

## VAB Annual Report – 2022

VAB eagerly awaits its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 16 December 2023, which not only makes us proud, but also inspires us to further our mission of helping rural children in Bangladesh get quality education and skill training. Seizing opportunities out of adversity on many occasions, VAB has carried on with its mission often introducing innovative measures. With gratitude, we express that all this was possible because of the support and encouragement from all of you.

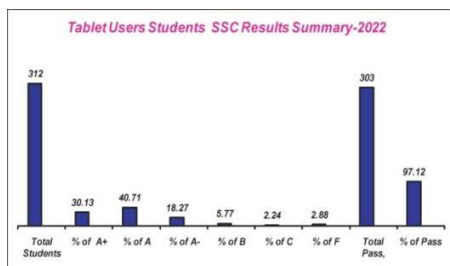
The pandemic inflicted notable deficits to the VAB program for quality education for the rural poor. VAB faced the challenges with resolve and creativity, leveraging e-learning and other modalities in the rural education scene during 2021-22. This challenge opened the window of opportunity to work on some new initiatives with support from other partners. In 2022, VAB launched four new initiatives such as, the e-learning program, the field work under the Rotary Global Grant Project, a Project under the Malala Fund, and the launching of a technical training center (pilot). The VAB regular program activities such as student scholarship, teacher training, and school empowerment projects continued at their usual pace. We also feel that the increasing interest of donors/partners like UNDP, Rotary Foundation, and Malala Foundation to work with VAB demonstrates a credibility and confidence that VAB has created through its work and results over the years.

This is our third decade of work in Bangladesh, which began in 2000, refined over two decades of experience. We invite our donors and patrons to share with us how we can reach further heights and what would be befitting ways to celebrate the success of a small international NGO, relying mostly on the support of the Bangladeshis abroad and non-Bangladeshi Americans, including Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) who care for Bangladesh.

**e-Learning Project:** VAB is thankful to UNDP Bangladesh for its collaboration in the e-Learning Pilot Project that ended in March 2022. A number of activities, including a baseline and an end line survey of students' learning behavior through e-learning, awareness training and consultation workshops, were organized and conducted by VAB. There was a great interest among policy makers in e-learning in rural schools that has been exemplified by visits of various delegations to rural VAB-supported schools implementing the Project.

Consultation Workshops on the UNDP-VAB e-Learning Pilot Project were held at Keshabpur, Jashore and Shyamnagar, Satkhira. The Workshops covered salient issues, including advantages, disadvantages and the future of e-learning. A delegation from USAID visited a VAB-supported school, Mahamuni Anglo-Pali High School, located at Rawzan in Chittagong (Chottogram) District, and observed how the UNDP-VAB e-Learning Pilot Project worked. The members of the delegation included Ms. Sonjai Reynolds, Cooper Director, Office of Education, USAID and Mr. Ali Muhammad Shahiduzzaman, Inclusive Education Advisor, Office of Population, Health, Nutrition and Education, USAID.

After the pilot phase of the e-Learning Project, VAB continues the “e-Learning Program” in the same schools where it started the pilot phase. The tablets have been given to another group of students who are in for the SSC its beneficial effects continue and expand severe resource and 2022 SSC results of Learning Pilot Project



Total Tablet user students under the e-Learning Pilot Project were 318, among them 312 students sat for SSC examination in 2022. 303 students among them passed. Their pass rate was 97.12%, with 30.13% obtaining A+ grade, 40.71% A, 18.27% A-, 5.77% B, and 2.24% C.

**Rotary Global Grant Project:** As per the MOU signed between VAB Bangladesh and the Rotary Global Grant Project, the duration of the Project was from April 2020 to March 2023. But just after the MOU signing, the Covid-19 pandemic spread across the globe that led to the closure of all educational institutions. VAB Bangladesh had to adapt to this situation. When schools reopened after the Covid-19 pandemic, VAB started working in the schools and the Rotary Global Grant Project activities started in March 2022. Most of the programs of the project have been implemented in 2022 and in January and February 2023. We are running the second phase of the project (at the time of writing this Report) and have applied for extending the third and the last phase till May 2023.



M.M. Arafat Hossain, Upazila Nirbahi Officer, delivering speech as the Chief Guest in the Rotary Global Grant Project Launching Workshop in the presence of Kazi Rafiqul Islam, Upazila Chairman, Keshabpur, Jashore.

