



Quality Education for Rural Bangladesh

Transforming Vision into Reality



*In commemoration of the
Birth Centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*

Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB)

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Education Model developed with 20 years of Field Work

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Foreword

Dr. A. T. Rafiqur Rahman, Founder and President of VAB

It is a challenging job to write the Foreword to a piece of work the subject matter of which is something with which one has been closely associated. Let me take an approach – honest, self-analytical yet deferential to the readers.

As a Bangladeshi expatriate, when I decided to establish a Charity, registered in the U.S.A., dedicated to the service of Bangladesh, the driving force behind the decision was clear – love for my Motherland, an endeavor to do something for the country left behind by a son of the soil who thought he could mobilize some resources for the purpose. But to do what? This initiated a searching, soul-searching and researching process. The searching process pointed to three “whats” – disaster relief, healthcare and education. The soul-searching process leaned heavily towards education, mainly basing itself on the experience of other expatriates and myself, because we felt the critical factor behind our own success was education. The researching process, chronicled in Appendix A of the book, “A Brief History of VAB”, which included, inter alia, extensive discussions with leading NGOs of Bangladesh, particularly Brac and Prashika, finally zeroed in on the area of secondary education, primarily because it is most essential for the people, individually and collectively, but at the same time it is most underserved. My friends and I chose to work on secondary education in rural Bangladesh, because we thought, the need was greatest there, individually and collectively.

The above understanding was noted broadly in the formal document registering VAB with the State of New York: “to support charitable and developmental activities especially designed for the poor and the needy in order to promote and sustain a strong civil society and democracy in Bangladesh.” Within this broad purpose, specific purposes included support for primary and secondary education and vocational and skilled training for the poor. It may be noted that the first remittance of VAB from the USA to Bangladesh in 2000 amounting to ten thousand US dollars was allocated half for scholarships for needy students in ten rural high schools and the

other half for supporting activities in a skill-training center. I went into somewhat of a detail into the “what” - which eventually became “education”, “quality education” and “a way to provide quality education” to inform the readers of the book about the deliberative and rigorous manner it was selected. The same extent of deliberation and rigor went into the subject matter of the book which coincides with the “what”, particularly the third element above. I feel, this itself may be a unique and distinctive feature of the book that may be attractive to readers.

As VAB continued its operation, it became obvious from Day One that the need of the youths was not just education, it was *quality* education. Without quality education the rural youth fails to become employable labor or competent entrepreneur; without enriched manpower, the country fails to reap the “green dividend”. Resources and efforts expended in giving the rural youth anything less than quality education will come to naught. This overriding concern started the searching and researching process of our Charity, Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB), as is well documented in the book. The process matured, VAB accumulated “on-the-ground experience” about rural Bangladesh, and it acquired widened and deepened expertise, outcomes emerged, and in pursuit of its objectives, VAB applied those outcomes as leading to quality education.

For the sake of transparency and objectivity, this whole process-outcome-application exercise of VAB would be obvious to the readers if I put down the chronology of VAB’s initial quality education measures for rural high schools. At the inception in 2000, VAB awarded scholarships to high school boys and girls; in 2003, VAB introduced teachers’ training to prepare undertrained rural teachers for improved teaching; in 2004, it started providing science lab instruments and library books to underequipped rural schools; in 2005, VAB initiated tutoring for SSC students to bolster their substantive and mental preparation for the exam; and in 2008, VAB started tutoring Class VI students to help them overcome the deficiency they bring in to the high school from the primary school. It soon became clear to VAB that quality education is a holistic concept, with multi-dimensional goals, requiring a composite set of multi-faceted measures.

Readers may note that the above details only the first phase of VAB’s work, covering the first five years, which was carried out with a Partner in Bangladesh, Prakritajan, as noted in Appendix A. VAB discontinued the partnership arrangement and started its sole ownership of the exercise which was essentially the continuation of its experiment in Bangladesh with quality education for the rural poor. Within one year under sole ownership, VAB was granted the recognition as an US International

Charity and was brought under the purview of the NGO Bureau under the Prime Minister's Office, Government of Bangladesh.

It may be useful to note that over the years VAB activities were introduced in different segments in at least 153 rural high schools located in 55 upazilas of 32 districts in Bangladesh. Utilizing the experience, VAB developed and launched its first comprehensive five-year program for quality education in 2012. The program focused basically on "Learning", and was introduced in several Clusters of rural schools, each Cluster consisting of five rural high schools. Four groups that were empowered under this program included: students, teachers, schools, and the community. As the work progressed, the empowerment approach remained the same, the goals, activities and delivery methods of the VAB's program underwent significant changes, as detailed in the book. Just to draw the attention of readers to some significant changes, the goals were broadened to include "learning, competence, and citizenship"; activities included teaching English language skills, expanding students' co-curricular activities through Student Clubs in computers, English, debating, sports, and volunteering; and finally, delivery methods included experimenting with the Group Method of Learning-Teaching, both in the classroom and in the Student Clubs.

This book will be many things to many readers. At one level, some will find it a chronicle of how a small dedicated NGO, run by expatriates and Bangladeshis, relying mostly on voluntarily provided resources – labor, skills and money - tackled one of the most inscrutable problems of the country: quality education; at another level, some readers will find it an account of how a resource-poor entity tackled one of the most difficult problems of the most resource-starved segment of the population: quality rural education. At the most intellectually satisfying and practically useful level, many readers will find it a template for providing a most rewarding (literally and figuratively) private and social good in the country: quality secondary education in rural Bangladesh that has the potential of supplying two-thirds of the country's productive manpower.

Personally, I, and the authors of the book hope that this last group of readers will not only study the book, but also use it as a guide. We admit that there may be disagreements among experts, educationists and policymakers about a number of issues including the whole definition and coverage of quality education. We submit to the readers and prospective practitioners to please examine VAB's work and potentials objectively as well as critically. I fear that without such objective and critical examination, the book may get mired in subjective value judgment and doubts;

such an unfortunate development will definitely retard or even deter the potentially useful application of the VAB template countrywide. This eventuality, in my view, will be tragic for individual rural schools, for rural education as a whole, and for the country at large.

Functionally, VAB attempts to meet three primary criteria for Quality Education, in line with the Bangladesh Education Policy: Learning, Competence and Citizenship. Under “Competence”, VAB pursues three areas of competence: Computers, English Language, and Character traits.

We must admit that some may argue that the resources may not be available to consider wide application of the VAB template. We note VAB itself is a resource-poor organization working with the most resource-poor segment in the country which itself is relatively resource-poor, despite its recent promotion to the Middle Income Country (MIC) category. But the stark reality is: Change requires resources. Thus, *it becomes a fundamental issue how to find and augment resources of the rural schools.*

Fortunately, working solely on rural education, possibly as the sole external agent on such a mission, VAB became keenly familiar with the resource endowment of rural Bangladesh: *rural Bangladesh is rich in human resources of various kinds.* Each group of stakeholders in rural education – students, teachers, schools, school management committee members, parents, community leaders, local public officials – possesses innate assets that can be transformed into usable resources. VAB has been utilizing these innate assets in bringing about the change in rural high schools, as detailed in the book. We submit that the VAB template may be evaluated in terms of its capacity and potentials aimed at bringing out and utilizing such resources of stakeholders for attaining quality education; in other words, enabling and empowering each group of stakeholders to infuse resources required for quality education.

The ultimate critics of the book will be the readers. The ultimate evaluators of the composite set of VAB measures (which is dubbed as “VAB Model” in the book) will be the prospective practitioners.

The three authors and the editor Ahmed are my colleagues at VAB and my close friends. I sincerely thank them for presenting succinctly what VAB did so far for quality education. I’m sure, they will be happy if the book raises awareness and stokes curiosity. Perhaps their dream is that there will be countrywide application of the Model laid out in the book. As their colleague and friend, and also as the Founder and President of VAB which gave them the opportunity to develop and apply the Model, I am proud and unabashedly optimistic about rural Bangladesh and my Motherland.

Finally, as I close my Foreword, I would be remiss if I do not mention the four principles that guided VAB's work from the onset, and record our gratitude and thanks to several groups that made our work possible. The principles are: first, to establish an organization that can serve as a bridge between the expatriates and the people in Bangladesh to process the flow of ideas, funds, and services to help the needy in Bangladesh; second, to promote true volunteerism in organizing and implementing work; third, to promote a true partnership between donors and recipients, in this case mostly Bangladeshi expatriates and their friends in the USA and underprivileged Bangladeshis and their organizations at home; and finally fourth, to encourage our partners, the recipients of our support, to truly own the development programs and organize and manage them in self-sustained way in which VAB support will be temporary and changing over time. The aspect of "sustainability" highlighted in the book can be viewed from this perspective also.

Lastly, I would like to record our deep gratitude and offer our thanks to the several groups that made a unique international charity like VAB achieve such reputation in such a short time. They include: (a) the body of donors, mostly individuals and some corporations including the Bangladesh Bank; (b) a large and wide group of 100% volunteers both in the USA and in Bangladesh; 3) school officials and teachers, students, local officials and communities; and finally, (d) VAB Directors, Advisors and officials in both the USA and Bangladesh. Our special thanks are due to Dr. Jasimuz Zaman, the Country Director since mid-2010, who worked fully voluntarily and guided the VAB work in Bangladesh and acted as the principal "searcher" and "researcher" for "quality education" in the latter phase of VAB's work and also the main author of the book.



Preface

It is with great pleasure and pride that we present VAB's '**Empowerment Model for Sustainable Quality Education**' (or, **VAB Model**) for rural high schools of Bangladesh. On the occasion of celebration of twenty years of work by VAB, the publication gives an account of its efforts to the cause of quality rural high school education in the country.

Quality education is the crying need of the country. This is particularly true for rural high schools. The rural parents accept great sacrifices in sending their children to high schools with the expectation that the hard-earned education would provide their children a bridge to a secure livelihood and future, but this does not happen. The low-level education the children get does not help them with the required skills for their future. In a way, sending children to school is lost opportunity cost for poor rural families. At the national level, it induces a chronic deficit in generating the required level of skilled workforce that meets the twenty-first century needs both at home and abroad. To deny the rural students the opportunity of quality education is morally wrong, economically disastrous for the country and ethically untenable.

The central theme of VAB Model is empowerment of all the stakeholders of the school – students, teachers, parents and community - through a variety of innovative activities that bring quality to the education process. Activities like the group teaching-learning method allows students to take ownership of learning, extracurricular clubs bring out latent creative talents and impart qualities of leadership and citizenship, entrusting teachers in the forefront of all school activities helps implement the quality process in education, and involving parents and community leaders in school events and making them aware of their responsibilities and rights regarding education bring out interrelationship of the community with the school. These activities when implemented by effective planning and management catalyze the empowerment of the school as one entity to achieve sustainable quality education.

The potential of rural environment is often underestimated. The openness of the rural setting is an inherently conducive environment for children to develop as individuals. Rural children mostly have to fend for themselves. This gives them opportunity for self-development. Rural children can develop life skills more readily. Ironically, the uniqueness of rural environment is so naturally blended with the human ecosystem that it tends to escape attention. VAB recognized the potential of rural environment and embarked upon the design of a program leveraging the potent power of the stakeholders and the rural society at large.

The schools implement VAB Model on their own accord, using own resources and capacity. VAB acts as a catalyzing force with the addition of some tools and techniques, and essential supporting resources. VAB works with the conviction that the rural society and its people possess an inherent capacity to join hands and work collectively to address and solve their own problems and accomplish their dreams. The emerging results suggest that the program, with its transformational stimulus is helping them to come out of the cycle of poor quality of education, despite the social and economic constraints they face

VAB formulated ‘Empowerment Model for Sustainable Quality Education’ (‘VAB Model’) in 2012. The model has undergone continuous testing and refinement working with a total of fifty schools in a participatory manner over the next eight years. VAB is grateful to the major stakeholders of rural education - students, teachers, schools and communities - for providing, directly or indirectly, the "ground information" which made it possible to develop the "bottom up" model. VAB appreciates the tireless work of the VAB field staff who collected and processed the information obtained from the stakeholders and who meticulously followed the guidelines in implementing the elements of VAB model with passion and dedication.

Far from being a utopian model of working with schools with exotic resources and inputs, VAB’s approach is a down-to-earth model, keeping in view all the constraints of rural high schools. The teachers, parents, community leaders and education officials in the respective localities have found the benefit of VAB Model and accepted it as the pathway to quality education. Its application, performance and results in multiple settings have confirmed its feasibility as a working model, and its potential for scaling up across upazilas and all geographic regions in Bangladesh.

The book describes the need and rationale for working in rural high schools, the methodology for implementing the different activities in VAB Model and the expected outcomes of the activities. It is a resource document for any school aspiring to provide quality education. We hope and expect that the educationists, policy

makers, government agencies and non-government organizations would find it useful to launch programs in quality education. The timing of this publication is opportune in that it coincides with the country's mainstreaming strategy goal of quality education for all, enunciated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations adopted by its 193 member countries.

We conclude the preface with remembrance of a great personality, Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury who will be remembered as an iconic figure for his contributions to the nation in a number of fields, including science and technology and education. VAB was fortunate to have benefited from his leadership as the Chairman of the VAB Advisory Board in Bangladesh for ten years. He provided vital support throughout the period of development of the VAB Model.

Dedication

As Bangladesh celebrates the year 2020 as "Mujib Birth Centenary", it is with great humility and deep respect that VAB dedicates the publication in memory of the Father of the Nation , Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Jasimuz Zaman

Matilal Pal

M. Nurul Alam

December, 2020



ExEcutive Summary

Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB) launched its program initiative in Bangladesh in the year 2000 with the motto of enhancing quality of education in non-government rural high schools. After two decades of hands-on work with rural schools, it developed a composite model for enhancing quality education in rural high schools; it is coined as **‘Empowerment Model for Sustainable Quality Education’** (or, shorter **‘VAB Model’**).

The parents in rural Bangladesh send their children to school with the expectation that they will receive education and skills which will help them earn a sustainable livelihood and also elevate their standing in the society. The rural schools serve the community by preparing its children as productive human resources of the future. However, experience and historical trend show that left to themselves, the schools alone are unable to achieve and sustain quality education, without the active involvement and support of its stakeholders.

1. Empowerment Model for Sustainable Quality Education/VAB Model

The basic premise of VAB Model is that, beyond classroom based rote learning, quality education in rural schools can thrive and sustain only with the engagement and support of all stakeholders. In VAB Model, the entire community of stakeholders surrounding the school– students, teachers, parents, school management, community leaders, and local government officials - is brought into a purposeful coalition for adding value and energy to the drive for quality of education. This engagement and empowering of the stakeholders generate the momentum enabling the social environment required for quality education to sustain and flourish.

The engagement and empowering of the stakeholders in the affairs of the schools take place through a stream of organized and interactive activities/events. Their involvement creates an environment of open communication for a common purpose, which draws the students, teachers, parents, community leaders in an alliance to harness the best out of classroom learning. Through a set of novel and harmonized

activities, a conducive learning environment is created for the students, the teachers are motivated and empowered by having being given well designed training and having been involved in academic planning and other matters of the school, and community members are welcomed to the school to perform their respective roles for quality education for the children of the community.

VAB Model, formulated in 2012, has been tested, refined and matured over eight years of ground level work with fifty rural high schools in different parts of Bangladesh. Empowerment Model for Sustainable Quality Education (VAB Model) is now proven, affordable and replicable. It is quietly but surely demonstrating its transformative impact on its partner cluster schools.

2. The Inception: It all Starts with a Conversation

VAB's approach is simple. VAB gets a conversation started in the school on measures needed to improve the quality of education through in-house school initiatives, and shares the ideas with the community. The interaction pivots around the different pillars of VAB Model and a collective consensus emerges. The constituent set of activities of the model is a typical outcome of this participatory process.

VAB understands that the goal of education culminates in the attainment of learning, developing competence in application, and acquiring citizenship traits by students. Quality education will not only provide knowledge, but also create ability to apply knowledge and nurture the capability in students to work in teams, to become problem solvers and to act as productive citizens of the country with attributes of good citizenship and character.

The quality of education in rural high schools in Bangladesh currently presents a grim picture. This sector has been the most underserved sector in education. VAB makes a case that this should not be allowed to continue any longer, on the following compelling grounds:

- Poor quality education inflicts high opportunity cost for rural parents as well as for the society
- Provision of quality education is a sine qua non to meet expectations of the disadvantaged in the society. Hence it is a moral social imperative for the society
- Quality Education is also a practical necessity driven by the skills demand for twenty first century

Embarking on undertaking to work in improving the quality of education in rural Bangladesh is at the least a daunting task. VAB analyzed thoroughly the well-known impediments and, at the same time it looked at the positive elements in rural setting that have not been utilized or appreciated; it looked beyond the obvious. The uniqueness of the VAB approach is captured in the following elements:

- Reimagining rural high school
 - Open environment
 - Community spirit
 - Parental sacrifice for education
 - Life skills development opportunities
 - Citizenship and Character development opportunities
- Engagement of stakeholders
- Composite program benefitting all students
- Staying at the school for longer period (a critical period is needed for the measures and the “culture” to take root; typically five years)
- Working in a cluster of schools concept at the upazila level
- Focus on affordability of cost, workability and outcome

Typical measures in the Empowerment program are briefly presented below.

3. Student Empowerment

A student-centric learning environment is considered an essential prerequisite for enhancing student interest in school and in learning. Teamwork is a great motivating factor to get the students attracted to school as an inviting place. Classroom teaching is enhanced by the introduction of the Group Method. Programs like computer literacy and English conversational skills for 100% students create an enabling environment and incentive for students. Students are encouraged to take part in co-curricular programs like sports, debate and cultural programs. Student Clubs in English, Computer, Sports, Debate and Volunteering allow students to acquire skills in communication, planning and leadership, problem solving and critical thinking and teamwork. Students acquire qualities of tolerance, respect, dutifulness and ethical conduct through actual practice. The clubs are student managed; clubs become integral part of the school and ensure that the benefits to quality education are sustained. In VAB cluster schools the student empowerment program has demonstrated great success.

4. Teacher Empowerment

An important aim of VAB is to empower teachers to have voice in school affairs. Teachers are the primary agents to implement quality process in the education system of a school and without their engagement no academic improvement project can be successful. VAB, therefore, engages them early from the design and planning stage. Their skills in content and pedagogy are upgraded through additional training and they are exposed to current trends in education using technology to improve the teaching-learning environment. Emphasis is given to self-driven practice to continually upgrade knowledge and pedagogy. VAB supports well-tailored off-site and on-site training for teachers to enhance their pedagogical and mentoring skills for the benefit of the students. All teachers are expected to perform well in their academic work and other duties to meet the quality objectives of the school.

5. School Empowerment

The most significant element in school empowerment is to strengthen and reaffirm the role of the Headmaster as a leader and visionary for the school. Harmonious relation among the Headmaster, school management committee (SMC) members and teachers are emphasized. The Headmaster is encouraged to delegate responsibility to teachers and practice transparency in all matters, including financial management. School empowerment, in addition, involves supply of need based resources like computer, science/vocational equipment and books. VAB regularly organizes leadership and team-building training workshops for the Headmasters in the VAB Training Centre. The Headmasters are encouraged to work with SMC to make quality as a cardinal policy of the school.

6. Community Empowerment

Parents in rural community are often unaware of their roles, responsibilities and rights regarding education. VAB makes this awareness as a vital agenda through parents-teachers meeting. Engagement of parents and community leaders is obtained through open and easy dissemination of the measures for the school and through inviting them for participation in all school events. In addition, an annual award giving ceremony is held in a multi-school education fair to showcase the success of the school and its students. The community members see the success stories and get induced to take part in school improvement activities.

7. Transformation through Empowerment

VAB envisions the transformation of rural high schools to ones with capability to impart quality education to the rural children. Empowerment is the process embodied in VAB Model that propels the transformation process. **Empowerment** leads to

Engagement, Engagement leads to Commitment, Commitment leads to Action, and Action leads to **Sustainable Quality Education**.

Once VAB Model is successfully implemented in a school, the school can successfully attain the three objectives of education – Learning, Competence and Citizenship, through three distinct, but interrelated programs:

- Student – Centric Group Method of learning-teaching to make learning effective
- Student Clubs to promote competence and development of soft skills to meet twenty-first century needs in the job market
- Character and citizenship traits through internalization by students the character virtues enshrined in the curriculum and the virtues practiced by them in their activities in group learning and student club activities, creating a “self-image” and striving to live up to it

8. Logistics and Training for Aspiring Schools

Many schools aspire to come under the VAB umbrella. They invite VAB to introduce the concept of VAB Model to their schools and to explain the logistics and methodology for implementation. For such aspiring schools, VAB offers this service by organizing orientation program as a part of VAB work in the upazila. The only condition is that there must be a cluster of five schools teaming up for this service. Once the Model is introduced and the logistics and methodology explained, implementation would be the responsibility of the schools.

