



Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB)

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Annual Report 2017

2017 was the year that witnessed the execution of most of the measures included in the “VAB Model of Quality Secondary Education” in the majority of the rural schools partnered with VAB. Five clusters of 5 schools in each cluster implemented the model to the fullest extent practicable, and an additional 21 rural schools implemented it partially. The outcomes have been very encouraging. There was also an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the model. The preliminary findings corroborate the success of the VAB measures in improving rural high school education.

Program delivery

The model itself, includes a set of interrelated and multi-faceted measures aimed at improving the quality of education in rural schools through the empowerment of the four major stakeholders– students, teachers, schools and communities. The delivery of these measures in 2017 is presented in the Tables.

VAB’s Student Empowerment Measures in 2017

- Scholarships to 1,187 students
- Tutoring to 765 Grade VI students in 17 schools
- Students’ Clubs in debating, sports and voluntarism in 35 schools
- Training to Students’ Club members in 35 schools
- Assistance for participation in Math Olympiads to 250 students of 37 schools

Students’ Competence Enhancement

- Training in computers to 1500 students in 15 schools
- Training in English Pronunciation to 75 students in 15 schools
- Organization of Competition on English Poetry Recitation for 29 Students

VAB’s School Empowerment Measures in 2017

- 33 computers given to 26 schools
- Furniture provided to 10 schools
- School Improvement Workshops in 36 schools

Effectiveness of programs

The preliminary findings of the evaluation exercise show that, compared to the pre-VAB situation in the cluster schools, there was an increase in enrolment, pass rate in public examinations, i.e., Junior Secondary Certificate (JSC) and Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exams, and grade levels of successful JSC and SSC candidates, and there was also a downward trend in dropout rate during the period, 2012-2016, in which VAB programs were implemented. There was, however, a slight decrease in attendance. In 2017, another example of excellence of students was that the debating teams of 2 schools earned the best debater’s awards competing against two other schools in a national competition broadcast on TV. More and more of the schools are performing well in the Upazila and District level competitions. Some of the schools are seeing a rush for admission and practically all schools report that there is no longer a drain of better students to other schools– a direct indicator of a change of public perception about the quality of VAB supported schools.

VAB’s Teacher Empowerment Measures In 2017

- Honorarium given to 34 teachers in 17 schools
- Training in English, Math and Science to 81 rural teachers
- Training in computers to 65 teachers in 25 schools
- Training in English Pronunciation to 25 teachers in 15 schools
- Headmasters’ Seminar for 22 participants

Competence in computers

VAB is now endeavoring to have visible outcomes for students in: Computer skills, English skills, and Citizenship traits. As to computers, students, teachers and staff of a school are trained on-site in Word, Excel and PowerPoint by specialists from the VAB Office in Dhaka. Teachers are trained in particular so that they can in turn train students in groups year round. At the end of training, a test, overseen by local government officials, is given to assess computer literacy and skill acquisition. An outstanding achievement in 2017 was that 100% of all the students, teachers and staff of 3 schools, all three girls' schools, passed the test. Among the staff in one school, an ayah was a successful trainee in computer literacy. The achievement of these schools is expected to be replicated in other VAB-partnered schools, and is considered a landmark, however modest, in attaining the goals of the Digital Bangladesh.



Students taking the Computer Literacy Test as Mr. Abul Kalam Rafiquzzaman, Upazila Secondary Education Officer of Shyamnagar, Satkhira looks on

VAB's Community Empowerment Measures in 2017

--4 Education Fairs organized for 23 schools

--Parent-Teacher Meetings:

37 meetings in 37 schools

Competence in English

Under the patronage and leadership of an eminent expatriate linguist, Mr. Amin Rahman, VAB has spearheaded an English language competence campaign in the rural schools. Mr. Rahman, Chair of the Rotary Club of Wheelers Hill in Australia, near Melbourne, has also been instrumental in garnering sponsorship of his Rotary Club in the campaign. While overall skill acquisition in English remains the goal of the campaign, one of the areas of current emphasis is conversation, and in relation to conversation,

pronunciation. English conversation is a big hurdle for all high school students in Bangladesh, more so for rural students. Currently, the mainstay of the campaign is **training in pronunciation** to both teachers and students, provided in the VAB Office in Dhaka and also on-site in the schools. It is expected that the teachers, in particular, will, in turn, train their students. To put the training to test, a widely participated **Poetry Recitation Competition** was held in Dhaka, with student contestants from three types of schools: rural Bangla-medium, urban Bangla medium and urban English-medium. It was an extraordinary accomplishment that two students, both girls, came out first and third among the Bangla-medium contestants, overcoming the urban-rural divide. The competition provided VAB with a baseline as well as a benchmark that will help further planning training needs in the schools. VAB also introduced a program on "**Spelling Bee**" in selected schools. The conversational language in the English Class in these schools is now English. There are definite elements of conversational skills development that the students now practice within the class and in groups outside the class.