The basic aim of the Rotary Global Grant Project is to train rural teachers so that they can provide quality education to students of rural schools. A number of activities have been developed to that end. **(i) Computer Training for Teachers:** 75 teachers from 15 schools of three upazilas (Nageshwari, Nilphamari and PabnaSadar) received 3-day computer training that covers Microsoft Word, Excel, Power Point, emailing, familiarity with hardware, and troubleshooting, etc. **(ii) Subject Based English Training:** English education deficiency stands as a critical impediment to quality education in rural schools. For English lessons to be more easily comprehensible, enjoyable and usable in practical life situations, both students and teachers need rigorous English training. Rural schools lack teachers proficient in English teaching. On top of that, teachers with an English background hardly come to secondary level teaching particularly in rural schools. All this makes English teaching-learning situation much more difficult in rural Bangladesh. VAB with support from the Rotary International launched a Global Grant Project to improve the situation of English teachers of its project schools. VAB under this project has been providing subject based English training to 75 English teachers from 25 schools. To select the trainers one TOT (Training of Trainers) was conducted by VAB; trainers have been selected and English training for the project school teachers has started. So far, 30 English teachers have already received training; they appreciated the style and module of the training.

**Malala Foundation Project Implementation:** VAB has started implementing a project since 2022 with the support of CAMPE (Campaign for Popular Education, Bangladesh) and funded by the Malala Education Champion Network. The Network invests in education activists who are creating solutions to barriers to girls' secondary education in their communities. CAMPE is an advocacy and campaign network operating in Bangladesh since 1991. It has now grown to have 1,000 members - NGOs, researchers, educators and other civil society organizations and individuals sharing similar vision.

The project undertaken by VAB is titled "Influence schools and sub-national and national decision makers towards a more gender-responsive, climate-resilient, and digitally-oriented secondary education environment in Bangladesh". This is intended to mobilize community support for girls' education, create gender-sensitive and climate-resilient school environments in *haor* areas in the southern and northern parts of Bangladesh - we know that girls from marginalized, remote, climate-impacted communities in these areas often experience barriers to education. It is a three-year project spanning August 2022-March 2025. VAB is working in 8 schools in 2 Upazilas under this project and targeting to reach 1,484 beneficiaries through activities such as "Back to School Campaign to prevent child marriage and sustain education", "Local level dialogues on educational deprivation of rural boys and girls with particular emphasis on girls", "Local level dialogues on education budget with particular focus on gender" and "Formation of school-based environmental clubs to raise awareness on climate related issues". VAB has already completed two "Back to School Campaigns to prevent child marriage and sustain education", which were attended by teachers, students, public representatives, newsmen, local government education officers and administration officials. The attendees expressed appreciation for the activities and demanded to extend such type of programs in all the schools of their respective Upazilas. They thought such activities are very important for boosting the motivation of the students and guardians and reducing child marriage



Farjana Jahan, Upazila Nirbahi Officer, delivering speech as the chief guest in the dialogue on deprivation of education program in the presence of Mohammad Hossain Faku, Mayor, Nageshwari, Kurigram.

**VAB launches Technical Training Center:** VAB launched a Technical Training Center at Shymnagar, Satkhira on a trial basis, to keep a solid footprint in the technical education scene of the country, and to assess whether such initiatives can help unemployed youths to stand on their own feet by providing some technical skills. This will also help VAB to explore its future options for skill training for high school dropouts and for youths who are low-scoring high school graduates. The project had a good start by already enrolling two batches of trainees totaling 40. Initially, the training is on basic computers and graphics; because of the growing demand for IT persons in our country for taking advantage of the "outsourcing" opportunities in the global market, the trainees are taught practical ways of being engaged in the "outsourcing" opportunities. Already 8 trainees of the Center have become employed, and are earning BDT 7,500 to BDT 17,000 per month at the Upazila level. Another three students have started outsourcing work after completing the course from the Center. As technical education is gaining popularity day by day, with government policies and support to this sector, VAB also plans to extend its support in this area to develop skill based manpower in the society.

## **Other regular programs which VAB executed successfully in 2022:**

**Student Scholarship Program:** To reduce the educational expenses of the poor but talented students in rural schools, VAB has a continuing program of providing scholarships. Currently, because of various government and non-government programs, the gap in educational expenses of poor students consists of provision of educational stationery, and the VAB scholarship fills the gap. 490 students from 18 schools have been provided scholarships in 2022.

**Training on group-based teaching-learning and student clubs:** The group based teaching-learning method engages students, teachers and Head teachers and empowers students to learn and makes them responsible learners and citizens. They also learn how to work collaboratively with each other and develop clubs to engage themselves fruitfully. 980 students and teachers received training on group-based teaching-learning in 2022; Clubs were formed in 34 schools. The Clubs which students formed after receiving the training include – Clubs in Debate, ICT, Mathematics and Science, and Language. Our observation confirms that students associated with the clubs excel in co-curricular activities as well as academic matters. The club activities increase the confidence of the students and develop their teamwork and leadership qualities. Their communicative ability also gets developed.