9. Evidence of Success

VAB schools have achieved significant improvement of performance in pass rate and proportion of students getting high grades. The average performance has been consistently better than the national average with some schools doing as good as the best endowed schools in the country. In addition, the schools have done well in sports, debate and cultural programs at the upazila, district, divisional and national levels. The schools are doing remarkably well in getting the students proficient in English, Math and Computer applications. Several schools attained computer literacy and English conversational skill for 100% of the students. VAB has been instrumental in getting girl students participate in sports and debates. In debates, the teams from girls’ schools are competing successfully with co-ed schools. In girls’ competitions in sports, VAB school teams are topping at the upazila level. In 2019, the cricket team from one VAB school became the National Champion in girls’ cricket.

10. Future Plans Awaiting Implementation

Model School

The Model School is a concept under development. VAB has developed a set of criteria for selection of the Model school. The Model School will be an experimentation school where the school, in association with VAB, will explore and innovate new tools and techniques for education and apply them in practice. The Model school will offer training and learning facilities for all schools in an upazila. A “Model School”, if successful, would be the ultimate validation of the VAB’s **Empowerment Model for Sustainable Quality Education.**

Quality certification

It is now expected that high school education should not only cover content knowledge, but also give the ability to apply the knowledge to practice. The graduates from high schools are also expected to have ability in leadership, teamwork, critical thinking and problem solving, time management skills and communication skills. In addition, they must build through practice the habits of character and learn citizenship and work ethics.

Typically, a school that has high performance in examination results and co-curricular events is considered a high quality school. This unfortunately allows the schools to get away from their responsibilities to impart quality education for all students, denying opportunity to the majority of students to develop themselves. VAB has developed an index to measure the performance where excellence is valued, but the opportunities provided to all students are also measured and valued. VAB uses this index to assess the performance of schools.

VAB plans to volunteer its quality certification service to any school who wishes to assess the quality of their education by applying the measure of the index. VAB also has a plan to make a case with the government and policy makers to create a yardstick to assess quality of education for all students, and excellence for individual and team achievements.

Advocacy

With a history of twenty years of work dedicated to quality education in rural high schools, VAB can rightfully claim to have acquired competency in matters related to both assessing the gaps in quality education in rural schools and addressing them through a set of concrete and practical measures. VAB hopes to reach out and share with the government policy makers and nongovernment institutions the lessons it has learned in the course of two decades of its work experience.

11. Conclusions

The theme of the Empowerment Model for Sustainable Quality Education is “Quality for All” as a continuing accomplishment of the schools. Excellence for teams and individuals will be an outcome of the drive for all-round quality. The basic implementation strategy is to secure the engagement of all stakeholders around a vision for quality and specific program activities. The prime strategy of the design has been to give voice to the teachers as well as to parents, community leaders and even students in shaping a shared vision and outcome. Sustainable quality education will result when the stakeholders believe in their strength and play their roles in a mutually reinforcing manner.

A paradigm shift in the strategy for teachers’ training has been instituted. The purpose of training is to aid teachers for their self-training. The role of teaching to facilitate learning by students themselves has been emphasized with explicit responsibility of learning assigned to students. A significant leap in student interest occurred with the introduction of the Leadership Group concept in student training in the English language skill program developed by VAB. In this process, top performers act as trainers for other students. The concept has been given an institutional shape with the formation of Student Clubs in five key areas: English, Computer, Debate, Sports and Volunteering. The students are engaged and take ownership of club activities as they unlock their potential to achieve laudable success in their work.

Motivation of the teachers has been enhanced through empowerment. They are made an integral partner in the design of the quality program. They are empowered with a pedagogy that can be realistically applied in a rural setting. VAB demonstrated how the students can be energized to empower themselves. The dynamism generated among students provided an impetus for the teachers to get further engaged with students.

The empowerment measures led to success of students, teachers, and schools. Success generated interest among parents and community. This has empowered the schools to place their needs effectively to the parents and the community, and seek their partnership to make quality education sustainable.

VAB Model has been implemented with successful outcomes in fifty schools. The students are vibrant, the teachers are guides for the students, the headmasters are leaders and the communities are enthused. VAB Model has a track record of success enhancing learning, competence and character of students; it is doable, affordable, and replicable

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The VAB Empowerment model for Sustainable Quality Education for Rural High Schools

1.1 Introduction

The VAB **Empowerment Model for Sustainable Quality Education for Rural High Schools (VAB Model)** supports a rural high school to improve the quality of education it imparts to students. It demonstrates how a simple vision, a concrete plan and concerted participatory efforts with small addition of resources create a positive momentum and pathway for a rural high school to break away from its perennial abyss of low performance. The essence of the model is Empowerment of the Stakeholders of the school – students, teachers, parents, community leaders and government officials. The purpose of the empowerment program is to get their engagement in the affairs of the schools through a stream of organized and interactive activities and events.

The school serves the community by preparing its children as productive human resources of the future. Hence its core commitment and responsibility to the community is to impart quality education to prepare the children for a productive livelihood later. Left to itself, the school cannot do it, as amply brought out by poor performance through ages, not years.

VAB model for quality education, through a coherent and harmonized set of activities, creates a conducive learning environment for the students, motivates and empowers the teachers through workshops and training, engages the school for a commitment to quality, and finally brings the community and school together to perform their respective roles for the shared responsibility of quality education for the children of the community.

The model has been practiced and matured through two decades of work with rural high schools in Bangladesh. VAB started piloting its new innovative model in 2012 with 15 schools and gradually extended it to 50 schools in different upazilas in

the country. VAB Quality Education Model is now proven, affordable and replicable. It is quietly demonstrating its transformative impact on VAB's partner cluster schools.

1.2 Rationale for VAB Model

A number of expatriates led by a retired UN official in New York, Dr. A. T. Rafiqur Rahman, started a charity in New York, Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB, pronounced as Vaab, which has two meanings in the Bangla language – amity or idea), with the aim of helping the disadvantaged students in rural high schools enhance their life opportunities. VAB started its program focusing on providing scholarships to promising poor students. Gradually, it became clear that providing financial help to some students may allow the continuation of their studies, but without improvement of the quality of education they receive at schools, the financial assistance fails to impact the life opportunities even for this small number of students.

The parents of a large majority of rural children are from marginal or poor income groups. They are hardworking people with dignity who send their children to school dreaming for a better life for their offspring. Most depend on day wages or some limited earning, but they are not desperate seeking help from others. The initial years of the VAB experience showed that some financial help to poor students is highly desirable and welcome. But in an environment where the quality of education is dismally poor, this support has a marginal impact in preparing them to acquire a higher quality of livelihood.

Opportunity Cost for Rural Parents

Bangladesh is primarily an agricultural country and a large segment of the rural population is engaged in work related to agriculture. In addition, there are also parents working as artisans of various kinds, transport workers and day laborers of different types. The children from poor families can and often tend to adapt themselves quite readily in any of the occupations of the parents. Some children can also be sent away to work as domestic help in towns and cities. At an age when these children are ready to start high school, each one of them can become a source of earning for their families; in many cases, equal to, or even more than, their parents.

While child labor is morally repugnant and should be nonexistent, many parents under the circumstances, see sending their children to high school as a loss of potential income. Also providing costs of education increases financial burden and it is viewed that the parents incur a huge opportunity cost by sending their children to school.

Moral Imperative

This potential income sacrifices made by poor rural parents by sending their children to high school do not find space in any economic or social cost accounting/assessment of the policy makers and educationists. In fact, it is most often not even appreciated by the rural parents themselves. Most rural high schools get support from the government (salary of teachers, other facilities and buildings, etc.) and parents have a natural right to demand good education from the school.

The continuing dismal state of quality education in rural high schools represents a moral failing of the society, of the public education system and the policy makers. Providing quality education in rural high school is a moral imperative for the society.

Opportunity Cost of Society

While each parent suffers an opportunity cost through potential loss of income, the society suffers an aggregative loss because of poor quality of education. The society is denied the benefits of having the seed of developing a skilled workforce. A large portion of about thirty to forty thousand crores of taka spent in education is wasted because of the lack of quality not only in high schools but also in other spheres of education.

Practical Necessity

The economy of Bangladesh is progressing steadily with modernization and diversification, industrialization and growth of the service sector. Eradicating poverty and attaining higher standard of living are the goals of the nation. Simultaneously, the nation needs to adjust to the demands of the global economy,

The growth of the economy must be matched by a supply of skilled manpower. But the country is going through a crisis of manpower in all sectors of employment, from vocational to the highest level professional.

Traditionally, the prime source of skilled manpower for the industrial and business sectors has been the urban institutions. But this now will soon reach its limits. Added to this is an increased drainage of indigenous skilled manpower to advanced countries. The crisis has been going on unabated for many years and the trend will only intensify.

One area of steady economic growth has been due to remittances from Bangladeshi workers abroad. Bangladesh supplies mostly unskilled labor in the international market. With slightly higher skills profile these workers could have earned significantly larger remuneration. The demand for low-skill workers locally and internationally is diminishing.

The shortage of skilled manpower not only hampers economic growth but also costs the country billions of dollars additionally. Substantial numbers of foreign employees (from neighboring countries) occupy upper-to-middle management levels in the industrial sector. The manpower crisis is also reflected in the health sector; many resort to seeking health services in India, Thailand and Singapore. The education sector also suffers because of the lack of trust in the quality of education; the well-to-do has a tendency to send their children to India, Singapore, Malaysia and the western countries for education at great cost of the country's exchequer.

A large part of the underlying cause of all this can be traced back to the absence of quality education in high schools. It is time to examine the education in rural schools to meet the challenge for skilled manpower. It is crucial that high school graduates possess content knowledge in core subjects. But equally important, the students acquire competence in creative thinking and problem solving, along with excellent communication skills. Knowledge based economy is expanding exponentially and the youth of the country must be prepared for this.

The foundation for quality of education must be at the preprimary, primary and secondary school levels. VAB chose to work in rural secondary schools because rural secondary education has been the most underserved sector in education in the country. The secondary school level is particularly significant in determining the kind of manpower eventually produced, whether technical, midlevel or high level.

Bangladesh population has a high proportion of youth and this is growing even more. Now is the opportunity for Bangladesh to reap a significant demographic dividend, but only if Bangladesh has a robust program to transform this young population to productive human resource. This can happen only when quality education produces skilled workers. Secondary education is an essential stepping-stone to the production of trained manpower at every level in all sectors. In view of the large number of high school population in rural areas, rural schools need special attention and support for imparting quality education. It can be said without hesitation that the days when only a handful of rural students obtained good education is over.

1.3 Goals of VAB Model

The goal of VAB Model is stated explicitly in its full title: *Empowerment Model for Sustainable Quality Education*. The model is built on the assumption that empowerment leads to the final outcome of sustainability of quality education. The model articulates clearly whom to empower and through what specific processes and actions.

Empowerment

The model empowers all the stakeholders of the school, notably: the students, the teachers, the management, the parents, the community and local leaders and local government officials.

How do we empower? Empowerment is achieved through engagement. The model contains specific measures or interventions that engage and empower the stakeholders. The stakeholders play their specific roles and perform their responsibility for the school and their combined efforts generate sustainable quality education as the outcome.

How do we know that the stakeholders' effort will lead to quality education? Schools in rural areas function with a strong social interface and relationships. It is VAB's experience that the greater the involvement of the community, the better is the performance of the school. Empowerment achieves mobilization of the combined energies of the institutional (students, teachers, and management) and social stakeholders (parents and community leaders/members) and deepen their engagement.

Quality Education

Quality Education is enshrined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Out of the 17 SDGs, SDG 4 exclusively deals with Quality Education. Quality education has multiple context-specific dimensions. In its most basic form, it is content knowledge. But in its functional and applied form, knowledge should enable the student to use the acquired knowledge in practice, including the ability to analyze and absorb new knowledge from different sources and apply them. They must acquire certain life skills so that they can become productive citizens. Quality education also provides the environment, exposure and guidance to enhance students' ability to work in teams, solve problems, think critically and communicate effectively. Students also learn values of work ethics, virtues of character and citizenship. Hence by definition, 'Quality Education' provides opportunity for students to develop their full potential and become productive citizens and individuals. Functionally, VAB Model is consistent with the three primary attributes of quality education as enunciated in the Bangladesh National Education Policy: Learning, Competence, and Citizenship and Character.

Learning encompasses proper comprehension of content, quite different from rote learning or learning to the test. VAB Model includes multiple ingredients in pedagogy and student activities to support learning along with competence, citizenship and character. The model integrates effective Learning, Competence in essential skills,

productive and responsible Citizenship and Character driven by values, now popularly called the ‘twenty-first century skills’.

Sustainability

Quality is not a one-time phenomenon or event. VAB Model creates an enabling environment for the school, with demonstration that school on its own can undertake quality measures. However, it needs some additional support. And that is where the parents and the community come in a big way. VAB Model also demonstrates feasibility in that respect. Once the process is understood and results obtained, VAB expects the school to move along on the quality path with meaningful engagement of all the stakeholders.

1.4 Description of VAB Model

The model is depicted in Figure 1. The essence of the model is to take measures with active partnership with schools to empower all the stakeholders. A comprehensive approach is taken for students to complement their knowledge with co-curricular activities in language, Math and Science while activities through clubs and volunteer squads develop competence and good citizenship. The teachers are trained that enables them to teach better and the schools are provided with resources to support teaching and learning.

A pilot scheme to test the model started out in 2012 with fifteen schools in three upazilas in the country, five schools in each upazila. Instead of considering an overhaul of the system, the model works for gradual change over a five-year period. The engagement of all the stakeholders and their ownership in the quality effort backed by the community-friendly approach of VAB helped produce successful outcomes of the project. These enabling factors created the necessary environment and conditions required for sustainability with local initiative.

VAB Model is an all-encompassing model with a realistic promise of attaining its goals and for that reason, VAB received philanthropic support to apply the model in various rural schools. Chevron Bangladesh awarded a one-crore taka (US\$133,000) two-year project grant for 14 schools in its area of operation in 2014. The Bangladesh Bank granted 65 lac taka (US\$ 86,000) to implement the model in several clusters of schools for the period 2015- 2019. American and Efird (A & E) approved 24.5 lac taka (US\$ 32,000) for work in two schools for a five-year period.

In the Global Conference at Atlanta, USA in 2015 on Innovative Social Business Projects in Health, Technology and Education, organized by the Nobel Peace Laureates, VAB Model won the first prize. VAB submitted its model as a solution to poor quality education in rural Bangladesh, which can be applied to any third world country. The model's focus on the empowerment of the stakeholders of rural education combined with low cost, effectiveness and sustainability won the prize.

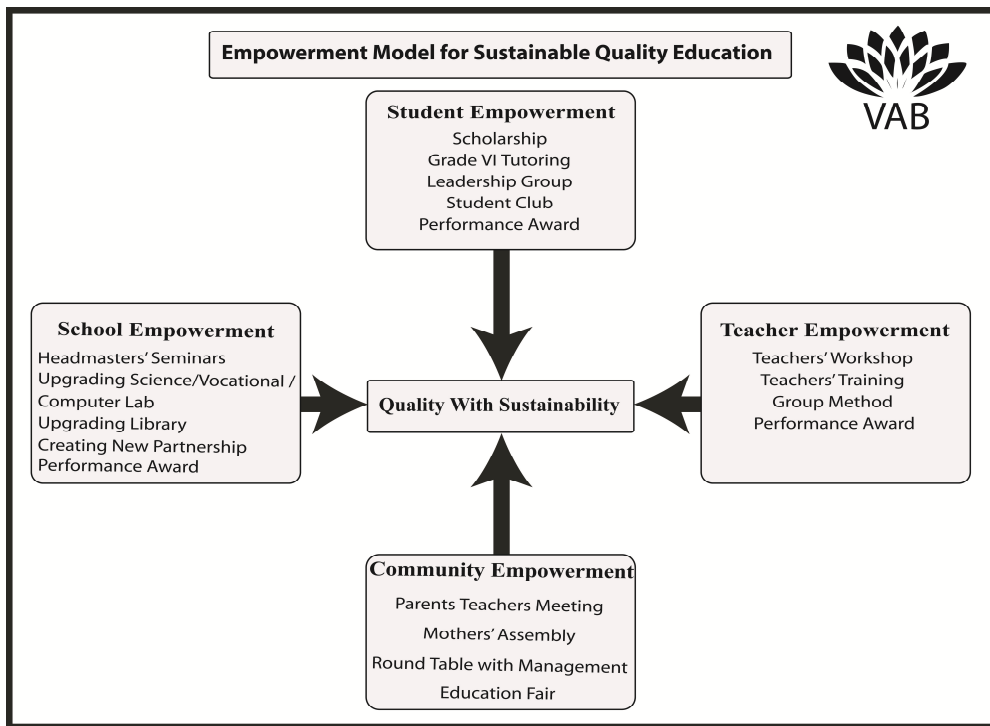


Figure 1: VAB Empowerment Model for Quality Education

How It works In rural High schools

2.1 Rural Non-government High Schools

Bangladesh consists of 87,223 villages. Even with significant urbanization, nearly 65% of the population of Bangladesh is rural. Bangladesh has a unitary form of Government and is governed by the central government based in the capital, Dhaka. The country is divided into eight divisions; each division is broken down into districts, the total number of districts being 64. Each district is broken down into sub-districts known as upazila and there are 492 of them. Upazilas are further divided into unions (total 4,554), each of which covers several villages. Upazila is the lowest unit in the public administrative structure. The local government structure with public representation starts with union at the bottom and then moves higher to upazila and district levels.

VAB works with schools at the upazila level. Each upazila has a form of local government with limited responsibility and power. Most power is vested in the central government and the parliament. Education is the responsibility of the central government and the education department services extend to the upazila level through a cadre of education officials.

Different schooling systems are prevalent in Bangladesh; VAB works in the secular public system of education directly controlled by the government and having the widest coverage. Most schools and practically all rural High Schools cover education from Class VI to Class X, 'Class' representing Grade level. Two public examinations are held annually, one at the end of Class VIII and the other at the end of Class X.

There are over 20,000 high schools in Bangladesh, and more than 16,000 of them are rural nongovernment high schools. Most of the local high schools were set up by contributions from the locality to meet the educational needs of the children in the

community. The government provides salary for a fixed number of teachers in many of these schools. It also has program to support gradual improvement of infrastructure and education resources. VAB works in these government supported, but classified as nongovernment, high schools.

2.2 Challenges in Respect of Rural Schools

VAB has worked with rural high schools with full recognition of the stark reality of the overall environment surrounding education in rural Bangladesh.

These are noted below:

- Lack or inadequate support or guidance at home for students related to studies/learning, as a large majority of parents is non-literate
- Poor financial conditions of most parents
- Inadequate numbers and poorly qualified teachers with limited capacity and commitment to teaching
- Examination-centered approach to teaching without regard for learning
- Scarcity of teaching resources
- Inadequate opportunities for students to develop competence and proficiency (content knowledge and applied skills) in language, science, math, and computer
- Inadequate exposure and opportunities for students to develop in an all-rounded capacity and citizenship qualities
- Lack of quality consideration in planning and budgeting school activities
- Lack of incentive and engagement of the community in education endeavors
- Value of education is not fully ingrained across the community
- Inadequate infrastructure and poor financial condition of most schools

2.3 Uniqueness of VAB Approach

Improving the quality of education in rural high schools is a bold undertaking. VAB embarked on this stupendous task driven by its firm belief and confidence in the innate strength and capability of the community and its conviction that the community resolve can achieve goals even under the worst conditions. Most of the rural schools came into existence from local initiatives sometimes led by the collective drive of the community or sometimes by individual philanthropists supported by the community. The VAB experience confirms that given some catalytic support and advocacy, mobilizing community engagement in the school is not only feasible, but has proven to be a sound proposition.

Reimagining rural high schools

Despite the somewhat dismal reality of the state of rural schools cited above, there are certain natural attributes in rural schools that provide an inherently better environment for children to develop as individuals. Ironically, the uniqueness of the rural setting is so natural that it escapes attention. Years of work in the rural setting opened our eyes to the unique features that go unobserved and thus unutilized or underutilized. VAB turned the natural advantages described below as creative and reinforcing inputs to enhance quality education:

a. Open environment

The entire rural setting and the environment in a rural high school is generally open. The school has a playground available (unlike many urban schools) and within an easy reach for the students and the community. This spatial openness and ease of mobility offers rural students a degree of ease in interaction and relatively less strict parental restrictions, offering the students a potential space for growth and development.

b. Community spirit

The community around the school has a great interrelationship. Most of the teachers are from the community, and there is generally a bond of love, care, respect and responsibility. The parents occasionally meet the teachers at bazars and haats (weekly market) and by the wayside shops which sometimes offer an informal opportunity for feedback on student performance. The community leaders and the education officials in the locality also know the teachers well. There is an atmosphere of respect for the school. The school premises or the school field is often used for community or public events.

