



Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB)

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VAB Newsletter – November, 2021

VAB's work remains affected by the ongoing pandemic. Nevertheless, we pursue our mission while we adjust to "life with the pandemic". We share here what we have been doing.

Emergency Covid Assistance Program

VAB, devoted solely to rural education since 2000, is deeply concerned about the "education/learning deficit" in rural schools, caused by the pandemic through the stoppage of regular on-site schooling. At the same time, VAB's humanitarian values spur its conscience to act to alleviate the suffering of the poor families of its rural students. There is persistent hunger, and an alarming lack of medicine and oxygen. The stark realities of education deficit and sufferings from hunger and disease have prompted VAB to develop an Emergency Covid Assistance Program. The four components of the program are: (i) assistance to combat "education deficit" by providing e-learning (online learning with the use of electronic devices); (ii) food support (to families of students, which face hunger persistently); (iii) provision of oxygen cylinders, concentrators, etc.; and (iv) health care support (primarily medicine that needy families cannot afford).

A Global Fundraising Campaign enabled VAB to mobilize resources for the program. Within days, generous Patrons came through with Pledges amounting to more than \$56,000. By October 31, VAB received full pledged amounts of many Patrons, totaling about \$52,000.



Food support program being inaugurated in Bhangura, Pabna by Mr. Golam Hasnain Rasel, Mayor, Bhangura Municipality (2nd from right) and Mr. Saiful Islam, Upazila Secondary Education Officer, Bhangura, Pabna.

e-Learning Project

For an Education NGO like VAB, the centerpiece of the program is aimed at combating education deficit – e-learning assistance to be provided to SSC candidates, both for exams of 2021 and 2022, from the poorest families, on the three specialized subjects in each stream of high school education – Humanities, Science and Business Studies – on which the Government plans to hold exams. On October 1, VAB initiated its e-Learning Project at a pilot level starting with 9 schools from 5 districts, Jashore, Satkhira, Kurigram, Nilphamari and Pabna.



e-Learning Project being inaugurated in Shyamnagar, Satkhira by Mr. A.N.M Abuja Gifari, UNO (Upazila Nirbahi Officer) (center) and Mr. Mohammad Shahidullah, AC (Assistant Commissioner) Land, Shyamnagar

In all, 186 SSC candidates in Science and 5 candidates in Business Studies are e-learning through the use of tablets. Whenever practicable, a single tablet has been shared by multiple users so that so far, only 99 tablets, provided by VAB to students and teachers, could serve the purpose. E-learning by rural school students is a "first" for Bangladesh. One distinguishing feature of the tablets, and another "first" for Bangladesh, is a built-in app which prevents students from the "undesirable" use of the Internet. The developer of the app BacBon Ltd. of Bangladesh, made the app available to VAB free of cost. In the case of each of the 9 schools, the distribution of the tablets was made in a modest ceremony attended by local governmental and non-governmental dignitaries, the Headmaster, SMC members and Teachers.

VAB is also implementing a Monitoring and Evaluation System which tracks hours spent by students on videos, scripts and tests related to the learning contents. As of October 31, the total hours spent by students in e-learning in a month are 8,500 hours, which translates to an average of more than 42 hours per student.

UNDP-VAB cooperation in e-learning



The recently signed “Statement of Intent” (SOI) between UNDP Bangladesh and VAB is a momentous development. According to the SOI, operational for six months starting on November 1, UNDP Bangladesh and VAB will cooperate on the e-learning pilot project which has just been described above. The cooperative project is expected to achieve progressively greater technology diffusion in rural areas which will contribute to supplying digital skills as Bangladesh enters the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) era. As part of this joint initiative, UNDP will provide the necessary Learning Management System (LMS), which has some unique features: it includes curricular content required for the pilot project, limits the use to Internet material related only to curricular content, and at the same time, provides a Monitoring and Evaluation System about the use of the app. VAB will manage the day-to-day implementation of the pilot project and the distribution of digital tablets. The project is also to produce a learning report to assess its activities and outcomes based on results, observations, and the data generated by the LMS. Both UNDP and VAB teams will have discussions jointly and coordinate the overall implementation of this pilot project and development of the learning product.

Food Support Project

The Food Support Project of VAB has already been completed. BD Takas 1,500 have been given to each of the families of 450 students of 15 VAB-partnered schools, and of 20 non-MPO teachers and needy school support staff. These families have been facing persistent hunger. The students are at a risk of dropping out. The teachers are not covered by the -

governmental subsidy under a program called “Monthly Payment Order” (MPO) and earn a scanty amount.

The two remaining projects of VAB, dealing with Oxygen Provision and Medicine Support, are progressing and are planned to be implemented fully by the end of December.

VAB's regular program activities amenable to online execution

VAB has taken advantage of online options to implement certain educational activities, through Zoom meetings. These activities include: online training of teachers on both content and pedagogy; online “brainstorming” with Headmasters of rural schools about how to cope with the damage done by the pandemic on rural education; and online English skills enhancement activities for students, such as English conversation as well as debating, poetry recitation, extempore speech-making and discussion in English. Competitions were held online on debating and discussion/conversation in English, at the local, regional and national levels. Such competitions were highly successful, and were appreciated greatly by students, teachers, community leaders and VAB and non-VAB experts in Bangladesh and abroad. They were publicized widely by video and print media at the regional and sometimes, at the national level. These events were significantly educational and inspirational for students. VAB staff became so adept in online execution of educational activities that on many occasions, other NGOs and governmental agencies sought out VAB for assistance.

Status of Country Director recruitment

VAB's Country Director (CD) for 11 years, Dr. Jasimuz Zaman, retired on June 30, 2021, having provided exemplary services on a voluntary basis. An extensive recruitment process for his successor started with 90 applicants, a number incredibly large considering the “volunteering” elements of the “benefits package”, progressed through various review and interview procedures, and currently reached the stage of identification of 5 most suitable candidates. It is expected that the entire process will result in the selection of the new CD of VAB by mid-November.

Renewal of VAB's Registration with NGO Affairs Bureau

The process took almost six months and has now been completed - VAB is now registered with the NGO Affairs Bureau for ten years.

VAB is extremely grateful to its Patrons, donors and well-wishers for standing by it during one of the most challenging times in human history. VAB intends to move forward to a brighter future with continuing support from them and others.

In the USA, for donation, please pay online or send to VAB at P.O. Box 234, Irvington, NY 10533

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