Nashita Tasneem of Class VIII in Nageswari D. M. Academy School reciting poem in the National Poetry Recitation Competition in Dhaka

Celebration of Excellence in Rural Schools

Among the measures of the VAB model is the encouragement and incentive provided to rural students, teachers, schools and communities. Performance awards are given annually to best students, teachers, headmasters and schools. In 2017, VAB celebrated the Excellence in Performance of Rural High Schools in Bangladesh in an Award Ceremony on November 25 at a Dinner Event in Dhaka. The Chief Guest was the Governor of Bangladesh Bank,

Mr. Fazle Kabir, Mr. Choudhury Mufad Ahmed, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Education, Government of Bangladesh, was present. Within the Ministry, the responsibilities related to secondary education are entrusted to Mr. Ahmed. The high-profile ceremony was intended to be an inspirational and celebratory event to reward the strivings of stakeholders involved in rural education,



The Country Director explaining the VAB Model program to the Governor of Bangladesh Bank, Mr. Fazle Kabir prior to the Award of Excellence Event on November 25, 2017

a motivational endeavor stimulating stakeholders going forward and, at the same time, a venture to showcase the effectiveness of the novel blend of measures offered by VAB in the achievement of the goal of quality education. Performance in eight categories was appraised on the basis of relevant documentary evidence and assessment of VAB staff visiting the VAB-partnered schools. Awards, totaling 34, were given to students, teachers, headmasters and schools. The Governor of Bangladesh Bank stated that it was exceptional that VAB brought into focus the empowerment of all the stakeholders of rural education, and he thanked VAB for such an inclusive approach. The Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Education expressed great appreciation for the model approach used by VAB, saying that no other NGO in Bangladesh work with a model as the guiding instrument, and there is a lot to be learnt from the model approach and the model itself.



Moon Shah of Class IX of Ponchopukur Girls' High School receiving award as Accomplished Student from the Governor of Bangladesh Bank

Assistance to flood-affected VAB schools and their students

Several VAB-partnered schools in north-eastern Bangladesh were affected by the floods, two of them severely. The homes of many students were washed away. Among other things, the students lost their textbooks and educational supplies. Much of the furniture in two schools was unusable. To help these students and schools, VAB organized a **Fundraising Campaign For Assistance**, in USA. The campaign succeeded in raising \$6,200 from eight donors, donation varying from \$200 to \$2,000. The textbooks and the stationery of the students have been replaced and the schools were provided with new furniture.

Finances of VAB

The lion's share of VAB USA's funds come from **donations from individual philanthropists**. A small part is contributed by foundations and matching grants from corporations. **Donors to VAB USA may also donate in Bangladesh with Bangladesh Takas**. In 2017, VAB USA raised \$114,045 in the US from 132 donors and Tk 907,000 (equivalent to \$11,335) from four donors. All of VAB's programs are executed in Bangladesh by the VAB Bangladesh Office. VAB USA remitted \$97,500 in 2017 for program implementation. While the main source of funds for VAB's programs is remittance from VAB USA and donation in

Taka from NRBs, a certain amount of funds are raised by VAB Bangladesh itself, mostly from institutions and some from individual donors. A salient feature of VAB's finances is that all the administrative expenses, including salaries of a few paid staff in Bangladesh, are borne by the VAB USA Directors. This means, **every penny of every dollar given to VAB by a donor goes directly to the beneficiary** – needy high school students in rural Bangladesh.

A concerted effort in the USA as well as in Bangladesh is being initiated to build up the **VAB Trust Fund** which could be a potentially powerful and durable source of income for program execution, at present and in the future, both near-term and long-term, and thus can be a bulwark for VAB's sustainability. The fund is administered by a Board of Trustees composed of renowned experts, who strictly adhere to the rules, regulations and procedures of the Government of Bangladesh. Recognition to Contributors to the Trust Fund can be proffered. In addition, there is provision that a part of the income from the contribution made to the Fund may be expended on preferred education-related activities of the Contributor himself/herself. **VAB's well-wishers are encouraged to contribute to the Fund, and for more details may please contact the President or the Country Director.**

Organizational matters

In 2017, there was one meeting each of the VAB USA Board of Directors and of the Management Committee. One of the major decisions of the Board was to form a 3-member **Budget/Finance Committee** entrusted with consideration of all financial matters. The Budget/Finance Committee met once and took significant decisions about, among other things, allocation of the VAB Bangladesh budgetary resources to programs, both under the current model and for a newly innovated project, and fortification of the Trust Fund. As for VAB Bangladesh, the Board of Advisors and the Trustee Board met three times. In late December,



Mr. Nurul Alam, Vice President of VAB and Syed Zaki Hossain, Director, Corporate Outreach and Special Events sharing concerns and ideas with some of the VAB Advisory Board and Trust Board members on December 28, 2017 at VAB Office at Dhaka

2017, there was a crucial **meeting of the leaders of VAB Bangladesh with the Vice President of VAB USA and the Chair of Corporate Outreach and Special Events**, who were visiting Bangladesh and devoted a full day on VAB matters. All significant VAB matters were discussed, including, the VAB model, a new innovative project, off-class vocational training for employable skills, the independent evaluation exercise, funding drive and the VAB Trust Fund.

Going Forward

From 2018 onwards, VAB will try to extend the application of the VAB model to as many rural high schools as its resources permit. It will also intensify fundraising efforts for current programs and future endowment/Trust purposes, to expand its resource base. It will study and apply the lessons learnt from the evaluation exercise and augment the positive effects while at the same time eliminating the negative ones. Many schools are seeking inclusion under the VAB model; VAB cannot respond to those urgings within the limitations of its current funding base. **VAB appeals to its donors, patrons and well-wishers for continued and additional support in its endeavor to spread quality education in rural high schools of Bangladesh.**

For query or comment, please contact Dr. A T Rafiqur Rahman, President, arahman10@aol.com, 914-591-8635 in the U.S.A.; Dr. Jasimuz Zaman, Country Director, zamanjasimuz@gmail.com, 88-01829-333-311 in Bangladesh. For contribution, mail your generous check to VAB, P.O. Box 234, Irvington, NY 10533.