This offers an opportunity to create a bonding for quality education for the students. There is a potent demand and an expectation by the parents /community that the children should do well in their pursuit of education and this in turn creates a mutual accountability for the school and the teachers. VAB actively tries to utilize this opportunity.

c. Parental sacrifice

It is a reality that rural parents incur an opportunity cost (loss of potential income that could have been earned by the child by engaging in work) by sending their children to school. The society, to a large extent, is unaware of this huge sacrifice that rural parents incur, neither is there an understanding or appreciation of the extent of hardship inflicted on the parents/family. This factor deserves to be brought to focus. If understood properly, the teachers would be morally pressured to do a better job with

the education of these children. It would also become a moral obligation of society and the state to impart quality education to the neglected rural children. Realization by the parents about the sacrifice will also embolden them to demand quality education for their children.

d. Life skills

Rural children mostly have to fend for themselves. This gives them opportunity for self-development. Rural children also can develop life skills more readily. In many families, they help parents in their work and become a part of it. They can take part in family or other local vocations and can learn some crafts and skills. In fact, our society has the tradition of parents passing on knowledge and skills in their own crafts to their children.

e. Citizenship and character

Children are perhaps better nurtured and brought up in a rural environment than in urban environment. Parents are generally honest and hardworking. They earn their living by the sweat of their brow. The children have greater opportunity to learn and develop respect for all kinds of work. Natural association with their parent's vocation teaches them dignity of labor and respect for all vocations. There is a greater outpouring of mutual support and respect in the community. Rural environment provides this natural and conducive environment for developing individual competence, citizenship and character.

Engagement of stakeholders

The essence and pivot of the VAB model for sustainable quality education is the empowerment of the stakeholders – students, teachers, and parents being the primary stakeholders followed by the community, its leaders and local government officials. Students are engaged through better teaching in classroom, through offering challenges to run student club programs (both academic and extra-curricular) and through creating a welcoming and lively environment in the school. Teachers are empowered through training, workshop, seminars and discussions. Schools get better resourced through supplements of additional physical and material resources; incorporation of participatory management approach infuses a culture of better transparency and accountability. Parents are brought in to support student programs and share responsibilities with the school.

Community leaders and members are invited in all VAB sponsored events to bring them closer to school. Achievement of the students forms the bridge in connecting the school to the community, creating environment for the school to seek out support for the school program. Connecting with the local Government officials

serves dual purposes. Demonstration of positive impact helps easing bureaucratic approval. Positive attitude of the officials gives strength to VAB's position with the schools.

Sustainability is presented as a cornerstone of VAB partnership and association with schools. VAB starts its program in the school with a clear message: “**Quality Education in (your) Rural Secondary High School through (your) Local Initiative.**” This is the theme of all discussions at the beginning and through all phases of work with the school.

VAB works with the stakeholders to create a common vision for the school with a work plan outlining roles and responsibilities for each group of stakeholders. The stakeholders join their heads and hands to develop the different aspects of the program with clear pathways to achieving the ultimate outcome of quality education in the school. All VAB events are open to the community. This is done deliberately to keep the community informed of the VAB program in the school as well as attract their attention that may lead to engagement, and consequently to sustainability.

An outstanding characteristic of VAB is that that the program is designed and implemented by the school. VAB is a facilitator to draw up a shared vision, set goals, develop plan of action and assign responsibility. VAB acts as a motivating and catalytic force with some input of resources, guidance, training and orientation.

The measures set out in the model and modalities of implementation are just typical of what came out from the work with schools over the past years.

Composite program benefitting all students

VAB addresses all facets of quality education which is customized to meet diverse interests of students with the involvement of a good segment of teachers. Any project to be successful requires participation of a critical mass of students and teachers. VAB took note and learned lessons from past undertakings by different organizations which revealed multiple shortcomings: they addressed a single intervention, they worked with a very narrow selection of teachers (may be one or two teachers). Instead of connecting with the whole body of students, they catered to only a small number of students to show success of their program. They somewhat ignored the value of engaging and involving the stakeholders like parents and community leaders.

VAB program design and modality is built upon the principle of inclusion and engagement of the whole community. The engagement was real and was driven by inherent parental and community interest in deepening quality education in the local school.

Student Clubs become organic entities as parts of the school

All schools have co-curricular programs in sports, debate, cultural activities and so on. However, there is no concerted effort to provide opportunities for the bulk of students. Schools most often play by the rule; hold some mandatory events to satisfy requirements of education authorities. These events, essentially planned and organized by teachers, tend to be isolated happenings and do not provide inspirational energy for the students to excel in extra-curricular activities in larger numbers.

To fulfill the motto of Quality for All, VAB encourages that a greater number of students should participate in co-curricular programs. Usually teachers lack time and motivation to undertake such activities as a part of their duty. However, without teachers' involvement the co-curricular activities lose institutional character and continuity. To circumvent this problem, VAB has been promoting the development of student clubs in five areas: Debate, Sports, English, Computer and Volunteering.

The Clubs are managed and run by students, with one teacher responsible for each Club. The responsibilities of the Clubs are three-fold: Improved learning; Increased Participation; and Strong Team formation. The Clubs are structured and their mode of operation is defined. Positive outcome of the existence of the club will ensure its acceptance. With time, the Clubs will take a firm root and will become an integral part of the school.

A strong foundation of the Student Clubs, in addition, gives an organic footing for student activities and initiatives, provides a platform for nurturing creative faculties of students, and helps develop a non-threatening bond with the school as an entity. Together, this is a step forward in satisfying some vital elements of quality education.

Staying with the school for a longer period of time

A common experience of externally supported projects in Bangladesh is sustainability of benefits. Projects, initiated and led by external entities, have a term life. Each project comes to an end on its termination point (number of years) which is pre-determined. The external support ceases and the agency leaves with a report of successful completion. While there may not be any dispute about the success at that point, it is quite a common experience that the benefits of the program dissipate in subsequent years and finally they disappear without any trace.

VAB initiatives are not one-time measures. A five year plan is devised and VAB provides some essential resources, but most importantly provides guidance and impetus for the school as the school marches ahead implementing its plan of activities and striving to reach target outcomes.

In practice, VAB emulates the principle of the monitoring model of the World Health Organization (WHO) – which underlines that status of achieved goal needs to be continually monitored even when eradication of an individual disease is achieved.

Working in clusters of schools

VAB takes up programs, targeting disadvantaged areas at the upazila level. Generally, a minimum of five schools are chosen in an upazila. This makes it easier for VAB to administer its program at lower costs. It allows the schools to enter into cooperation and competition, both of which enrich them. It spreads a demonstration effect on other schools in the upazila, generating an interest and urge in them towards quality education. This has the potential of creating conducive environment in the whole area for quality education. Improvement occurring in a number of schools at the same time may also attract regional and national attention through media publicity and word of mouth.

Focus on affordable cost, workability and outcome

The VAB programs are designed with the paramount consideration of affordability of costs by the schools. VAB is keenly aware of its own financial constraints and also the limitations of the school in raising funds. Before any new program is launched, VAB internally spends considerable amount of time, effort and thought on designing the program so that it is doable from all considerations. VAB program components and modalities are enriched by extensive research on best practices nationally and from experiments and experiences in several countries worldwide on quality education. Once the program is designed on a consultative basis, it is then shared with the schools to test out its feasibility and applicability. The outcomes of the tests are then fed back into the program, and the program gets refined. VAB identifies some measurable outcomes for each component for monitoring purposes.

The empowerment Approach

3.1 Student Empowerment Measures

Based on observed deficiencies in a number of areas in rural schools, VAB designed some support activity streams in order to enhance student empowerment. They range from addressing means (material/financial) of support to needy students, providing additional coaching support for academically deficient students, enhancing learning through group methods, introducing computer literacy and English language skill enhancement and extra-curricular clubs for complementing learning through classroom and textbooks, at the same time bringing out latent creative talents within students. A brief description on each is provided below.

Student Scholarship

Poverty poses to be an endemic deterrent for accessing and continuing schooling by children from poor families. Scholarships provide poor students with the critical means of initiating and carrying on with their education in high school. A scholarship meets the needs of schooling costs and thereby reduces economic burden for poor households. Specifically, VAB scholarships provide students with school supplies, such as pens/pencils, copy books, school bag, etc. and examination fees. The Government provides free textbooks, and in many cases, tuition fees are waived. VAB methodically avoids duplication of assistance to poor students.

The selection of students is made based on merit and financial need. The Headmaster of the school plays the lead role in the selection process. Each year a fixed number of students from class VI are selected. Once selected, the financial help continues till the end of class X, unless there is a significant drop in academic performance, a dropout or transfer to another school. The number of students selected in class VI is the replacement of the outgoing cohort from class X. The regular program with the school ceases at the end of the stipulated five years of collaboration with the school. However, the students who were already awarded scholarships by

VAB continue to get scholarships for two more years, or until finishing class X, whichever is earlier.

The scholarships are awarded in the presence of parents. In most cases, education officials and community leaders are also invited to attend a brief session of the award. In some cases, a central event is organized for the full cluster of five schools at one location with the presence of parents, community leaders and government officials.

Besides benefit to the poor students, the scholarship program generates a social recognition and access for VAB to the school. It also demonstrates the charitable nature of VAB and its donors and patrons to the wider community.

Grade VI Tutoring

Class VI is the entry point of a student to the high school. The rural high schools are often obliged to enroll all students from local primary schools. Since in many cases the admission is not based on merit and competence, the new entrants are a mixed bag in terms of their literacy proficiency. Rural primary schools often fail to equip all graduates with adequate skills and a large segment of students finds it hard to cope with high school curriculum. This sometimes leads to dropouts, but more importantly, it produces a drag in the classroom and turns these students into chronic low performers disabling them to cope in subsequent years.

To address this phenomenon, VAB promoted a special three-month remedial tutoring program to remove their deficiency, particularly in English and Math. VAB pays a small honorarium to the teachers involved in this tutoring. Tutoring mitigates the students' deficiency and deficit in classroom education. This has proven to improve the academic performance of the students and impacted positively in reduction of dropout and better examination results in subsequent years.

The Grade VI Tutoring Program is promoted and supported by VAB for three years and is expected to be taken over by the school itself, as the benefit of the program becomes evident to the school.

Group Method of Teaching-Learning

One unique area where VAB made an effective breakthrough with good outcomes has been in the implementation of Group Method of learning in schools under its umbrella.

Most school teachers are required to have some training in teaching before they can get a job as a teacher. The Government also has a program for in-service training for teachers. The teachers are quite aware of the current trends in classroom pedagogy

that promotes the Group Method of Teaching-Learning. Unfortunately, the teachers in rural schools do not use the pedagogy that is recommended during training, but follow the classical lecture method of teaching. It is less work for teachers, easier to go through the required lessons in the syllabus, and is a familiar method. VAB impressed upon the schools to introduce the new modality of group teaching-learning and they are now finding that it brings new energy and enthusiasm among students, and also hones their mastery of content.

VAB recommends formation of Groups in each class by the class teacher at the outset of the academic year, mixing students of different academic abilities. A major deterrent to the introduction of the Group method was the congestion of students in benches in a non-spacious setting because of the size of the classrooms. The problem was resolved with a prior seating arrangement so that during group work the students may just turn around and work face to face with the group members. Each Group stays the same for all subjects and throughout the year. Each Group has a leader, and a co-leader, who takes over in case the leader is absent for some reason.

Group method of teaching-learning is inherently student-centric. The Group members join their heads to resolve problems assigned by the teacher, or taken up at the Group's initiative to resolve the issues involved in comprehension and learning, before asking for help from the teacher. It is the responsibility of each member, particularly of leader and co-leader to ensure engagement of every member of the group. The teacher has the responsibility to ascertain that initiative and creativity is not confined, but they come from every member of the Group in course of time.

Each Group in every class will have a name that will be unique for the class. The same Group name will stay in every class, creating an identity of the class in terms of Group name.

This Group methodology has the following benefits:

- The Group develops its identity with a unique name creating a sense of pride and also giving an opportunity for being accountable
- Better cooperation and empathy develops among Group members
- Every Group tries to perform better, resulting in competition for better performance
- The Group can be made responsible for its performance
- The Group can persuade its members to be present in all classes
- The Group can encourage its members to participate in different co-curricular activities

- It creates an opportunity to reward best performing groups, thus creating an incentive for better performance in both curricular and co-curricular activities.

A special benefit of the Group Method showed up during COVID 19 pandemic lockdown. Headmasters and teachers in VAB schools could communicate with the Group Leaders, instructing them about study programs and asking them to share the instructions with the respective groups.

Computer Skill Program

Digital literacy is turning to be an essential skill required for improved learning and modern life skills. Importantly, for most employments in formal and semi-formal sectors in the economy digital literacy is now a required qualification. VAB embarked on an ambitious program to introduce a digital literacy program in the schools it works with. This is one area where rural students suffer from an endemic constraint that stifles their further education and career.

Over the years VAB has been encouraging all schools in its program to give access to computers to all students. This did not succeed initially because of shortage of computers and funds for acquiring computers, and more importantly due to lack of interest of the teachers in this area. The situation changed when in 2013, VAB undertook a program of training Headmasters in computer use, followed by training of all teachers on-site by VAB training personnel. This helped create a digital awareness in the school which provided the needed impetus to impart training to students.

Computer literacy for 100% students

Since 2016, VAB instituted a program for Computer Literacy for 100% of the students (all the students in a school). Literacy includes the elements of office applications for computers such as the ability to use Microsoft Word, Excel, Power point and use of email and the internet.

The training is offered all year round in batches. An eighteen-hour curriculum is introduced to the teachers by a VAB Trainer.

After several batches are trained, the teacher identifies a group of students as trainers for the remaining groups of students. This worked well and nine schools qualified to have attained computer literacy for 100% of their students in 2019. This is a landmark achievement of VAB schools in the country's drive for Digital Bangladesh.

This also serves as a unique example that showed, given a methodology and target, the teachers can innovate ways to reach the target with own initiative. Once

100% computer literacy is attained, maintaining it requires training the new batch of students entering Class VI and keeping the opportunities for access to computers available for other students.

The computer literacy test is done by picking students at random from all classes. It is conducted by the VAB Trainer, who designs the test with guidance from experts, and is supervised by external visitors, in some cases by Education Officials.

Computer proficiency

To bolster excellence, VAB has an additional program for advanced skills in computer use. This requires students to go slightly beyond the literacy requirement to applications such as Photoshop and some elements of graphics. Training, evaluation and testing are done by VAB.

For the test, each school is asked to select the top three students, and VAB holds a competition among the top three from each of the five schools in a cluster. The competition is supervised by an external expert or an education official. The top three students from among the fifteen are awarded recognition.

English Language Skill Program

As part of its mission of quality education for rural children, VAB has been consistently pursuing English Language training to mitigate the poor skills level in English in rural High Schools. Simply stated – teachers and students appear to be “scared” of English, which seem to generate an ‘invisible defensive shell’ around them about the language.

A series of English Language training workshops organized by VAB and conducted by an eminent linguist, Mr. Amin Rahman, with support from the Rotary Club of Wheelers Hill, Melbourne, Australia, showed good results and the teachers and students seemed to come out of their shell. Yet it fell short of generating the expected surge in their interest in learning English.

The experience and a subsequent field survey generated some ideas on what additional steps were needed. These ideas combined with other innovations, prompted VAB to develop a new in-house program that would promote and sustain efforts among the learners themselves.

VAB developed a resource book on mastering the language skills through self-driven practice – **‘Road to Learning: A Guide to Learn and Converse in English through Individual and Group Practice’**. A booklet on Limericks, composed by Dr. Mushfiqur Rahman, was also made ready. The shortness, the interesting rhyming

scheme, and the humor make a limerick a useful tool for learning English pronunciation. A DVD was also compiled, containing various resources in Pronunciation, Spelling, Listening, Reading, and Writing. VAB trained its own staff on the use of the guide and other resources.

A demonstration of the training methodology was given in every class in the school by VAB trainers. A Leadership Group of fifty students, 10 from each class, was then trained in a day-long session. The training was done in a participatory mode that enabled the members of the Leadership Group to take over the responsibility for skill development on themselves. At the end of three months, each member of the Leadership Group demonstrates their skills to VAB trainers and then each of them is assigned a group of five to seven students of the class on how to enhance skills through self-training - solo, in pairs or in groups. Thus, English language skills spread to the whole school.

Two messages are made clear in the training:

- ❖ Students need to learn English for their own interests
- ❖ Students can learn only through concerted practice

Strategies for success in English program

The program proved successful. On the whole, the following strategies in the design and implementation are the reasons for success in the program.

- The primary responsibility rests with the learners –the students. The responsibility of trainers/teachers is to be a promoter, catalyzer and provider of quality assurance
- Consciousness and understanding of self-interest are stoked by the Guide itself and by the VAB trainers
- Responsibility to learn is made easier when students understand that learning is in their self-interest. Learners become “owners” of the learning process
- The students of the Leadership Group will have a strong motivation to learn well before they can take the responsibility to train other students. The student trainers become “owners” of the training process
- The Guide consistently relates to curricular materials, synthesizing techniques in curricula with techniques developed in the Guide, at the same time conforming to the curricular materials which are mandated by the Government

- Linkage to curricular material assures students that conventional exam success can also result from better learning through the Guide
- Teachers and schools are engaged in the goals and methods. Teachers take a supervisory role monitoring that the students are learning correctly without diminishing the students' leadership in the learning process

Regular follow-up on performance evaluation is held, and excellence in performance is encouraged with performance-based rewards.

English conversational skill for 100% of students

The immediate goal of the English Language Program is to attain conversational skills for 100% students. Random test for students for all classes is undertaken by VAB. The components of testing include ability to converse for five to ten minutes between two students or with an external examiner. The test at cluster level is conducted in presence of external examiners and government officials. With progress in conversational skills, other elements in English learning like Spelling Bee and Limerick recitation are introduced before moving to more advanced levels.

English conversation program with university students

In order to promote conversation skills and to generate additional enthusiasm among students, VAB has undertaken a program of conversation between rural high school students and urban university students. The students are enthused talking with a university student. It provides an inspiration to them to meet their own dreams to be in a university.

Under this program, a university volunteer talks to a school student twice a week, about half an hour each time, over eight-week period with a total conversation time of 450 minutes. The volunteers are given a general guideline on the topics of conversation, with freedom for adjustment to meet conversational needs of the student and mutual interests. The volunteers provide a feedback on the impact of the program and the student's current standing in conversation.

Student volunteers from universities find the experience well worth their time; they gain an experience in knowing about rural students and enjoy the satisfaction of having been a part of a much needed skill of the rural students. There is a growing number of these volunteers who are committing to be connected with VAB. They are being enlisted as "Life-Long Volunteers" for VAB.

English language skill proficiency

English proficiency skill is driven by the Leadership Group with regular training among themselves and other interested students. Each member of the Leadership Group will develop proficiency in all the four skills of language: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The Group members will follow an agreed schedule of training. The Group will hold internal competitions at different times to hone their skills. A proficient group of at least ten students is expected to spur interest and enthusiasm of many more students in each class.

English proficiency test will be conducted by every school; VAB will conduct interschool competition among the best performers and recognize them.

Student Clubs

VAB has been promoting five student clubs: English, Computer, Debate, Sports and Volunteering. The Student Clubs have created a productive, dynamic and inviting environment to engage students actively and with interest in different co-curricular and extracurricular activities with the intrinsic benefit of acquiring some competencies and soft skills. The clubs provide a fertile ground to exercise and enhance abilities in leadership, teamwork, communication, problem solving and critical thinking.

The clubs have helped slowly to transform the schools, beyond classes, to become a center of attraction for the students with a lively and inviting environment to pursue creative activities and develop friendship. The activities increased attendance and made classroom instruction more effective, and improved the learning environment in the school. Student Clubs have also created more engagement of the community through participation of parents and community members as providers of advice and guidance, spectators, avid supporters, and patrons.

The distinguishing feature of the VAB's Student Club Program is its emphasis on the management of the Club directly by the students. However, each Club has an Adviser who is a teacher of the school.