**Math Olympiad:** VAB assisted 210 students who registered for attending the Math Olympiad, out of whom 57 students were selected for attending the regional level competition. Among them two students got chance in the National Level Math Olympiad Competition. They are Md. Yashir Arafat and Pankaj Sen Nayan of Nageshwari Doya Moyee (DM) Pilot Academy (a school situated in the remotest part of Bangladesh). The VAB actively in this context supported the schools in the whole process (notifying, registration, advice how to win, financial help to attend divisional level championship and coming to the national level).

**School Development Workshop:** VAB Bangladesh has completed workshops on school development plan in 30 schools. In addition to school development planning, this workshop added a new and much-needed initiative known as ‘capturing students’ attention in the classroom’ that has already garnered very positive response from the stakeholders. The session on this topic covers: what is ‘attention’ and the need for it; the causes of being inattentive; what we can do to make students attentive; and some important and practical ways and means that can be shared among stakeholders. Student representatives, teachers, members of school managing committees, and parents participated in this session.

**VAB Volunteers Squad:** VAB has employed four volunteers in its four potential localities such as Shyamnar-Satkhira, Keshabpur-Jashore, Nilphamari Sadar-Nilphamari, Nageshwari-Kurigram, who are representing VAB in their respective areas. The volunteers maintain communication between the Country Office and the schools. The volunteers also coordinate the activities taking place in VAB working areas. They are also mobilizing some more volunteers locally. Each of the four volunteers is paid BDT 5,000 monthly. We had four formal meetings with these volunteers and exchanged necessary information. They are also given direction how to implement the VAB activities and find out the possibilities of skills based training for the dropout students. The volunteers received a day-long orientation before they started working for VAB where a general idea about the activities of VAB, its project implementation strategy, the outcome of different initiatives and the role of volunteers were discussed.

**VAB Director visited VAB Country Office:** A Director of VAB, the Board of Directors being the highest body of VAB, Mr. S Syed Samiul Islam visited the VAB Country Office on December 19, 2022. He also visited Nageshwari-Kurigram, one of the areas of VAB operation, and had a meeting with the teachers, students, guardians and SMC Members. He held meetings with the Country Office staff and gave necessary directions.

**VAB engages a Consultant (pro bono) to review the operations of the Country Office:** In December 2022, VAB commissioned an independent management and program review of the VAB Country operations in Bangladesh. Mr. Shafiqur Rahman, a retired UN professional, carried out the review as a consultant (pro-bono). He visited the Country Office, had several meetings with VAB officials and staff, and developed a framework to solicit further information and data on VAB's current status and its future planning. He is scheduled to have a second visit in March before he submits his review report. His report is expected in April.

**VAB's finances in 2022:**The total receipts of VAB Bangladesh in 2022 were remittance from VAB NY - BDT 7,981,750 (US \$85,000); donation from VAB Directors who belong to VAB USA - BDT 315,704 (US \$3,365); donation from local (Bangladesh) partners and individuals: BDT 2,479,435 (US\$ 26,405; Total: BDT 10,776,889 (US\$114,770). The receipts also included donation that was made in Bangladeshi Taka (BDT) in Dhaka by US donors. VAB USA raised \$72,381 in 2022. VAB USA remitted \$85,000 to VAB Bangladesh in 2022. The total expenditure of VAB USA in 2022 was \$2,305 – this is in line with the long-term trend of minimal expenditure. VAB USA has a total investment of \$700,000 in the U.S.A., aimed at its long-term sustainability.

**Challenging Fundraising Issues of VAB:** For the past two years VAB is facing an unprecedented challenge in fundraising in the U.S.A. – it is witnessing a declining trend in the total amount of funds raised and in the number of donors. The trend results from a number of factors, such as passing away of some longstanding dedicated donors, difficulties of infusing and sustaining donor interest in Bangladesh and in the education of its children, and problems of expanding the donor base. Ways and means of meeting the fundraising challenge are to be found. The leaders of VAB both in the U.S.A. and in Bangladesh are exploring solutions. We appeal to our donors to guide and assist us in finding effective ways and means to face the challenge that never irked us before in our 24-year mission and vision of helping the needy children in rural Bangladesh. The overhead and program support costs have reached an unsustainable level which is affecting the level of total funds for running regular programs. For the first time in its history of nearly a quarter century, all seven employees, including the top two, are paid for full time service at the market price. The VAB management in New York is actively considering some steps for addressing this issue including reorienting the program focus and its components.

In USA, for donation, please pay online or send to VAB at P.O. Box 234, Irvington, NY 10533. In Bangladesh, Bank Account: Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB), A/C-148.120.0005550, Dutch Bangla Bank Limited, Shyamoli Branch, Dhaka (Routing Number-090263978).

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