Like the Leadership Group in English, Leadership Groups are formed in Computer, Debate, Sports and Volunteering, with special training in respective areas. These Leadership Groups, with development of sufficient skills and competence, form the core membership of the Clubs. Typically, each club will have fifty students, 10 from each class. So a large number of students get automatically connected with some work beyond routine academic activities.

The mandate of the Leadership Groups are taken over by the Clubs. The Clubs have the mandate to reach excellence in their activities and make training available for

the entire group of students. The Club members become resources for training their classmates. The clubs run with the motto: *Quality for all; Excellence for Team.*

All clubs are provided with training materials and guide on effective operation of the club. The training materials include written manual as well as materials in CD with illustrations. VAB staff has been trained to offer training to students of all clubs. The Club members are given a Log Book where they record all their activities. They are asked to use it as a self-generated Report Card so that they would evaluate themselves to assess their own performance. The Log Book could also be used as a monitoring and accountability tool by VAB.

A detailed exposition of the organization, management and operation of all the clubs are provided in Appendix B: Student Clubs.

English Club

The English Language Skill Program took an institutional shape with the formation Club by students. The success of the Leadership Group is driving the participation of students in learning English as a language, instead of a subject in the curriculum. Realization has been achieved that command over language automatically ensures high grades in examination in English.

Computer Club

VAB has been promoting the use of computers by teachers and students. It successfully trained most teachers in the use of computers for routine activities. This was followed by a drive to have computer literacy by 100% of the students.

Student Clubs on computer dubbed as ICT (Information and Communication Technology) Club have been launched with an aim to extend the exposure of students to a higher level of work including programming and robotics. The initiative is at an early stage, but it is expected to gain momentum over time. Schools with a competent computer teacher and a computer lab are chosen for setting up computer clubs.

VAB has in-house trainers and training materials in different areas of computer applications. External sources are obtained for initiation on coding, gaming and other more advanced topics that students can learn with fun and enthusiasm.

Debate Club

The purpose of the Debate Club is to promote and strengthen the ability for cognitive thinking, articulating, reasoning and communication, among students. In the process, it enhances their language skills, confidence in public speaking, and social awareness.

Every class has at least two teams with a regular practice schedule. School teams are constituted based on in-class and inter-class competitions.

Training is provided to students by VAB trainers, teachers and occasionally, by highly skilled debaters at the national level. VAB developed a manual to provide guidance to students to develop skills in debating.

The Debate club has already made an impact on student participation and school team performance in various competitions.

Sports Club

The Sports Club manages four teams: two junior and two senior teams in each of Cricket and Football. In co-ed schools, there are separate teams for boys and girls. The teams are trained by the physical education teacher of the school and also by external coaches through a scheduled program of practice over the year. The Club provides opportunities and motivation for all students to undertake sports activities. Practice sessions and competitions are held based on a schedule prepared for the school year.

The Sports Clubs have resulted in enhanced student participation and school team performance. This is evidenced by results of competitions held at different levels – local, upazila, district, division and national.

Volunteering Club

Institutional volunteering activity is not a widely practiced phenomenon in Bangladesh. Volunteering initiatives, much like philanthropy, emerge to respond to specific needs in difficult times such as cyclones and floods. Incidentally, volunteerism is a fundamental principle of VAB, as enshrined in its name; the Headquarter Office of VAB (VAB USA) is run by volunteers, and the higher officials in the Executing Office (VAB Bangladesh) are all volunteers. VAB promotes a culture of volunteering by students at schools at all times.

Students choose volunteering activities through interactive discussion among themselves. A manual has been designed as guide to facilitators as well as to students. VAB staff has been trained to facilitate the sessions. Common examples are keeping the classrooms and the school premises clean, keeping the public places of the village clean and sanitary, forming and managing “neighborhood watch groups” for protecting female students from eve teasers and other nuisances, tree plantation, helping farmers in reaping season and helping community during natural disaster.

Character Education

VAB believes character is better learned through practice rather than precepts. VAB provides the students with opportunities to develop character through practice.

All activities, particularly those in Student Empowerment, center round character education. Character education is inbuilt in VAB Model. The student scholarship program expounds kindness, Grade VI tutoring demonstrates helping attitude, and Group method brings about practice of sharing, helping and mentoring. The Club program, in addition to soft skills, allow students to learn through practice the character traits of patience, hard work, perseverance, respect for one's own self and others, tolerance, humility, responsibility and trustworthiness.

The formal character education program is an interactive exercise where the students identify the character traits they have practiced and demonstrated during all their activities in the school. Discussions are held with club members twice a year on the following theme:

- Identification of character virtues demonstrated by students
- Identification of character virtues existing in rural society
- Creation of Student Self-Image
- Living up to the Self-Image
- Challenges in real life practice of character virtues

Details of how VAB brings in the engagements of students and teachers in character education are presented in Appendix C: Character Education.

External Programs Promoted by VAB

There are a several programs of other organizations, many at the regional and national levels, which VAB advocates for rural schools. Some of these programs supplement the VAB program, and some add additional opportunity for students. Such referral or collaboration serves the dual purposes of widening the opportunity set for students for quality education and of economization of the scarce resources of VAB. These are briefly described below. In most cases, VAB has a formal or informal understanding with the organization in question.

Math Olympiad program

The Math Olympiad Committee in Bangladesh holds Math Olympiad competitions countrywide annually, under the auspices of the International Math Olympiad Committee. The competitions are held at the Primary, Junior, Secondary and Higher Secondary levels. For the schools that show interest, VAB encourages and mentors students to compete at Junior and Secondary levels. VAB organizes a brief training

for a group of twenty students by volunteers from the Math Olympiad Committee. The students are provided with materials to practice by themselves, with supervision and support from the Math teacher of the school. VAB partners with the schools to send out promising students to compete at the district, regional and national levels.

The Math Olympiad Program of VAB does not cover all students in a school. The expectation is that the exposure of the team sent by a school and hopefully the team's accomplishments would spur interest in Math among all students, providing an impetus to understand Math starting from the fundamentals. An additional expectation is to spark the interest of students with relative proficiency in Math to join the Olympiad next year.

Science promotion program

Bangladesh Science Popularization Committee and Freedom Foundation work for promotion of interests in science by holding science fairs nationally. VAB promotes the participation in these fairs.

Book reading program

BishwaShahitto Kendro (BSK) promotes book reading among students. VAB encourages the schools to join the program. Most of the VAB schools are connected with the program.

Computer programming and robotics

VAB works with Bangladesh Open Source Network (BDOSN), a nongovernment organization, to offer training in selected schools on Computer Programming and Robotics. So far school teams from five schools have received training and have also participated in the competition organized by BDOSN.

Talent hunt program

The Ministry of Education holds the talent hunt program nationwide in different categories such as Language and Literature, Bangladesh history, and Math and Computer. VAB encourages the schools to participate in them.

3.2 Teacher Empowerment Measures

Headmaster is the leader in a school, but the workhorse is teachers. Surprisingly, teachers, definitely the bulk of the teachers, are generally left out of all discussions and decisions related to education in the school and outside the school. For example, typically a school has to submit an academic and development plan annually to government agencies for the school. Generally, it is done as a routine job of the headmaster with little discussion with the teachers. Empowerment measures for

teachers in the VAB model put the teachers in the forefront of all activities in the school.

Teachers' Workshop

Teachers' workshop is among the first events that VAB undertakes in the school. Teachers are the people who really perform the tasks needed for the education of children. It is lamentable that often the voice of the teachers are not given due weight in setting new policies and procedures in high school education. This has been one of the main reasons why teachers often seem reluctant to appreciate and apply policy measures in education. Most measures therefore perform in a less than satisfactory manner. The lack of enthusiasm and absence of ownership is the direct result of the failure in partnering with the teachers.

For the VAB program, teachers are the primary partners, because they are the people who make things happen in a school.

VAB undertakes steps to involve the teachers in the design, planning and implementation phases of all VAB measures at the school level.

All teachers are invited to participate in the workshop.

The Headmaster and the members of the School Management Committee (SMC) are included in the workshop. Sometimes a few students and guests also take part in the workshop.

Teachers are asked if they have a dream about the school, and if so, to visualize how the goals for the dream school can be realized.

The following are the outcome of a typical workshop:

- It draws out a vision for the school through interactive discussion
- Identifies the hurdles to reach goals
- Identifies ways to overcome the hurdles
- Works out a five-year program to reach the goals
- Prepares a budget for the program

Emphasis is given on local initiatives and local resources.

The workshop runs for a full day and a review of the work is carried out the following day. VAB personnel act as facilitator.

This document provides a blueprint for school's academic and development activities. The Teachers' Workshop is not only the first activity of VAB in the school; VAB considers it the most significant event under the VAB Program.

Teachers' Training

Teachers are trained in Math, General Science, Computer Applications (ICT), Social Studies, English and Bangla. The special features of VAB's Teachers Training Program are:

- Training emphasizes the pathway to self-learning through practice; teachers are to upgrade themselves following this path way
- Training material includes subject content and realistic classroom pedagogy
- Trainees demonstrate classroom presentation skills, giving emphasis on the Group Method of Learning-Teaching
- Training is designed with input from experts in teaching and by a peer group of high school teachers, from established high-performing schools, mostly urban schools

A need assessment form is sent out to schools to select the teachers and to include the preferences for the desired content in the training, particularly in the subject area, as indicated by the teachers *themselves*. Teachers are also asked to come prepared with one lecture using the best pedagogy used by that teacher. The presentation by teachers, selected randomly, generate lively exchange of ideas that becomes helpful for improvement by all teachers.

The formal training offered by external trainers is followed by assessment, motivational mentoring and supplementary support by VAB in-house trainers.

Simplified Pedagogy for Teachers

Most teachers receive training in pedagogy, organized by the Ministry of Education, and conducted by experts in Teachers Training Colleges. However, VAB does not see any reflection of the training in the way the teachers actually teach in the classroom. VAB reviewed the training materials; they are done quite well by experts of national and international repute. But they require quite a bit of detailed reading and absorption. Most teachers have no impetus to make that effort. With cooperation of experts in teaching methodology and the review of teaching manuals designed by NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board), VAB designed a simplified pedagogy that all teachers can use in a realistic classroom environment in a rural school. VAB trainers have been trained by expert trainers to demonstrate the use of this pedagogy for all subjects. Training in this methodology is delivered by VAB

trainers and it has been well received by the schools. They make a presentation to the teachers and demonstrate the methodology using some examples from textbooks. VAB has developed facilities for online delivery of all training for teachers, in addition to on-site mode.

3.3 School Empowerment Measures

School Empowerment measures include strengthening of educational resources of the schools. It also includes measures for engaging the Headmaster and SMC members and enhancing opportunities to obtain new partners for quality education.

Headmaster Seminar

Headmaster Seminar is a mechanism to secure commitment of the school. The first seminar gets the Headmasters attuned to quality concepts. It is conducted interactively in the workshop format. Headmasters in schools from different clusters participate in the seminar. The general theme of the presentation is: Improvement of Quality of Education through Local Initiatives. Headmasters are asked to present their views on quality, their understanding of local initiatives, presence or absence of local resources and what an external agency like VAB can do to support school endeavors. The modality of working with VAB is discussed. The Seminar/Workshop also shares experiences and good practices and works for devising a planning outline for institutional development.

The seminars in subsequent years are held to assess the progress of work, share experiences with participating schools, identify bottlenecks, find remedies, improve execution and add new elements in the program. The issues of management and leadership are also discussed. Headmasters have the dual role of leadership and management, and this is explored thoroughly. The role of the Headmaster in creating a vision for the school and getting the teachers own that vision is emphasized. Headmasters are often bogged down in managerial role; the difference between management role and managerial role is discussed.

Round Table with School Management Committee

This takes place in Year 3 when the school becomes fully conversant with the aims and objectives of the VAB Program. The purpose of this round table meeting is to bring in the benefits of transparency in school management, including financial management. Issues of accountability, workload of the Headmaster and opportunities for delegation of responsibility and authority are also brought in. The roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders are reviewed and ways and means to get the roles played by the respective stakeholders effectively and efficiently are discussed.

Again, the approach is participatory, with the participants dwelling on the current situation, difficulties for change, means to bring change, desirability of transparency and the benefits it would bring.

An action program is drawn up and reviewed at the end of each year. Particular attention is given to the reduction of workload of the Headmaster from routine work to overall management and liaison with the government and the community. The Assistant Headmaster will be given specific responsibilities to reduce the workload of the Headmaster. The Headmaster will encourage peer learning for the teachers by observing each other's class.

Need Based Assistance to Schools

VAB explores mitigation of shortage of resources like computers, science equipment, library books, photocopier and multimedia equipment. Facilities for vocational training are enhanced in schools having a vocational stream. Attempt is made to develop a partnership with the schools, the schools sharing part of the financial load. A typical arrangement is a 50:50 split of cost. For computers, the school will find resource to buy one computer if VAB provides one. For photocopier, the school would provide 50% of the fund if VAB provides 50%. Among other things, this kind of "matching grant" provide a training ground for the schools to meet financial needs when VAB leaves – contributing to sustainability of the quality process.

Performance Award to Teachers and Schools

Despite the innovative features and novelties of the VAB approach and measures, all measures of VAB fall in the spectrum of activities that the schools should undertake as a part of regular school operation. The extra effort that school puts should be a part of what the schools are expected to do.

To overcome the lack of enthusiasm in the school and to help create a culture of quality, VAB introduces an incentive scheme based on performance record. Teachers and/or the school are given Performance Awards based on the performance of the students. Small amounts of cash and a certificate or a plaque are the usual award items, given to the school or teachers concerned. The performance attainments recognized are:

- 100% pass rate in SSC and JSC exams
- 80% of successful graduates receiving A grade in SSC and JSC exams
- Computer Literacy for 100% students
- English Conversational Skill for 100% students

- Best Teacher, Best Headmaster and Best School (VAB has well-defined criteria for this purpose)
- Best Club Awards – English, Computer, Debate, Sports and Volunteering

The awards would generally be given during the Education Fair or in a special Award event. One such event took place at Dhaka in 2017 with the Governor of Bangladesh Bank as the Chief Guest.

Creating New Partnerships

VAB took its roots from the volunteerism of its founding members and it has been endeavoring to promote volunteering in society, particularly among students. VAB engages students from different universities to volunteer their time in implementation of its program in rural high schools. The volunteers take this as an opportunity to explore the countryside and meet people of different areas. In addition, VAB has recently developed three special initiatives to get voluntary services for the benefit of the students of rural high schools.

VAB Ambassador

VAB has undertaken a task to create a database for the high achievers in academic and co-curricular areas in the school. This group of students constitutes a body of potential volunteers and patrons that we designate as VAB Ambassadors. The list is prepared at the end of publication of SSC results and an induction meeting is held at the school before they go out to colleges or career avenues. This group is encouraged to keep contact both with the schools and VAB. They are expected to volunteer their time, expertise and experience when they visit home during vacations. The schools are advised to encourage them by providing opportunities to volunteer, to meet students and make presentations in classes. VAB will track their career and in due course, they can be great assets for VAB and the schools concerned. The connection with the schools builds pride about the schools, which can bring about the formation of school alumni associations. The Ambassador program opens up a new vista of opportunities in the future for both VAB and the school.

Roving Ambassador

Across the board, there is a large pool of teachers who earnestly follow the VAB Program. These teachers would retire in due course and some among them may opt to volunteer their services to VAB. VAB can gainfully engage them in mentoring and training teachers and students in different areas. VAB has a program to recruit them as Roving Ambassador for VAB.

Life-Long Volunteers

VAB in recent times engaged university students to have a conversation program in English with students of rural high schools. Some of the students found this experience worthwhile and continued in the program multiple times. In recognition to their volunteering aptitude and in order to have a pool of volunteers who would be making career in different fields, VAB introduced a scheme enrolling them as Life-Long Volunteers.

This has a potential to bring long term benefits to VAB, in addition to providing the volunteers opportunity to enrich their lives in volunteering to affect the lives of the underserved.

3.4 Community Empowerment Measures

Multiple events are organized to bring together teachers, parents and community leaders, SMC members, representatives of students, old students, and local education officials to discuss issues related to quality education in schools. Most rural schools were generally established by the community to respond to the need for access to education for the children in the community. The schools came about because of the philanthropy, small and large, of the local community. As the years pass by and the school starts receiving some government assistance, the community unwittingly shakes off their responsibility and commitment to the schools. The school and the community look upon the government for assistance instead of using their own potential for development.

VAB believes in the innate ability of the school community - its teachers, students, management committee and the community people. With a will, determination and planning, the community has the capacity to contribute significantly to high quality education in the schools. With the country witnessing remarkable economic growth, despite regrettable disparity among segments of population and geographical areas, every community in the country has its share of affluent citizens, perhaps some of them are even alumni of the particular school in question. These citizens may be potential benefactors of the school. VAB acts as a catalytic agent in this effort.

Parents-Teachers Meeting

Many students drop out due to lack of knowledge of the parents about the importance of education in the lives of their children. Parents often get frustrated about the progress of their children and feel that the children have no future in education. Schools are mandated to have parents-teachers meeting. But the occasion for the meeting and the structure of the meeting do not lead to a meaningful discussion

between parents and teachers. Meetings do not address the issues relating to why the students are not performing well and what the parents or teachers can do to improve the students' current performance.

VAB introduces Parents-Teachers Meeting in a participatory mode. In addition to discussions on the mutual roles and responsibilities of the teachers and parents, the VAB promoted meetings take up several associated issues connected with education. The typical set of issues discussed are: Regular Attendance in Classes, Regularity in Home Study, Good Conduct, Tiffin from Home at School, Education in School, Adolescent Health Issues, Early Marriage, Respect for Girls, Club Activities, Drug Problem, Mobile Phone Addiction, and Television Addiction, etc. The facilitator may touch upon all the issues briefly in a general way, but select only a few for discussion in particular meetings.

Duties and responsibilities

In the first parents-teachers meeting, held within three months of starting work with the school, VAB introduces what it wants to do with the school and how it views the prospects of quality education for the children. It brings into focus the responsibilities of teachers, parents and students. It also discusses the right of the parents to have quality education for their children. It brings into focus the sacrifice parents undergo in sending their children to schools and the consequent moral responsibility of the teachers to provide quality education.

Parents-Teachers meeting is held every year. VAB facilitates two other meetings, one in Year 2 and the other in Year 5. In Years 3 and 4, VAB stays in the meeting as observers. VAB may also meet separately with the parents of the Executive Committees of the five Clubs to explain additional involvement of parents to meet Club needs.

Round Table with Community Leaders and Government Officials

The round table discussion engages the schools with the communities, government and public agencies as well as the former students of the schools. Discussions are held on issues of education with special emphasis on what quality education means, why the stakeholders should remain connected and how together, they can impart students the education they deserve. Community issues such as cleanliness campaign; rights of women, children, and minority communities; and volunteering are also brought up. VAB programs on promotion of citizenship and moral values in students encourage the community to become engaged in school activities.

Mothers' Assembly

The parents-teachers meetings are attended mostly by mothers, because the fathers are mostly daily wage earners and have to work outside home. VAB emphasizes the role of parents in the upbringing of children giving an extra emphasis on the role of mothers during parents-teachers meeting. The special role of mothers to help their children deal with adolescent issues and respectful relationship between boys and girls is particularly emphasized.

VAB holds one special meeting with mothers only, as a Mothers Assembly, once during its work with a school to highlight the role of mothers in the family and society.

Education Fair

The Education Fair is the capstone program VAB organizes to showcase the achievements of the schools and its students and teachers as outcome of VAB Model. Two Education Fairs in each cluster, one at the end of Year 3 and the other at the end of Year 5, are organized to bring to public focus the achievements of the schools.

The Education Fair is a day-long event. There are “stalls” displaying the achievements of the schools. It includes a number of contests to bring out the best in the five schools. It also features food stalls and other entertainments. The award event in the afternoon also comes with songs, dances and comedy. The Education Fair is designed to be a fun-filled event with participation of students, parents, community leaders, government officials, dignitaries and media.

3.5 Transformation through Empowerment

VAB envisions the transformation of the rural high schools to ones with capability to impart quality education to the rural children. Empowerment is the process embodied in VAB Model that propels the transformation process. **Empowerment** leads to Engagement, Engagement leads to Commitment, Commitment leads to Action, and Action leads to **Sustainable Quality Education**.

*Once VAB Model is fully implemented in a school, the school can achieve the three objectives of education for **All Students** - Learning, Competence and Character and Citizenship, enunciated in the Bangladesh Education Policy, with the effective implementation of only three distinct but interrelated programs:*

- **Program on Group Method in Learning-Teaching.** Consistent application of this pedagogic methodology across all core subjects (languages, mathematics, and science), makes class room learning-teaching student-centric. It infuses new energy and enthusiasm among students, and also hones

- their mastery of content in core academic subjects. It encourages teachers to become mentors on top of their respective subjects.
- **Program on Student Clubs** promotes competence and develops soft skills to meet twenty-first century needs of job market and the economy. The Student Clubs create a productive, dynamic and inviting environment to engage students actively in different co-curricular and extracurricular activities. The clubs provide a fertile ground to exercise and enhance abilities in leadership, teamwork, communication, problem solving and critical thinking.
 - **Program on Character Education** is a synthesis of all the character virtues enshrined in the curriculum, and practiced by students in their group learning and student club activities. This program creates an awareness that the students do possess the desired character and citizenship traits and helps them create a “self-image” they can strive to live up to.

Implementation of VAB Model

4.1 Phases in Implementation

VAB's experience with schools showed that a sustained effort over a **five-year period** is needed to bring to fruition a comprehensive quality education program in a school. This is particularly true for rural schools where the odds are high against success.

Implementation of the VAB Quality Education Program is made in a progressive manner divided into four phases to allow time for the school to fully comprehend and develop the ability to implement a comprehensive program and then to carry out follow-up in a sustainable manner. The following is a brief description of the phases. Table 4.1 provides a breakdown of activities in the different phases.

Description of the Phases

Phase 1 - Induction

Phase 1 covers the activities for Year 1. The primary objective of this phase is to induct the school into the VAB Model to ensure the ownership and commitment of the Headmaster, teachers and management committee members. Three principal activities undertaken in the first three months of the program are: Headmaster Seminar, Teachers' Workshop and Parents-Teachers meeting. Scholarships to students are also distributed during this period.

All discussions take place in a participatory manner with the intent of getting most of the talking done by the participants, with VAB acting primarily as the facilitator.

The participatory method is practiced in all training and workshop programs undertaken by VAB.

An initial assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the school is made, and data are taken to compile the baseline Performance Index.

In the second half of the year, the key elements of the Group Method of Teaching-Learning, Leadership Group and Student Clubs are introduced to the students, teachers and parents. An assessment of resource needs of the schools is also made before the year is over.

Phase 2 – Launching

Phase 2 starts in Year 2 with introduction of the Group Method in the class and formation and training of Leadership Groups of the five Student Clubs to be formed in second half of the year. Leadership Groups are formed in English, Computer, Debate, Sports, and Volunteering with 10 students from each class in each of the five areas, as mentioned earlier. This covers a total of 250 students (10 students each in five areas in each of the five classes, classes VI to X). VAB offers training to Leadership Groups in English, Computer, Debate and Volunteering using its In-House Training Module and trainers, and arranges training of Leadership Groups in Football and Cricket with the participation of the physical education teacher and external trainers. External trainers are also used for Debate, if needed.

In the second half of the year, Leadership Groups are turned into Student Clubs with definite organizational structure, program of practice, mode of operation and duties and responsibilities to work with a mission: **Quality for All and Excellence for Team.**

VAB also initiates Teachers Training in different subject areas based on priorities set by the schools. VAB has in-house trainers to train computer skills needed by the teachers.

Phase 3 – In Operation

Years 3, 4 and 5 are the period of performance by the schools. The targets of 100% Computer Literacy and 100% English Literacy for students are launched at the beginning of year 3. The Debating Club and the Sports Club are mandated to excel in their respective fields. The Math Olympiad Program is initiated with a target to reach the national level competition. Teachers are provided with simplified pedagogy to make the classroom interesting and create inquisitiveness among students. The Character Education Program is launched at the end of Year 3, with a synthesis of the character traits exhibited by students themselves in various activities.

The Computer Club is set up in selected schools each of which is equipped with a computer lab with at least ten computers.

A Round Table on School Management is conducted in the beginning of Year 4. The approach used is the same participatory one, primarily asking schools to decide on a better course of action.

Phase 3 is the phase for the school to carry out programs and attain desired goals for each program.

Phase 4 – Exit Plan

Phase 3 marks the end of the five-year program for the school. Exit Planning in Phase 4 means disengagement from actively engaging with the schools in the implementation of programs. The success of the school in self-driven progress with participation of its stakeholders will continue to be encouraged and monitored. Agreement will be worked out with schools for mutual consultation to reap benefits in emerging opportunities developed with increasing use of technology. Schools with excellent records may qualify to be certified as VAB Model High Schools with a long-term relationship of mutual benefit. This is discussed in a later section on VAB Model School in Appendix E.

Table: 4.1 Mode of Implementation of VAB Model

Phases	Activities	Purposes/Objectives
Phase 1 Induction (Year 1)	First half of Year 1	
	Headmasters' Seminar	To align and induct the school with VAB Model
	Teachers' Workshop	To ensure ownership of the model
	Parents-Teachers Meeting	To obtain commitment of all stakeholders
	Scholarships to students	To meet the financial needs of Students
	Assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Schools	To establish benchmark for the Performance Index
	Second half of year 1	
	Explanation of Group Method	To make teaching student-centric
	Concept of Leadership Training	To promote student leadership and ownership in different areas
	Assessment of Resources Needs	To meet identified/felt needs
Phase 2 Launching (Year 2)	First Half of Year 2	
	Introduce the Group Method widely	Enhance classroom teaching/learning
	Leadership Group Training in English,	To create dynamism and self-driven

	Debate, Sports and Volunteering	excellence efforts To spread the concept of “Quality for All” among all stakeholders
	Second Half of Year 2	
	Turning Leadership Groups into Student Clubs	Institutional shape to give permanence to the respective activities. Clubs to operate with motto: Quality for all; Excellence for Teams
	Teachers Training in different subject	To promote continuing and enhanced competence of teachers in content, pedagogy and engagement with students
	Training of all teachers in computer and ICT	To create digital literacy and promote using technologies in teaching
Phase 3 Marching (Years 3, 4,5)	Year 3, Year 4 and Year 5	
	Launch Computer Literacy and Conversational English program	To ensure 100% Computer Literacy and 100% English Conversational skill
	Launch Character Education Program	Synthesis of character virtues
	Launch Computer Club in schools having Computer Lab	To promote benefits of ICT for education
	Schools implement all elements of VAB Model	To promote excellence and establish success stories in all spheres – academic, co-academic (English, Computer and Math) and Co-curricular
	Round Table on School Management	Endorsement of Quality Education as school policy Endorsement of transparency and accountability in school management
Phase 4 Parting (Year 6)	Year 6	
	Discussion on disengagement from direct intervention	To develop a plan to keep the Quality Education Process in force in the future

4.2 Do-ability and Cost of VAB Model

The VAB Model was developed extremely carefully not only keeping the output side – quality education - in mind, but also placing fundamental importance on the input side – resources, both financial and human. Being keenly conscious of the extreme scarcity of financial resources of rural schools, VAB tried, in its Model, to maximize the utilization of human resources. In this context, VAB’s longstanding experience of working in rural areas provided critical insight regarding all aspects of human resource – availability, potential expansion and enhancement of human resources through qualitative change, and finally, potential level of utilization of expanded and enhanced human resources.

To start off, teachers themselves formulate the budget with maximum reliance on local initiatives and resources as mentioned in Chapter 3 in section 3.2 on Teacher Empowerment Measures. It shows that all the measures can be implemented with the existing resources; some injection of resources and funds would be needed to help the schools reach a takeoff stage.

VAB Model provides an effective pathway to help the schools reach the goals of quality education as envisaged in the National Education Policy. Schools generally follow them, but do them as a routine, with little regard to the inherent intent of the activities to be spread over for all students. What VAB does is to improvise ways and means to do a meaningful realization of the objectives of education for a broader range of students.

What VAB intends is to demonstrate with a five-year engagement with a school is that quality education is a feasible idea even under the constraints of rural high schools. **What is required is the enthusiasm, drive and dynamism to achieve better.**

VAB intends to showcase the success of a sufficient number of schools to catch the national imagination and draw the attention of the Government and policy makers to expect high quality from rural high schools and undertake initiatives to ensure that the schools accomplish it.

For a five-year program, VAB has a budget of 10 lac taka (US\$ 12,500.00) annually with two lac taka (US\$ 2,500.00) on the average for a school. VAB attempts to empower the schools with noticeable outcomes and a success story so that at the end of five years, they can reach out to the parents and the community to provide resources to the schools to continue the march towards success.

4.3 Experience of Working with Schools

Engagement is the core strategy for the success of the VAB program. VAB continually assesses whether there is engagement of the stakeholders in the initiatives promoted by VAB. VAB provides guidance, logistics and support for the programs, but the execution of the program essentially rests with the schools. It offers training to teachers, but it is left to the teachers to use the fruits of training in the classroom. VAB offers training to students, but it is left to the students to follow them. VAB implores teachers to encourage and support student activities, but it is up to the teachers to do so. VAB helps with some resource materials, but it is up to the school, the teachers and the Headmaster to use them. VAB trains Headmasters on leadership and again, it is up to the Headmasters how they utilize the training.

The challenge for VAB is to clearly explain VAB Model and its objectives and explain how it is to be executed and if needed, demonstrate how the execution should be carried out.

The engagement of the stakeholders is therefore of paramount importance for the success of the VAB program and sustainability of quality education. For VAB, engagement is not a one-off action; it is a continuing effort.

Engagement of Schools

A popular saying in the school system in Bangladesh is: A school is as good as its Headmaster. The Headmaster is in the center of all school activities. VAB therefore takes the endorsement and engagement of the Headmaster as the vital requirement for success in its activities. The School Management Committee (SMC) has power over the Headmaster. In many cases, the SMC in rural schools is not equipped to play an important role in education and in the administration of the school. There are also political issues in the SMC. Headmasters generally should be able to work harmoniously with the SMC; working in a school where there is conflict between the Headmaster and the SMC is problematic.

A truly difficult problem in the school system of Bangladesh is the concentration of powers with the Headmaster. VAB addresses this issue in Headmasters' Seminars. There is now a greater awareness of the need for delegation of responsibility to teachers to allow the Headmaster to play a bigger and more productive role in leadership and overall management.

Engagement of Teachers

Teachers are the most important element to drive an educational program to success. VAB holds the teachers in high esteem and discards the notion that there are good teachers and poorly performing teachers. Teachers, if properly trained, motivated, and shown a simple but effective methodology for work, can successfully carry out a program for the benefit of students. The success of the VAB Computer Literacy Program is a case in point. The successful implementation of the Group Method of teaching-learning is another example. Enthusiasm generated by the training of Leadership Group in English is also a case in point.

VAB works directly with a number of teachers in the school to implement the programs and they become highly enthused and motivated; the relationship with the remaining teachers remains indirect and VAB took notice of their relative lack of enthusiasm. The current developments in both onsite and online work will allow VAB to connect with all teachers with some program of activities. Already an initiative has been taken to connect with all teachers in ICT training, the use of ICT being of benefit to all teachers.

Engagement of Parents and Community

Parents play a vital role in the education of their children. They send their children incurring a high opportunity cost. They need to be recognized for their sacrifice, and their desire for good education of their children needs to be honored. VAB has been working to make the teachers and community leaders aware of this reality.

Engagement of parents and the community with the school must be a two-way process. And both sides must be able to appreciate and value this engagement. Parents and the community certainly want good education for their children. To accomplish this, the school has certain needs including financial needs, some of which must be met by the parents and the community. As an often encountered problem, when a school qualifies at the local level in a competitive event, it needs funds for sending the team to the next level outside the locality. Sometimes the students are denied the chance to compete at higher level because of shortage of funds. Further, this deficiency acts as a deterrent for the Headmaster to build teams of high quality. There is a need for open exchange and communication between parents, community and school to resolve such issues. We have observed that the school often shies away to spell out its needs vis-à-vis parents and the community in a way that would enable the latter to offer their support in terms of time, money or material.

Engagement of Government Officials and Community Leaders

VAB connects with upazila Education Officials and Upazila Executive Officer (UNO – Upazila Nirbahi Officer) before embarking on initiating a program in the upazila. In some cases, their advice is also sought in the selection of schools. The overall experience of VAB with government officials has been good, particularly in upazilas where VAB is visibly present. They appreciate the volunteerism and philanthropy of VAB and view its contribution to education in rural high schools very positively. The government officials have much authority over the schools, and their appreciation of VAB's work is of value in its dealings with the schools.

VAB invites local government officials, community leaders and elected representatives in all its activities and they are very supportive of VAB's work.

Engagement of Students

VAB had the most positive experience in dealing with students. VAB officials during their visits to schools often drop in for a few minutes in several classes and talk to students. Occasionally, the students are asked who can perform, sing, dance, and tell a story or a joke. There is obvious initial hesitation, but when asked, they do it readily and the environment changes in the class. Many eager faces come forward who would like to do their part. Out of consideration for not interrupting the work in the class, the stop-by is restricted to only a few minutes. In some cases, students are challenged to respond to some questions or quizzes. The successful student is rewarded with a token prize like a VAB ball pen.

Students have been occasionally invited at Teachers Workshops and parents-teachers meetings, and they have provided significant input. They even worked with teachers in the Teachers Workshop and in some cases, could show great enthusiasm and initiate more action than expected. It would be interesting to note that the teachers accepted the activism on the part of the students in a positive way, and with some pride.

VAB is now offering direct training to students in English, Computer, Debate, Sports and Volunteering, in addition to getting teachers trained. The message emphasized in these training activities is: The purpose of training is to show how to train yourselves; becoming good through extensive practice is your responsibility. The message has been well received by students.

VAB's experience with the students has been consistently positive: Students are keen to learn. But, they need guidance, support and encouragement.

Engagement with News Media

There are representatives of national and regional newspapers and in some upazilas, even Television. There are also newspapers at the upazila level and some have online circulation. VAB has built rapport with the media and gets media representatives to cover VAB programs. This is not only publicity for VAB; more importantly people of the upazila come to know of education programs and achievements of some of their schools. The information may have a positive influence on the performance of other schools. VAB appreciates the media coverage. The media too benefits from wider circulation and appreciation.

Systemic Issues

Several systemic issues exist, and these act as serious impediments against VAB Model. Most of these are very sensitive issues but these need to be resolved if progress is to be made. These matters are discussed below with an open mind and should be viewed in that spirit.

Access to school for club activities during out-of-school hours

Effective Student Club work, meeting the Club's training needs, and excellence in performance requires access to school facilities beyond regular hours. It has been an uphill task to persuade schools to provide access to school facilities with teacher supervision. There are problems both on the side of the school and the teachers as well as on the side of the students. The problem in relation to students is primarily with their need for nutrition. They need at least some simple snacks to continue work beyond school hours. There is also a problem for girls to be outside unescorted beyond school hours. There is an additional problem of students' time, because a large number of students attend private coaching or coaching center before and after school hours.

VAB has been trying to work out a satisfactory solution through discussion with parents of Club members and with school management. The school management will take responsibility to find a solution regarding the school facility and the teacher issues, while the parents will try to solve the student's issues. In some cases, parents can become involved in overseeing the activities of the Club as volunteers.

Coaching, coaching center and guidebook

There is a public outcry about the lack of quality of education at all levels of education in the country. High schools now are perceived as being run not as centers of learning, but as a preparatory ground for writing examinations. The result is anomalous - high grades with poor learning – which adversely affects later phases of education and future performance at workplaces.

The worst problem is that the schools are often run not even to prepare students for examinations, but to recruit clients for private coaching and coaching centers. Added to that is the indiscriminate use of mass produced commercial guidebooks for various subjects to memorize test answers by students. Coaching, coaching centers and guidebooks are notorious for pushing students to the rote method which is believed to be a great hindrance to genuine learning.

Many poor rural parents cannot afford money for private coaching of their children and these children depend wholly on guidebooks for help. The consequence of wholesale use of coaching centers and guidebooks affecting the quality of education cannot be overstated.

The government is desperately grappling with the problem and considering legally banning guidebooks and coaching centers and legally limiting private coaching. Unfortunately, the root cause of the problem seems to be escaping the attention of the policy makers. **The root cause is the absence of effective classroom teaching.**

Private coaching, coaching centers and guidebooks are worldwide phenomena. They exist because of market demand. They will be used to satisfy demands of those who seek it. There will always be a need for coaching for a segment of students who fall behind. On the other hand, there may be a need for coaching for students whose goal is star performance in examinations. Guidebooks may be a help for slow learners, and for more advanced students for self-study seeking additional resources. But these cannot be a substitute for teaching and learning in the classroom.

Schools under the VAB umbrella have moved out of the examination centered learning and are focusing on learning in the classroom. VAB is not against coaching by teachers of schools for remedial learning as well as advanced learning to excel in examinations. VAB does not go against occasional use of guidebooks by students as additional resource. A well-designed guidebook can be a good resource for the teachers. The teachers' guides prepared by NCTB are a case in point.

Lack of accountability

Education in the public system in Bangladesh is largely controlled by the government, with little local or community involvement. The government has education officials at the upazila level to administer the schools and ensure that government objectives are fulfilled. The education department does not have adequate manpower to oversee the school activities. The government expects to have a better grasp of school performance with introduction of online management system. The accountability of the school normally focuses on performance of the school in public examinations at

the JSC and SSC levels. The government also organizes several co-curricular activities where attendance of the school is expected. Usually a small number of schools participate in these events; even there, no system exists to assess whether the participating schools have a program to provide opportunities for development of all students.

There is worldwide recognition of local community involvement in governance of the schools. VAB is trying to bring in some level of social accountability at the local level, albeit remaining within the governmental framework, for the schools that will strengthen and complement government objectives.

VAB's efforts to make a bridge between the community and the school creating a social contract may not have a legal or executive power, but it will have abundance of moral force to promote the relationship between the school and the community.

It is expected that the introduction of the Performance Index (see below) for schools developed by VAB will enhance the culture of quality and accountability. The Government and the public are very concerned about the quality of education in the school system. The Ministry of Education may find the Performance Index developed by VAB as an excellent yardstick not only to measure quality but also use this to ensure accountability from the school system.

Lack of academic integrity

Starting with classroom teaching to marking examination scripts, there exists in the society a perception of an absence of academic integrity among many teachers. The school does not have any integrity policy. Teachers openly advocate use of guidebooks and enrolment in their coaching classes. In case students approach teachers for clarification of some content, the teacher, instead of helping the student, directs the student to join coaching group run by the teacher. There is negligence in classroom teaching; teachers fail to guide the students to learn, leaving them dependent on rote learning.

Teachers give some attention to the higher performing segment of the students and neglect the students who are behind. There is also widespread belief that some teachers grade the students unfairly, giving high grades to those who attend coaching, and giving poor grades if the answers are different from what has been taught in the coaching group. There is even a perception that there may be collusion between test-setters and coaching center teachers. The speculation is that coaching centers provide a selection of questions to their coaching group to memorize in line with actual examination questions.

On the other hand, there is no denying that the teachers and the Headmaster of a school earnestly desire high performance of their students in examinations and co-curricular activities. Sadly, this desire is not always based on honesty and integrity, and leads to corrupt practices. In public examinations, it is alleged many teachers try to help the students directly by providing them the answers, or indirectly by allowing them to share answers with each other.

For any competition at interschool level, instead of getting their students build a strong team, there are sometimes attempts to include non-students or students of other schools in their team to show better performance for the school.

The lack of integrity in schools in addition to doing the obvious harm at the immediate level is a curse for the future – producing human resources of low quality, thus impeding the country's development process. The curse is pernicious and long-lasting for the nation - raising school children witnessing stark examples of cheating and dishonesty and thus polluting the character of the whole nation for generations.

Like all generalizations, the above does not apply in every school every time, but they are perceived to reflect reality in many cases.

VAB tries to negate the lack of integrity with the promotion of in-school coaching for all students and by infusing pride of performance by the student clubs. The social contract with the community also acts to prevent lack of integrity. VAB believes that teachers should be compensated for additional efforts in getting the students ready for tests. VAB encourages the schools to develop a transparent process of payment for such services by charging fees from students with discussion with parents and community. This will encourage teachers to bring back our traditional culture of teachers being true mentors of students and at the same time, it promotes a value system for honest earning.

VAB expects the schools under its umbrella to set examples for the country of integrity, honesty and dedication. The schools are moving in that direction and the VAB schools will soon get rid of all actions on lack of integrity in very near future.

Transparency in financial management

For a large proportion of the rural high schools, the government pays for the salary of the teachers. The school charges some small fees for tuition, examination and admission. Additional assistance in building, maintenance and equipment from government usually comes in kind, not in cash. Even assistance by NGOs is most often in kind and in services. Hence, the financial management of school fund is a relatively simple task. Generally, the Headmaster manages the finance in the school,

with some help from office staff in account keeping. However, there is a culture of widespread financial corruption in the country. VAB observed substantial dissatisfaction among teachers about financial matters in the school. The problem may be more of perception; VAB believes that this problem can be largely resolved by developing a well-defined procedure transparently applied for financial management and reporting.

VAB has been holding open discussions with teachers and Management Committee members, and several remedial measures suggested in such meetings are being implemented in some schools.

Delegation of responsibility

The Headmaster has enormous responsibility in the school system. There is an Assistant Headmaster who can be entrusted with some load. But there is no other administration staff except for an office clerk who looks after the accounts, in addition to a few other routine duties. In the absence of a mechanism of transfer of responsibility, the Headmaster has too much to do and gets bogged down in routine day to day activities. The school really needs to be run by the teachers under the overall stewardship of the Headmaster.

There is a need for a mechanism for effective delegation of responsibility with accountability to help the schools run smoothly.

4.4 Monitoring

VAB offers ideas and suggests pathways. The work is done by the school. Monitoring is the only way VAB could assess how work on different activities is proceeding and how well the various programs are being implemented. Monitoring is done onsite with visits to schools and also online and through mobile phone and online meetings. VAB uses a 'reflexive' method of monitoring, which means always challenging the assumptions and looking at things from the stakeholder perspective. The experience is shared in VAB staff meeting with the Country Director. They discuss and reflect on the deficiencies, question their own assumptions and try to understand the viewpoints of the recipients. VAB staff always produces a report after a monitoring visit, recording the experiences and lessons learned. At VAB office, there is regular discussion on these reports in the staff meeting

Discussion with Headmaster and Teachers

This is a formal method where a VAB official talks with the Headmaster and the teachers, individually or in groups, and inquiries about how the program is going. The intention is to get an assessment from them, listen to any problem in execution and discuss remedies and improvement. VAB also maintains connection with the Headmasters and teachers on ongoing programs through telephone and online devices.

Discussion with Student Clubs and Leadership Groups

VAB staff maintains regular connection with club executives and leadership groups in different activities as a part of monitoring work.

Classroom Observation

VAB staff during visits to schools would occasionally sit in classroom and observe the class as conducted by the teacher. To be meaningful, observation should be for about 20 to 30 minutes preferably from the beginning of the class. The staff will record his/her reflection that will be shared with the teacher.

VAB encourages peer observation in classroom, inviting teachers to sit in each other's class and discuss issues, in addition to observation by the Headmaster and the Assistant Headmaster.

Random Sampling

One simple way to ascertain progress of different program activities is to ask students simple questions. VAB staff do this sampling when visiting schools. This is done casually without interrupting class time during the morning as the students start coming to the school, during break time, and at the end of school hour. Simple queries can often ascertain whether efforts are in place to benefit all students. The questions can be simple queries:

What class was the most interesting today?

Did all of your group members come to the class today?

Who is the Class Representative for the Debating Club?

Can I have a look at your notebook for Spelling Bee?

Are you a member of the English Language Club?

Do you have members of the Volunteering Club in your class?

What is the name of your Group in the class?

And so on.

One question may lead to another, but VAB staff should not take more than 3 to 5 minutes with a student. VAB staff will record the name and class with roll number for the student and note down his/her observation. The experience will be recorded in the monitoring report.

Random Tests

VAB staff can readily give random tests on different programs, particularly on various aspects of English and Computer Skills Programs. For English, they can ask students to spell some words, or they can do a “Show and Tell” test, or make a short conversation with questions and answers. Debate team has the mandate to make opportunities for all students in the class to speak on topics. VAB staff can ask students randomly to speak on certain topics and observe the ability of the students to organize ideas into a simple statement.

Random tests may also be run outside class time, as in random sampling.

4.5 Performance Evaluation of Schools

VAB identified three primary goals of education as Learning, Competence and Citizenship. The development of a Performance Index was done with the aim of making a quantitative assessment of how well a school meets these objectives, keeping in view quality education for all students.

A direct quantification of each of the objectives is difficult; further, they are not stand-alone items, but intricately interconnected. VAB, therefore, looked for an index with a set of composite measurements, *mostly* quantitative, but a few necessarily are qualitative.

Performance Index

VAB considers five different categories in the calculation of Performance Index: Academic (pass rate: 80 points and A grade rate: 80 points), Co-Academic (Math, English and Computer related performance: 80 points), Co-curricular (debate, sports and related performance: 80 points), School Environment (10 points) and School Management (10 points). Clearly all items are not weighted equally, and some items are related to specific VAB programs. VAB accepts examination results as an important measure; test scores are valued all over the world, though there is concern whether the tests reflect intrinsic student ability. VAB gives highest weightage on academic performance. Co-academic activities support the learning process directly and co-curricular activities build character and citizenship and these two activities are given equal weightage. Care is taken to give due weightage not only to competitive performance, but also to efforts by schools for inclusiveness of all students. School

environment and school management are also important, and they are also considered, but with low weightage. Direct classroom learning is supported by associated academic activities. Overall, academic activities (direct and indirect), reflected through public examination scores, are most important in determining the performance index. A detailed presentation with sample data sheet and calculation of Performance Index for a few schools is given in Appendix D: Performance Index.

The Index, if publicized nationally, could be applied as a measure of performance quality for all schools in the country.

Replicating Success

5.1 Evidence of Success

Shyamnagar is a remote upazila in Satkhira district in Khulna division bordering the Sunderbans. The upazila is in the disadvantaged category, becoming victim of flood and cyclone. Five schools among the fifteen chosen for launching VAB Model in 2012 belonged to this upazila. Ten more schools were subsequently added, five in 2016 and five in 2018. The recent successes of these fifteen schools in different areas along with a few others will be cited here to demonstrate the efficacy of VAB Model.

SSC Results. Five schools attained 100% pass rate at the SSC (Secondary School Certificate) in 2020. The average pass rate for the fifteen schools was 95.48, which was 12.61 percentage points higher than national average and 8.17 percentage points higher than for the Jashore Board (the Board to which Shyamnagar belongs). The percentage of students securing A grade was 81.08%, 14.64 percentage points higher than the average of the Jashore Board.

JSC Results. Five schools attained 100% pass rate in the JSC (Junior School Certificate) in 2019. The average pass rate of 94.86% was higher by 6.96 percentage points higher than the Jashore Board average.

The superior performance of the schools at both JSC and SSC levels has been ascribed to VAB interventions, particularly to the Group Method of teaching-learning in classroom.

Computer Skill. Four schools attained 100% Computer Literacy in 2019, a feat quite unique even for an advanced urban school. Students from different classes were tested on ability in Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and email and internet search. The tests conducted by VAB were supervised by external guests and education officials. A total of nine schools in different clusters have so far attained this status with many more on the way.

English Language Skill. The schools are moving ahead with English Language Skills for students. Some of the schools are well on their way to attain conversational skills for 100% of the students. VAB carried on with student training program virtually and on mobile phone. Sixty volunteers from four universities at Dhaka joined the University volunteer-Rural High School student conversation program in English. VAB is in the process of organizing an English Conversation Competition program virtually with twenty five schools from five districts in celebration of the Birth Centenary of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Math Olympiad. National competition is held every year under the auspices of the National Math Olympiad Committee. Forty-seven students from Shyamnagar schools qualified at the regional level. Three students, two in junior category from Sunderban Girls' High School and one in secondary category from Ramzannagar Tofazzal High School reached the National level. Participation at the National level is the first time in the Shyamnagar upazila.

Debate. Debate teams of several schools performed very well in competitions organized by external agencies. In many cases, VAB schools became champion at the upazila level in most of the clusters and in some cases reached the district and divisional levels. Recently, a month-long interschool debate competition was organized online by the Shyamnagar upazila authorities among fourteen schools in the upazila on the occasion of the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The debate team of a VAB supported school in a remote village, Kanthabaria AG High School, became the Champion beating a well-resourced and well recognized school in the upazila. Several VAB schools took part with excellent results in debates in the national television channel and in competitions organized by Dhaka University Debating Club. In the Education Week competitions organized by the Ministry of Education, debaters from VAB schools performed very well in debate, quiz and cultural programs.

In celebration of Mujib Centenary, VAB organized a Regional Debate Competition virtually in December 2020 among twenty four schools under VAB umbrella in four districts in the country covering the northern, southern and western part of the country. The competition took place at three levels: in-school, interschool in cluster and inter-cluster. The teams did very well and the final debate was well publicized in the media. One school from the north, Nageswari D. M. Academy High School became Champion, and Kanthalbaria AG High School from the south-west became runner-up.

Sports. VAB schools had excellent performance in National Sports Competition organized by the Ministry of Education in both the Summer and the Winter Games. Competitions were held in Football, Cricket, Handball and Volleyball. VAB school teams were champions and runners up in most cases at the upazila level and performed well at the district level. The results followed the same trend for boys' teams and girls' teams.

An outstanding record of VAB schools is to have four students from four schools qualifying for entry into BKSP (Bangladesh Kreera Shikkha Pratishtan) in 2020. BKSP is a government institution that hunts for sports talents in schools; the students get extensive training in selected sports, and also continue with their studies. The greatest success in sports so far has been the winning of the 2019 National Championship in girls' cricket by Ponchopukur Girls' High School in Nilphamari Sadar upazila.

5.2 VAB Model School

Our donors, patrons and well-wishers often dream of setting up a Model School where we could operate with foresight and vision. VAB did not move in that direction because of the holistic approach to serve a larger population that has been underserved at all times. VAB Model proved successful in drawing attention of the stakeholders to the benefits of quality education and in creating an impact on the culture of the schools. Schools are now more responsive to the needs of the students and to its duty towards the community. The community is also much more conscious of its rights and obligations.

VAB generally works with a cluster of five existing schools in an upazila with a five-year program to implement quality through its model. As the program ends, VAB enters into an agreement with the parting schools to stay connected with benefits for both sides. The connection is rather loose and as the number of such schools multiply over time, the connection is likely to be tenuous.

In order to showcase the VAB Model and have the VAB footprint endure, one of the schools in a cluster could be designated as a Model School. The Model school could become an experimentation station for VAB to try out new developments of methods and techniques in VAB Education Model. The Model School could also be empowered to serve not only the remaining schools within the cluster, but also all the schools in the upazila.

VAB will thus have an Experimentation Station at each upazila where it ends its normal program.

The concept has only recently been developed and is being explored for application in the three clusters from which VAB will exit at the end of 2020.

Appendix E: VAB Model School provides conceptual framework and the modality of operation defining the respective roles of VAB vis-à-vis the Model School.

5.3 VAB at the National Stage

VAB's Empowerment Model for Quality Education that started with 15 schools in 2012 is being implemented in 50 schools today. Over the years, the model has undergone refinement and innovation; it has now reached a level of maturity and can be launched for adoption nationally. The model has been designed keeping in view the needs and realities in rural High Schools in Bangladesh. But it encompasses all aspects of quality including twenty first century requirements and can be of benefit to any school, rural or urban, and poor or good quality schools. The distinctive feature is that it shows the way to achieve quality education within the constraints of the rural schools.

VAB will take steps to bring VAB Model to the attention of the Ministry of Education and the Directorate of Secondary Education for support to extend the operation of the model in a much greater number of schools. It will also seek out support from other organizations and foundations engaged in the upliftment of the underserved in society.

Provider of Logistics and Training for Interested Schools

VAB has undertaken a scheme of launching the Model in clusters of five schools in the upazilas where it is working currently and in the sister upazilas where it has not started working yet. The cluster of schools will be chosen after discussion with the Education Officials of the locality, community leaders and also with the school management.

VAB will host a day-long workshop at the upazila Center, in cooperation with the upazila Education Officials, inviting representatives from the five schools. The application of VAB Model will be presented. A representative group from a Model VAB school will explain how the schools implemented VAB Model and how they benefitted. A highlight of the presentation will be to demonstrate how the school itself can implement VAB Model using local initiative and local resources.

Achieving quality education is obviously a complex process. VAB will provide logistics to plan, schedule and set strategies for the effective implementation of the Model. It will also provide training in different elements of the model, if needed by

the schools. The schools do not have to bear any cost for VAB or VAB personnel, but have to meet the local costs associated with the program.

Leader in Quality Certification

VAB has developed an Index (as explained in section 4.5 and detailed in Appendix D) to measure performance of the schools that cover all aspects of achievement of schools including management. It considers the commitment of the schools not only for excellence for a few, but it attempts to measure the spread of quality education across the board for all students. VAB can help to rank schools based on the Performance Index and publicize this endeavor. The country is desperately seeking quality in school education. The Performance Index, if properly presented, can have a broad appeal. The Index can be recommended to the policy makers in education and the government may consider adopting this as a tool for measuring the quality of schools.

We trust that the Ministry of Education will find the Performance Index as a valuable tool in its drive to seek out ways and means to improve the performance of the teachers and the schools and hold the schools accountable for their performance.

Advocacy

VAB can become a champion for increased investment in education by the government. The experience of VAB suggests clearly, and research shows unequivocally, that student academic performance improves significantly with “soft” resources employed by VAB, co-academic and co-curricular activities playing a great part in it, along with student-centric Teaching-Learning by Group method. The government plays a big role in infra-structure development of the rural schools. In this context, a policy framework is very much needed to include quality improvement as a project by the government. With a right policy, the government could help rural schools leapfrog into the achievement of quality at a fraction of the cost of investment into infrastructure by the government. For example, while about one crore taka (US\$ 125,000.00) are needed for a reasonable infrastructure construction in one school, perhaps with only limited quality improvement, the same amount of taka spent annually over a five-year period with quality elements of VAB Model, could bring about significant change in the quality of education in 10 schools (see below).

VAB will work with the schools primarily to elaborate the concepts of quality education, and formulate ways to empower the stakeholders to generate the desire, motivation and drive for progress. The goal is to achieve quality education, with local initiatives, and VAB will provide planning tools and logistics to achieve the goals.

The success of the schools and competition among them in performance will act as the primary driver for self-motivation to drive the quality process.

5.4 Conclusions

The central theme of the Quality Education Model is: Quality for All. Excellence for teams and outstanding performance of individuals will be a natural outcome of the drive for all-round quality for all students. The prime implementation strategy is to secure the engagement of all stakeholders around a vision for quality. All the stakeholders – students, teachers, School Management Committee members, parents, community leaders, public representatives, government officials and even media will have opportunities to give their voice. Sustainable quality education will result when the stakeholders believe in their strength and play their roles in a concerted manner.

A paradigm shift in the strategy for teachers' training has been instituted; the purpose of training becomes assistance for self-training. The role of classroom teaching is seen as to facilitate learning by students; responsibility of learning is explicitly assigned to students. A significant leap in student interest occurred with the introduction of Leadership Group concept in student training by VAB in its program for English Language Learning. Additionally, in this program, well-versed, high-performing leader-caliber students serve as trainers for other students. The concept has been given an institutional shape with the formation of Student Clubs in five key areas: English, Computer, Debate, Sports and Volunteering. Engagement and ownership of the ideas are achieved through success of the application of the ideas. The lessons and success are carried through in classroom teaching-learning by the introduction of the Group Method.

Motivation of the teachers has been enhanced through empowerment. They are made an integral partner in the design of the quality program. They are empowered with a pedagogy that can be realistically applied in a rural setting. VAB has demonstrated how the students can be energized to empower themselves. The dynamism generated among students provides an impetus for the teachers to get better engaged with students.

The empowerment measures have led to success of students and teachers. Success generated interest among parents and community. This has empowered the schools to place their needs effectively to the parents and community resulting in their engagement to be partners in the drive for quality education, making quality education sustainable.

Scaling up VAB Model: An affordable proposition

Full implementation of VAB Model in a school (about 500 students) needs on the average only 2 lac taka annually that translates typically to Tk.400.00 per student annually (US\$5.00 @ 80.00 taka for one US\$). The total cost per student over the five year period is only Tk.2000.00 (US\$25.00).

In short, given one crore taka, with the full application of VAB Model, at the end of five years, VAB can deliver perceptible results in the following performance areas in 10 participating schools (about 5,000 students):

- A vibrant student community with enthusiasm for learning and overall development of competence, character, citizenship and communication skills
- Excellent academic results along with skills in language, communication, computers and co-curricular activities school wide
- A dedicated group of teachers (about 150 to 200) with excellent ability and dedication for teaching, providing student-centric learning-teaching environment and enhancing and enriching education through the use of technologies
- A pool of Headmasters (10) having capacity for leadership and management, and having courage of taking bold initiatives, and engaging with parents, community leaders and other government and nongovernment supporting sources
- Student friendly and well-knit school environment with quality as a culture in the school

The above is not a wishful thinking; it has been attempted and attained.VAB cluster schools represent real life manifestations of such achievements. Nothing succeeds more than success.



Appendix A: A Brief History of VAB

Dr. A. T. Rafiqur Rahman, Founder and President of VAB

VAB: Birth of the Idea

VAB was founded in 1998 by Dr. A T Rafiqur Rahman, who has recently been conferred the Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award by Marquis Who's Who, the world's premier publisher of biographical profiles, for his “achievements, leadership qualities, and the credentials and successes he has accrued in his field”. Dr. Rahman, an expatriate Bangladeshi is a retiree from the United Nations Headquarters in New York. During his many trips to Bangladesh as a UN official, he shared with leading NGOs of Bangladesh including Brac and Prashika about his desire to devote his post retirement years on social work, and sought their help. Most of them suggested the area of secondary education as it was beset with huge problems, including dropouts, and nearly complete absence of NGOs in the area for a simple reason: high school management was entangled in politics by three powerful groups: the Government, elected School Management Committee, and the School Headmaster and Teachers. NGOs want a relatively free hand to operate and no NGO was interested to assist High Schools particularly the rural ones where the challenge was great. (Even today after more than 20 years, there is not a single NGO except VAB that deals comprehensively with all the challenges that a rural high school in Bangladesh faces.) Dr. Rahman pondered over the suggestion and noted the enormity of resources needed to do anything which was so challenging. He found that volunteering was possibly the only way to compensate for the lack of monetary resources, and wrote a book dealing with Volunteerism and National Development in Bangladesh in 1997.

Two critical considerations went into choosing the name of the charity: predominance of use of volunteers in organizing and managing the activities of the proposed charity and the significance of the meaning of the word, as was thought at the time - “VAB” in Bangla referring to “Idea” (it was realized later that “VAAB” should have been used). Anyway, VAB was formed in consultation with a few like-

mindful volunteers, and was registered in New York as a charity in 1998 and received approval from the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in early 1999.

VAB's Journey Begins

Being a US international charity, VAB followed the corporate Model, comprising a Board of Directors, and executives such as President, Secretary and Treasurer and other officials as used by renowned US charities, like "Save the Children". All the basic decisions involving the organization along with fundraising are to be done in the USA, while the execution of program activities are to be carried out in Bangladesh. Initially, a local charity, Prakritajan, was selected for partnering with VAB to implement its program in Bangladesh. While doing so VAB has also established an Advisory Committee in Bangladesh to monitor and advice on the implementation of its program activities by its Partner. This collaboration lasted five years, following which VAB established its own Country Office to implement its activities under an Advisory Board. Within one year, VAB also received registration under the NGO Bureau of the Government of Bangladesh as a US International Charity.

With respect to its program, VAB focused on rural poverty as far as it affects students in rural high schools. It initially focused on reducing huge dropouts but soon included other components for supporting quality education for all students. It also initiated some support for skill training, which was later expanded to computer related works. Before coming to concentrate on the current program as detailed in this book, VAB supported college scholarships and pre-schools for a few years to assist with both forward and backward linkages with the high school stream.

As for its finance, from day one, VAB used fundraising campaigns, usually three times a year by mail mostly from individuals in the USA. Initially, it received around \$15-20,000 donation a year from over 150 to 200 donors and later on moved to the range of \$100,000 within ten years in about three or four stages. The number of donors was about 60% Bangladeshi expatriates and 40% non-Bangladeshi Americans who included a significant portion of US Peace Core Volunteers who had worked in Bangladesh. Additionally, VAB received donors' support for its purchase of Office Space in Dhaka to the tune of \$200,000 and for its investment in the Trust Fund for about \$200,000. In terms of institutional support, VAB did not receive any support from bilateral donors, like other well-known NGOs in Bangladesh. But VAB received several grants from the Bangladesh Bank and corporate donors in USA including International Youth Foundation, Chevron, A & E Enterprise and other corporations. Support from individuals and corporations in Bangladesh were very limited as the mentality for donor dependence is still pervasive.

Regarding management, VAB has been privileged to have numerous volunteers support its operations in the USA and Bangladesh. All the activities in the USA are managed by a few regular full time and several ad-hoc volunteers, while in Bangladesh VAB activities are carried out by a part-time, later became full time, Volunteer Country Director and about 10 volunteer advisors, who are being supported by seven full time paid staff and a large number of student volunteers from local universities and colleges.

Progress of VAB's Journey over Two Decades

VAB's operation over the last 20 years passed through four periods of roughly five years each as the following:

Introductory Phase - 1999-2004: During this phase, VAB started its network and publicity both in the USA and in Bangladesh through the Founder's long annual visits using his extensive contacts, and developed operating procedures and secured increasing support. During this initial phase, VAB has been privileged to have its Partner Prakritajan's network of rural high schools to carry out VAB's activities.

Experimental Phase - 2005-2009: During this phase, VAB took complete control of its program in Bangladesh as well as received registration with the Government of Bangladesh as a foreign NGO. While learning to operate as an USA International NGO, VAB faced several personnel challenges in its Advisory Board and top management position, which limited VAB's activity somewhat. During this phase, VAB engaged the first Country Director (CD), Dr. James Tejosh Das, who implemented VAB's initial quality education program in rural schools.

Expansion Phase – 2010-2014: VAB has been fortunate to have a dedicated full time volunteer Country Director, Dr. Jasimuz Zaman, and Dr. Jamilur Reza Choudhury, celebrated National Professor as the Chairman of its Advisory Board in Bangladesh in 2010. During this phase, VAB finalized its program focus on quality education for rural high schools and started experiment with a Five-Year program in three Clusters of five schools each. VAB also focused on consolidating its future in Bangladesh by procuring office space for VAB and by initiating a Trust Fund. VAB also expanded its program by approving a Chapter in Toronto, Canada.

All-Round Quality Focus Phase - 2015-2019: VAB program experimentation that was initiated in the earlier phase continued with vigor, going beyond the core facets of quality education and encompassing the multi-faceted nature of quality education addressing learning, competence and citizenship, as recommended by the National

Education Policy of Bangladesh. Additions included a computer skill enhancement program, an innovative English skill learning program, organizing co-curricular activities through student clubs, in the fields of debating, Math, Volunteering and sports. At the same time, there was an emphasis on sustainability of quality education. VAB in Bangladesh continually faced a dilemma balancing the multidimensional needs of quality education with its personnel and financial resources. During this time, the frequency of physical presence of VAB USA officials through visits to Bangladesh was severely limited. This resulted in limited direct interaction with the VAB BD management and officials.

Critical Challenges Facing VAB

As VAB looked to the future it faced three critical challenges: 1) consolidation of its model program and what to do with it in the future; 2) fundraising and the gradual introduction of paid service in the USA and its expansion in Bangladesh for continuing VAB's work; and 3) facilitation of a smooth transition while consolidating all VAB activities including the finance, program, management aspects, and finally the overall organization both in the USA and in Bangladesh. Work on the last challenge has already started, at least at the thinking and planning stage, and will take full shape hopefully in early next year.

The first two challenges dealing with the model program and fundraising and associated provision for paid service are somewhat connected. While VAB will continue to champion and expand volunteering in its program development and execution as well as management, it will make provisions for gradual acceptance and expansion of paid services when needed for efficient work both in the USA and in Bangladesh. This challenge is the other side of fundraising challenges which are being critical as VAB moves ahead. One way to address it may be to link fundraising in Bangladesh tied to any future expansion of VAB's program in new clusters. It does justice to the fact that VAB's model "is simple, effective, affordable, replicable and proven", as stated by the CD Dr. Jasimuz Zaman that any party- public, corporate and individuals- who want to apply the model should pay for it. VAB's work from its own fund should focus only on further perfecting the model, resolving the dilemma mentioned above, taking into account unforeseen challenges or effects of current program elements.

VAB's Future Focus: Sustainability

The current thinking of VAB policy makers about VAB's future is to focus fully on the issue and challenges of how to make VAB sustainable in the future globally. The challenges appear in all key areas including program, finance, management, and

organization. It is expected that a preliminary picture of how VAB will be dealing with future sustainability may emerge at the end of 2021 at the earliest, given the limitations in group work imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic globally.



Appendix B: Student Clubs

Student Club had been a novel attempt when VAB started initiating the formation of Debate Club and Sports Club in different schools in 2013. Debate Clubs and Sports Clubs were initiated for the purpose of training larger stream of students in debate and sports activities, respectively. Schools had no regular programs and school teams were formed with students who had some abilities developed with their own efforts. Teachers would organize a few routine programs to fulfill the requirements of the Ministry of Education.

VAB went through a learning curve in designing an effective Club in the rural high school. The lessons learned allowed a general procedure to set up an effective club in a three-step process.

a. Formation of Leadership Group

Before the idea of a Club is introduced, a Leadership Group for a Club in each field is formed from every class. VAB recommends a group of ten students from each class, forming a Leadership Group of fifty students for that Club. These students are trained in the activities of the intended Club and are asked to hone their skills in Club activities through practice, following the pathway shown in the training. Self-driven practice is made the cornerstone of the training message. The Groups are then given the responsibility to transfer the methodology of self-training to their classmates in groups of five to seven. The idea of formation of a Club and how a Club should function is introduced to them at the end of six months or before the year expires so that the Club is formed at the beginning of the next year.

b. Ownership of the School

Like all VAB programs, to ensure success, the commitment of the school is obtained through participative discussion. Operation of the Leadership Group provides evidence of the feasibility of student club. Ideas are shared through participative discussions with all stakeholders. The Headmaster and the Management Committee make a commitment to support the Club program, and as a first step, engage an enthusiastic teacher as Adviser to the Club, one for each Club.

c. Develop an Organizational Structure

The loosely structured organizational set up instituted by VAB in the earlier stages did not work well. And so, a definite organizational structure was set up with assignment of clear roles and responsibilities.

One significant innovation in the management structure was to form an Advisory Board for the Clubs that will advise and oversee all the Clubs. All Clubs will have some financial needs. VAB found that when a school team becomes champion at the upazila or district level, the Headmaster is often reluctant to send the team to the next higher level because of additional funds needed to do so. VAB intends to strengthen the hands of the Headmaster in seeking out funds, sharing responsibility with the Advisory Board. The Advisory Board of the Club will have members from the Management Committee as well as community leaders who will really become patrons of the Club, with a mission to provide all opportunities to students to nurture the talents of the students to reach their level of attainments.

Structure of the Club

The Club is formed when the preconditions described above are fulfilled. The Leadership Group forms the core membership of the Club. VAB is now promoting five clubs for students: English, Computer, Sports, Debate and Volunteering. All schools now have clubs on English, Sports, Debate and Volunteering. Computer Clubs are being established in schools equipped with a Computer Lab with at least ten computers.

Composition of Student Clubs

1. Advisory Board (One Advisory Board for all Clubs)
2. Chief Adviser for all Clubs: Headmaster
3. Adviser (for each Club): An enthusiastic teacher will be an adviser for each club.
4. Student Bodies (for each Club)
 - a. Club Members – The 50 students of the Leadership Groups (10 from each class) will be the core members of the Club.
 - b. Class Representatives - The Leadership Group of each class will elect/select two enthusiastic students having interest in management and organization to be Class Representatives. They will be designated as Leader and Co-Leader for the Class.
 - c. Executive Committee: The Class Representatives from the five classes will constitute the ten-member Executive Committee of the Club.

Criteria of Selection of Advisers

- Enthusiasm and commitment to help students develop skills in the area of Club specialty, as well as in general life skills
- Commitment to give time and thought for the success of the Club
- Enthusiasm to help students participate in competitions at different levels

Criteria of Selection of Class Representative

- Interest and ability in organizational work
- Ability to work with others
- Proficiency in club programs
- Believing in Quality for All and desire to work for that
- Engagement exclusively in the Executive Committee, with no other organizational work elsewhere

Function of Advisory Committee

- Patronize the Clubs in performing their tasks, through advice and funds
- Meet at least once a year to review the performance of the Clubs

Function of the Adviser of each Club

The Adviser is the key to the success of the Club. The challenge of the Adviser is to guide the club so that within a year, the Executive Committee can take over all responsibilities of the club, relieving a large part of his/her load.

- Provide guidance to the Club to run the Club effectively
- Encourage, mentor and inspire students to design, plan and implement Club activities with minimum input from him/her
- Give approval of activities and seek approval, if needed, from higher authorities
- Arrange access to school facilities beyond school hours, and during holidays and vacations
- Get the students to plan and do all work, overseeing mainly discipline, and adherence to school rules and social norms

Function of Class Representatives

- Practice sessions and competitions for the Club Members in the Class for excellence, through self-initiated efforts using the pathway demonstrated in training
- Training of classmates how to get trained through self-driven practice

Function of the Executive Committee of each Club

- The Executive Committee is responsible for all activities of the Club
- It will elect a President, a Secretary and a Treasurer
- It will design, plan and implement all activities of the Club for the year
- It will organize all competitions – in-school, inter-class, school-wide and inter-school
- It will help form teams for regional and national competitions
- The Executive Committee will meet once in a month to review the program of the Club
- The Executive Committee may chalk out a six-month program for the Club
- The **President** will get prior approval of the Adviser for conducting a competition
- The **Secretary** will be responsible for keeping records and oversee that the Class Representatives keep records of their activities
- The Secretary, in consultation with the respective Adviser and the President, will call an Annual Meeting of the Club
- The **Treasurer** will maintain the accounts and disburse funds with written notes from the President

Every member including the Executive Committee members will pay a membership subscription decided by the Advisory Board for Clubs. Any member can pay for the whole year at one time, if desired.

There will be some difference in modality of work because of the nature of the particular club in question. The above is a general guideline.

The Student Clubs created a dynamic and inviting environment to engage students actively and with interest in different co-curricular and extracurricular activities with an intrinsic benefit of acquiring some competencies and soft skills. The clubs operate with the motto - **Quality for All; Excellence for Team.**

The Clubs are mandated not only to train the members, they are also given the responsibility of opening doors to all students and guide them to practice different activities of the Club.

VAB trains and advises teachers and Club executives how to run an effective Club. Teachers are specially requested to nurture and mentor Club activities so that the students can take over bulk of the load. Students should be trained to plan, design and implement all regular activities as well as competitions. VAB aims to put the students in the driver's seat so that they require only guidance and approval from the teachers.

All rural schools operate with shortage of staff; teachers really do not have time to devote to other helpful activities for students. The teacher adviser will guide and train the club executives to take over the management of the club in the initial months. This will then create a more manageable workload for the adviser.

Club Features

- Well-developed organization of the Club as an entity
- Student-centric management and operation by students with a teacher as Adviser and facilitator
- Well defined programs
- Practice and competitions in-class, inter-class, school wide and inter-school
- Teams in every class. In-class participation and practice of all or selected classmates by members of each Club in that class
- Monitoring, Documentation, Evaluation and Reward
- Participation at regional and national level competitions (schools enable teams to participate)
- Creation of success stories and raising expectation

Resources Required

- Commitment of School Management and Advisory Board of the Club
- Enthusiasm and Commitment of Adviser
- Interest and Energy of Students
- Opportunity for Practice and Training
- Availability of a Club Office, Equipment, particularly for Sports Clubs.

Purpose

- Create opportunities to develop student skills in communication, problem solving, critical thinking, leadership and teamwork
- Promote excellence in student performance in co-academic activities in English, Computer and Math as self-driven efforts, removed from the burden of tests, in addition to debate, sports and other co-curricular activities
- Infuse spirit of tolerance, respect, empathy and trust.

Strategy

- Engagement of and networking through significant stakeholders like parents, teachers, management committee members, community leaders through an Advisory Board (One common Advisory Board covering all the five Clubs of the school)
- Formation of Teams in every class under each Club. Practice and participation in competitions in-class, inter-class, school-wide and interschool, and at regional and national level competitions.
- Wide dissemination of success stories of student performance to generate enthusiasm and interest in the school and the community

General Description of the Five Clubs

English Club

“English Club” has proven to be an effective medium of English proficiency development in VAB schools. VAB considered this as a critical skill for students to acquire as they prepare themselves for higher education or working careers in the government, private or service sector. Weak proficiency in English (spoken and written) poses a formidable barrier for their prospecting for a meaningful job or career.

English Club has been set up in all schools. Upon completion of training, the onus falls on the Club for sustaining the practice and pushing for further skills and excellence. The Club designs different programs for practice. The Leadership Group described earlier constitutes the Club membership.

The proficiency program covers all core elements of learning English: Vocabulary, Pronunciation and Spelling, Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. The Club has a year-round activity to improve English Language skill of its members and all students. The Club holds competitions to select the best teams in spelling, conversation and recitation in the initial phase, moving to more challenging items as it matures. The best teams from five clubs in the nearby cluster of village schools

compete and the best two teams are selected in each category. VAB holds the final competition either during the Education Fair or at some convenient date.

Resources provided for English Club

English language skill is the greatest deficiency of the rural students even when they successfully enter a promising career. Skill in the use of English is perceived in the society as a sign of accomplishment and smartness and it boosts the morale of the students towards further accomplishments.

Interestingly, VAB discovered that the attainment of this skill is very much within the capacity of each and every student, provided they have the guidance, inspiration and pathway.

VAB pays considerable attention to drive the students towards success in English. It provides some amount of resource materials and points to supplementary materials to further enhance their skills.

Typically, English Club is provided the following resource materials by VAB.

Books

1. Road to Learning English Language – VAB Publication
2. Mushfiqur Rahman - Limericks – a fun way to practice pronunciation, VAB Publication
3. Amin Rahman– English Pronunciation Guide Book for Native Bengali Speakers - *This and the dictionary below are excellent for phonetic pronunciation*
4. Amin Rahman – English Pronunciation Dictionary for Bangalees
5. Raymond Murphy, Essential English Grammar
6. Fr. Frank J. Quinlivan, C.S.C., Essential English Vocabulary – Notre Dame University publication
7. Collection of Reading for Pleasure series by BSK (BishwoShahitto Kendro)

Uploaded from the Internet

Videos in YouTube

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4NVPg2kHv4> – Pronunciation
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYb0LCqqJbU> - 3 hours - Spoken English – Listening Practice

English rhymes and poems

3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UVozY9dq58> – 1 h 50 m – Children’s rhymes

English stories

4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyN2rw2uU58> – 11 Disney stories
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=byKELv7gcDE> – Short Stories

Movies

6. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLTFr_KqVLE&t=1477s – About Helen Keller (American author, political activist, and lecturer. She was the first deaf-blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree.)
7. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fR05_ngoltM – Movie: The Triumph – about a teacher
8. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMrMILXMUaQ> – Movie: Beauty and the Beast

English Club Training Activities and Games

The skills training is designed by Clubs and offered in a regular and interactive manner. A few items from the following list of activities and games are covered in each hour-long session. A typical training session will cover a combination of the following:

- **Vocabulary, Pronunciation and Spelling**

Vocabulary – Use the techniques in ‘Road to Learning English’ and other resource materials cited above. Your textbooks are ready resources always available to you. *Master the use of new words by constructing multiple sentences and repeating them. Create a visual image of the word – do not try to memorize the meaning in Bangla.*

Pronunciation – Use dictionary, ask a friend or teacher, ask Google (get help from any well-wisher who has a Smart Phone with net connection), listen to resources provided in DVD, keep a notebook to record your new vocabulary.

Vocabulary Game —Each of the ten members of the Leadership Group in a class will come prepared with two words new to him/her. The member will learn the correct pronunciation from dictionary or from the teacher or from Google and come prepared with two sentences that describe the meaning of the words. Each member will then be challenged to compose similar sentences. Other methods of building vocabulary as indicated in ‘Road to Learning’ will also be taken up.

Spelling – Use the spelling rules given in “Road to Learning”, follow the directions given in Textbook and Grammar and Composition Book, write new words, and review your vocabulary notebook. Challenge yourself in Spelling Bee.

Spelling Game – Each of the ten members in a class will come prepared with two interesting “spelling madness” or two patterns of spelling, new to the member. They challenge each other and learn. Words having similar spelling but differing pronunciation will be chosen in this game.

- **Listening and Speaking**

Listening – Listen to others speaking; have a conversation; listen to Radio or TV news, DVD, and YouTube videos downloaded in DVD.

Speaking – Read, enjoy and act out any conversation from your Textbook. Get a grasp on how to make full sentences in a conversation. Practice techniques of introducing yourself, Role Play, Show and Tell and Telephone conversation, as shown in “Road to Learning English”. Do all the exercises in your Textbook and practice them orally yourself, with your friend or in a group.

Recitation of Limericks – Use the booklet by Mushfiqur Rahman. Listen to the recitation given in DVD.

Discuss a story or a book – Choose books from “Reading for Pleasure” series or books in DVD provided.

Tell me Game – A member asks another member: Tell me about your parents. This can go on for brothers and sisters, friends, family, village, school and so on. It could also be about an event – your sister’s wedding, a Mela in your village, a function you attended or what you did today.

Question and Answer Game – A member will ask a question to another member. A third member will put the same question in a different manner. A fourth member will answer in a different manner. The questions will be rephrased, so also the answers. The questions could be serious or lighthearted or humorous. Some members can raise the level of difficulties, posing the questions in different tenses.

Show and Tell – Follow ‘Road to Learning English’.

Multiple sentences with a word – Pick a word, e.g. a Verb, and use it to make a variety of sentences.

- **Reading**

Reading Practice – Read your Textbook, book on grammar and composition, stories and other books more than once to have fluency with understanding. Follow books in “Reading for Pleasure” series, and books given to you in DVD.

- **Writing**

Grammar and Composition – Read chapters on Parts of Speech and Tenses from your Textbook. Develop command over correct use of tenses, different sentence structures, and master use of Prepositions and Articles, Prefixes and Suffixes. Use “Road to Learning English” and your Grammar and Composition book as guide and resource.

Why Care about Nouns and Verbs – List some examples showing how usual mistakes with nouns and verbs can be avoided. For conjugation, pick a sentence and then change person or tense and challenge another person to express the sentence.

Hunt for Adjectives, Adverbs, and Prepositions – Pick a noun and choose appropriate **adjectives**. Pick an adjective and a verb, and choose appropriate **adverbs**. List some examples showing common mistakes with prepositions.

Determine the Parts of Speech for the different words in a sentence – Match your answers with those from the dictionary for a given word. You may need help from your teacher to determine the correct answer.

Writing Practice – (i) Your first step is to write answers to questions in your textbook. Practice writing paragraphs and essays. Use the techniques in “Road to Learning” and your book on “Grammar and Composition”. (ii) Choose a topic and write about it and read it out to your group. (iii) Write every day.

Computer Club

Computer Club aims to take the students forward in the use of computers to bring forth the benefits of learning from the resources in the Internet. VAB in-house trainers are capable of offering training to the Club members in searching for important resources using Google and other search engines, in presentation skills, video editing skills, brochure design, web design, software installation and basic computer troubleshooting. With assistance from external trainers, students will also be introduced to developments in software with some grooming in coding, gaming and other advanced topics where the students can learn with fun and amusement. Moreover, there are online contests in above areas where students can enthusiastically involve themselves, sharpen their skill to be at par with their counterparts in the advanced countries and develop a sense of being members of the global community.

Debate Club

The purpose of the Debate Club is to promote ability for cognitive thinking, articulating reasoning and communication skills of students. In the process, it enhances their language skills, confidence in public speaking and social awareness. The Club members are also encouraged to organize and participate in cultural programs like recitation, songs, dance and dramatic performance.

The members of the Clubs benefit from training by external trainers, and are provided with support resources to hone their skills in debating, like books and guidance notes, DVDs/videos containing tutorials for debate.

Operation of Debate Club

The class representatives (leader and co-leader) organize practice sessions for its members. Each class will have more than one team to compete against each other. The in-class debates and practice sessions will be managed and documented by the class representatives. Documentation of all interclass and interschool competitions will be maintained by the Club Secretary.

Interclass competitions will draw the best teams from each class. The school will select its team from among best debating Club members for inter-school or outside competitions. The winners in inter-school competition will be specially recognized in school events and magazines.

Sports Club

The Sports Club will have at least four teams: two junior and two senior teams in each of Cricket and Football. The teams are trained by the physical education teacher of the school, and also by external coaches through a scheduled program of practice over the

year. The Club will provide opportunities and motivation for all students to undertake sports activities. It will help select and mobilize excellent teams for internal competitions. A school team comprising the best performers will compete on behalf of the school with teams from other schools. The best teams within the school and the school team itself will be specially recognized. For co-ed schools, separate teams will be formed for boys and girls.

Volunteering Club

Institutional volunteering activity is not a widely practiced phenomenon in Bangladesh. Volunteering initiatives, much like philanthropy, emerge to respond to specific needs in difficult times. Individual or group volunteering activities are visible as a part of social norm.

In a school environment the Volunteering Club is formed in a participatory manner with 50 students (10 from each class). The process includes a Club launching meeting, with discussions on concept and importance of volunteering (the why), and how one may volunteer. The students work out in groups to explore what volunteering activities they could possibly undertake. Experience showed that the students generally have a good grasp of what volunteering work they can do, the benefits to the society and even to themselves. VAB builds on that positive force.

Members of the Club will keep record of volunteering work. The Executive Committee will meet once a month to monitor the Community Project, report progress and discuss new initiatives, if planned. The Club will try to undertake at least two community level volunteering project in a year. If any community project requires any consultation with community leaders and government officials, the Headmaster as the Chief Adviser of all Clubs would facilitate such discussion. Whenever possible, efforts should be made to publicize successful Community Projects that students carry out.

A consensus is reached to keep the activities within a limited framework. The Club will design an annual plan of activities under four broad themes:

Clean School, Green School. A routine program to keep the school compound and classrooms clean will be devised and executed. Depending on the space available, gardening and tree planting programs will be taken up and executed. The Club will take responsibility to cater all needs of the activities including nurturing and regular maintenance of the garden.

One Volunteer, One Tree. Each volunteer will plant at least one tree in his/her house and take responsibility for it. Every member of the Club will have a responsibility to encourage and inspire five other classmates to do the same. The volunteer can also encourage students and community members of the village to plant trees. The Club will take a leading role in the school in supporting Tree Plantation Drive undertaken nationally.

Save the Family, Save the Community. The Club will take up awareness campaign on various family and social issues. They can design attractive posters and take out rallies in villages and bazars, accompanied by a teacher. The rallies could raise awareness regarding Family Violence, Safety and Security of Girls, Stopping Early Marriage, No to Dowry, No to Addiction, No to Smoking, No to Corruption, No to Abuse, etc. Students may be encouraged to have creative way of composing the message, but should be vetted by the Adviser before display.

Community Project. The Club will take up two Community Projects for the whole year in consultation with community leaders. They would design the project, implement it and will produce a written report on it. The selection of the project will depend on local needs. It should require continued work over a period of time. Some examples could be Literacy program for street children, Mitigating Water logging problem in a village, cleaning up water bodies in a village, Agricultural work, etc.

There are a variety of activities possible within the framework of the above four broad themes. Some examples have been given above, a few more illustrative programs are given below.

Helping classmates, helping persons in distress, helping parents and siblings, spending time with senior persons - reading books and newspapers for them or entertaining them with songs and performances, etc., and also trying to learn lessons and skills for life from them, are of a “Personal Service” nature.



Appendix C: ChArACter eduCAtion

Defining Character

Human beings over the ages have identified and enumerated a number of positive traits in character. The Greeks put forward four cardinal virtues of good character: wisdom, justice, self-mastery and courage. Character is also defined as sum of our intellectual and moral habits. Character is doing the right thing, even if it is not convenient to you. Character is the Golden Rule – Treat others as you would like to be treated. Good character is about “knowing the good, loving the good and doing the good”.

You are not born with character. Plato believed knowledge led to formation of character, while Aristotle took it a step further – character is about one’s habits.

- Our character starts with our thoughts
- Our thoughts influence our words
- Our words lead us to actions
- Our actions, repeated over time, become our habits
- Our habits form our character

Moral Character and Performance Character

Character traits like humility, kindness, respect, empathy, fairness and gratitude are universal traits desired in human beings. These virtues have a connection with the religions of the world and constitute the moral compass of an individual. These virtues are termed Moral Virtues or virtues of Moral Character. But moral virtue without action is of little consequence in life. These virtues are thoughts of the mind and feelings of the heart. Action must be taken based on the moral virtues, but for enabling action, virtues like hard work, perseverance, courage and wisdom or prudence must also be developed. These are elements of Performance Character.

State of People's Character in Society in Bangladesh

After Independence, Bangladesh has progressed economically, but progress has not been unblemished. There is a general consensus that the moral fiber of the society is near complete collapse. Absence of and/or weak rule of law have allowed unscrupulous financial success and immediate gratification for some, and unfettered corruption has spread all over. People may lament for the loss of morality at the individual level, but collectively, if we can think of a concept like “a nation's or society's character”, such character leaves a lot to be desired, and collective performance is definitely dismal. In fact, there is a passive acceptance of corruption and as a nation we are not even at the start of the character building process.

But everything may not be lost. VAB, in the course of its years of work with high schools in rural areas, finds a golden thread to imbue the rural youth with virtues of character. While the urban society is dominated by corruption ridden people, and even the rural elites are not free from it, the rural society generally has a core group of hardworking, honest and respectful people. The peasants, the daily workers, the factory workers and the craftsmen of all types earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. They are the majority in rural Bangladesh. The young people in this group of hardworking families are relatively free from the corrupting influence that characterizes the urban society, and they need to be brought to the forefront of the national psyche. Perhaps, this can have an impact on character at the overall national level, too.

The pool of young people in the country, in particular in the rural society, provides a more fertile ground to cultivate character building. Given the right settings, the young minds can be motivated more easily. Their habits can be molded to instill character in them in its true sense.

The Stakeholders of Character Building in Rural Bangladesh

Students

There may be a parochial view in some quarters about rural students, but they are not different from those in more affluent settings. By and large, most rural students come to the class regularly and on time, listen to the teachers, work hard to do well in examinations, are courteous to their friends and other people, and respectful to seniors. There is a need to appreciate the virtues they have and build on them.

Parents

The majority of rural parents does not have a formal education. The father may be a peasant, daily labor, rickshaw puller, pushcart carrier or small vendor, small trader, or factory worker. Some may be craftsmen, artisans, and handymen or brick makers, carriers or layers. The mother is often a housewife, household worker in others' house and agricultural worker. They may also work in factories. On the whole, they work hard to make both ends meet. Generally, they are hardworking, honest and straightforward. A peasant's family is a mainstay of a combination of character virtues – respect, diligence and dutifulness. They are respectful, grateful and humble. They demonstrate respect for land, nature, crop and humans. They practice diligence and dutifulness in work at all phases of cropping and harvest. They deserve to be treated as persons of character and to be valued by children and the society. Their worth in practical demonstration of character virtues goes unnoticed and unappreciated. Similar behavior is seen among other classes of the village work force. They also make huge sacrifice to send their children to schools. The students in villages have a great role model in their parents and neighbors.

Teachers

Teachers are respected in the community. The parents know them and exchange greetings with them on the streets, in the tea stalls and in the village bazar and haat (weekly market). The teachers are generally caring about the students. They know many students personally from social interactions. However, private tutoring by teachers has brought a conflict in their role in education. There is shortcoming in their diligence and commitment to their duties in many cases. There is a priority for tutoring for payment over providing good teaching in the classroom. However, experience has shown, put in the right environment, the Headmaster and the teachers of a school genuinely want and do put extra efforts to see that their students do well in examinations and win in competitions against a competing school. VAB will view this as a strength in their effort to make a change.

The close association of the rural teachers with the rural society also provides an opportunity for action.

School Management Committee

The Management Committee provides the necessary logistics to run a school. The Committee can also provide assistance and cooperation outside the school perimeter in support of the school activities. VAB will seek the support of the Management Committee in the character building programs.

Community

Like the teachers, and the parents, the general community members also desire good performance by the students. The school and the community are integral parts of each other.

The positive relationship of the community with the schools can be exploited for good purpose.

Role Models

Role models can play a vital role mentoring young people to build character. A role model should be a person of character. Unfortunately, there is a distinct shortage of persons in all societies who can be identified embodying all the virtues of character. Young people are prone to accept anyone who shows an attractive trait or personality as a role model. It should be the job of parents and teachers to help them follow the right role model. One redeeming quality of a role model would be an uncompromising attitude toward doing something that needs to be done. A non-literate parent may teach a child good manners, a teacher may help build confidence, a well-known cricketer may motivate to play cricket well and pursue excellence, an ex-student may demonstrate that the rural background need not be a handicap in life. There is no dearth of the existence of specific virtues in a person.

The uniqueness of VAB approach is to leave out the path of identifying a person as a role model; instead it strives to arrive at a set of virtues expected to be the characteristics of a role model. VAB undertakes interactive discussion with students to identify at least one virtue in a person they respect for that virtue. This will then help identify a set of virtues that a student values. The interactive discussion leads to a consensus accepting this set of virtues as the desired **Self-Image** of the students. **The essence of the Character Development program is to have the students build an ideal Self-Image and strive to live up to the Self-Image.**

Supportive Components of Character Building

School Playgrounds

The school is also quite central to village life and how the village functions. Its playground is the playground for rural children and its premises are often the venue of village activities. A clean and inviting atmosphere would better promote extracurricular activities which can help young people to keep away from unsocial activities. Active sports and games teach cooperation and build friendship, which are also helpful in strengthening normal positive outlook.

The presence of the school as a social institution can be a boon to make progress in quality and character.

Character in Curriculum

Following the National Education Policy, the curriculum in high schools is geared to development of citizenship and character. Patriotism, pride in national identity, love of nature and people and respect for diversity are strewn through various segments of the curriculum. Students acquire a full cognition of all the virtues, but they do their studies related to virtue for the examinations only, with little regard that the virtues are to be “internalized” in themselves and practiced in life. **And so, there is a need for a jump from cognition into action.** The VAB program on pedagogy and on character education is directed to produce that jump.

One may examine and reflect on the contents of curriculum. In Bangla, one will find illustration of the virtues of patriotism, love of nature, kindness to animals and respect for all people; in Social Studies, rights and responsibilities of citizens and the equality of all citizens; in Religious Studies, respect for and striving for good of all creation, living and nonliving; and in the practice of Math, traits of hard work, persistence, logical rigor, and creativity.

The positive elements in curriculum can be a great resource for character education.

VAB also distributes a copy of a booklet, “Adarsho Manush” authored by a character development enthusiast and a VAB patron, Momtaz Bhuiyan.

Interactive Student Training on Character Education

VAB developed a novel approach to promote character and citizenship. It builds on positive traits in the society and in individuals. As already outlined, character develops with practice. The VAB program on the Group Method of Teaching-Learning and the Club Program center round practice of character virtues. Character training, in essence, is ingrained in all activities undertaken through the VAB Model. **The formal training on character education is to turn cognition to practice and practice to habit.**

VAB first introduces the essence of the program in a one-hour session in every class in a school. After that, VAB creates a Leadership Group on Character with the 50 Executive Committee members of the five School Clubs.

The training is conducted in an interactive manner with this Group. The training brings in what the students already have learned about character through their curriculum and through participation in different activities in group learning, group practice, club work, exposure to religion and association with different groups in society including parents, relatives, teachers, and neighbors. The students are given a form (Form A) with suggested categories and they are asked to fill in the two columns on the right of the Form. A typical answer is shown below.

Form A: Figuring out enduring human qualities

Category	Sub-Category	Emulating activities described by students in their own words	Qualities identified by students
Societal	Society	People help each other in times of distress such as cyclone, flood, fire, death in a family; they offer sympathy, food, and even shelter.	Empathy, Compassion, Helpfulness, etc.
	Religion	Student narration showed that faith in the Creator encompasses all virtues.	Righteous, Kind, Caring, Forgiving, Possessing Humility, Truthful, Honest, Just, etc.
	Parents	Parents care for us; they look after all our needs, they forgive us if we make mistake, they work hard to earn their living, they do not cheat other people, etc.	Love, Dutifulness, Caring, Hardworking, Honesty, etc.
	Teachers	Teachers care for us; they help us in our studies, they are happy if we do well, etc.	Affection, Dutifulness, Caring, etc.
	Festivities	People visit each other and take part in group activities during Eid, Puja, Mela, Weddings, Community sports and drama.	Friendship, Fellowship, Cooperation, Volunteering, etc.

Curricular/ Extracurricular	Curriculum	Students reflect upon selected pieces from their textbooks, particularly in Bangla, English, Social Studies and Religious Studies from Class I onwards and their understanding sought.	Love, Patriotism, Kindness, Empathy, Respect for diversity, Respect for environment, Gratitude, Courage, Wisdom, Duty, Sacrifice, Justice, etc.
	Academic work	We come to class regularly, listen to the teacher, follow school rules, study at home, etc.	Punctuality, Regularity, Attentiveness, Dutifulness, Discipline, etc.
	Debating Club	We prepare as a team instead of only individually, help each other, apply reason with each other, encourage those who are shy, and take responsibility given by the team, etc.	Confidence, Articulation, Appreciating differing viewpoints, Respect opponents, Team spirit, Commitment, No tolerance of bullying, etc.
	Sports Club	We practice regularly, work as a team; follow team decisions, persevere for team performance, we compete against strong teams, etc.	Commitment, Persistence, Hard work, Respect for opponents, Team spirit, Courage, Compassion, No tolerance of bullying, etc.

	English Language Club	We help each other, practice regularly, follow club rules, undertake regular practice to excel, etc.	Confidence, Articulation, Commitment, Persistence, Hard work, Striving for improvement/excellence, etc.
	Volunteering Club	We volunteer our services for others, work without personal benefit, think of others and act accordingly, etc.	Caring, Compassionate, Tolerant, Active involvement for others' well-being, etc.

The next part in the training process is to guide them to building Self-Image.

Students are exposed to the concepts of virtues in two categories: Moral virtues and Professional virtues (Moral Character and Performance Character).

Students are then asked to think of persons they respect and then to state why they respect that person. They are then asked what virtues their parents, their teachers and in general, the society expect of them. Students are then asked to create self-image in the light of the following:

- Virtues in people they respect
- Virtues that are expected from them by parents, teachers and the society
- Virtues they practiced in different activities

The students synthesize their own answers to create individual Self-Image. They are given a Form (Form B) to record their own desire of Self-Image. The form is filled out by students. A typical form submitted by students is shown below.

Form B: Figuring Self-Image

Question	Response
What are the expectations of Parents, Teachers, and the Society from you about your behavior?	Truthful, Hardworking, Responsible, Disciplined, Respectful
Persons you respect and why?	Loving, Helpful, Just, Good in what they do
From your response to the above questions can you create your Self Image? List the Moral and Professional Qualities that you should have.	<p>Moral Qualities: Honesty, Kindness, Responsibility, Gratitude, Respectfulness, Humility</p> <p>Professional Qualities: Hard work, Patience, Courage, Discipline, Prudence</p>

The Leadership Group of Character Education shares the lessons on Character Building with the respective Club members. In this manner, 250 students of the School Clubs (50 student members in each of the five Student Clubs) become associated with the training. The whole student body then is exposed to the training through association and permeation; 250 students constitute a large enough critical mass for spread of the concepts through examples and permeation.

Practicing Virtues

VAB is convinced that young people can be molded into possessing enduring character. But practice to a considerable extent and in a consistent manner is needed to cultivate the virtues into a habit.

There is an instructive example of practice in the life of Benjamin Franklin. He was a self-made man having only two years of formal schooling and who became a journalist, an author, a statesman, a scientist and an engineer. At the young age of twenty, Benjamin Franklin set out to practice deliberately a set of thirteen character virtues he considered important to be a man of high morality. The following is a list of the virtues with brief explanations as paraphrased from his Autobiography:

1. **Temperance** — Avoid drug and other abusive substances.
2. **Silence** — Avoid trifling conversation.
3. **Order** — Determine priorities of your activities.
4. **Resolution** — Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.
5. **Frugality** — Waste nothing.
6. **Industry** — Do something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.
7. **Sincerity** — Think innocently and justly; and, if you speak, speak accordingly.
8. **Justice** — Speak out when you see wrong being done by others.
9. **Moderation** — Do not hit back with extreme language or force even if you can.
10. **Cleanliness** — Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes, or habitation.
11. **Tranquility** — Ignore petty matters in life.
12. **Chastity** — Respect opposite sex.
13. **Humility** — Imitate prophets and philosophers to be humble.

Here is how Benjamin Franklin practiced the above virtues, in his own words: “My intention being to acquire the habitude of all these virtues, I judged it would be well not to distract my attention by attempting the whole at once, but to fix it on one of them at a time; and, when I should be master of that, then to proceed to another, and so on, till I should have gone through the thirteen; and, as the previous acquisition of some might facilitate the acquisition of certain others, I arranged them with that view, as they stand above.”

Practice Sheet for Character Development

Following the Benjamin Franklin model, the students are guided to the idea of practicing some simple virtues to make them habit. A practice sheet is provided where the students would note their success in acquiring the virtue, but more importantly, their failure to comply with the required practice. They would continue to maintain the record till there is no failure in a month. Some of these habits are:

- Regularity in class attendance
- No anger with parents
- No anger with schoolmates and no bullying
- Listening to the teachers with attention

- Greeting people when they meet and saying thank you when needed
- Do at least one act of kindness in a day, for example
 - help an aged person cross the street
 - help finding something lost by a person
 - give a smile to a passerby
- Record club activities in a logbook as a part of developing good habits

Students can develop their own practice sheet as they move along in the path of character.

Impediments to the Practice of Character in Real Life

Like the virtues, there are vices, the other side of the coin. VAB is not naïve about this and deals with the issue directly in the form of a discourse during the interactive training:

“We find you truly young persons of character. You know the virtues you would demonstrate but you must also know the vices that are bad and should be avoided. You know what is right and what is wrong and you shall choose the right as persons of character. And if you cannot figure out what is right and what is wrong discuss with others, your schoolmates, teachers, parents, people you respect, etc. Your predecessors also promised to be persons of character and when you look around, you know people have admirable character traits. They are loving, compassionate and would come out to help you.

But you look at the country as a whole. Our country is mired in corruption. There is a reign of muscle power. As citizens of the country, you go to a government office, nothing moves without a bribe. You go to the court, there are agents waiting for your money to get you to a lawyer of his choice. You go to a hospital and there are agents who promise to get you admitted if you pay some money. You want to set up an industry, you go through a maze of tables with “helping hands” only if you pay them, even though they are employed to serve you. And why is this so? There is a chain of corruption from top to bottom. And why is this so? Every one holding every chair was once a student like you, showing admirable traits of character. Where are those persons? Well, they were the same persons like you are here now.

What would you be when you sit on those chairs? It had been the same story all this time. Would you just be the same?

Should it be the same? If you do not want it to be the same, you need to understand why it has been the same so far.”

We explain the need for controlling the vices inherent in human nature. We explain how **Greed** takes precedence over character and how corruption has permeated in all segments of the society.

We emphasize that the society cannot be transformed without changes in the character of the individuals making up the society.

And they are the individuals who can lead the transformation.

Like all practices, you start early and start small. Resolve to do a few things right and make it a habit and gradually, as you move up in your life, continue the same practice with more challenging goals.

You make the right decision as an individual.

As more of the individuals make the right decision, a critical mass of people making the right decisions will emerge and social norms will change.

- You want to be yourself. You do not want to be the other person.
- Make your choices to match the person you want to be
- And when everyone in the society makes the “right choice”, **the society changes!**

Ethical Dilemma and Ethical Tests

Difficulties in practicing character virtues have been known from ancient times, even for persons of character. Philosophers and thinkers puzzled over the idea and there is a vast literature on ethical dilemma and ideas about how to overcome them. The dilemma arises because the issues at hand are not clear; they are not easy, they are complicated; there are ambiguities; and there is scope for bias, prejudice or self-interest. We shall take up a few simple cases to illustrate the application of some selected Ethical Tests.

Eight Ethical Tests

The following 8 questions can help us make a good ethical decision in any situation:

1. **The Golden Rule Test:** Would I want people to do this to me?
2. **The Truth Test:** Does this action represent the whole truth and nothing but the truth?
3. **The What-If-Everybody-Did-This Test:** Would I want everyone to do this (lie, cheat, steal, litter in the school, etc.)? Would I want to live in that kind of world?

4. **The Parents Test:** How would my parents feel if they found out I did this? What advice would they give me if I asked them if I should do it?
5. **The Religion Test:** If I have religious beliefs, how do they apply to this action? What would a respected member of my religion advise? Are there any religious texts that I could draw on for guidance?
6. **The Conscience Test:** Does this go against my conscience? Will I feel guilty afterwards?
7. **The Consequences Test:** Might this action have bad consequences, such as damage to relationships or loss of self-respect, now or in the future? Does this harm someone? Might I come to regret doing this?
8. **The Front Page Test:** How would I feel if my action were reported on the front page of my hometown paper?

Back to the Basic: Develop the Right Habits

Our digression to vices and corrupt practices in the society was to bring to focus the complexities in the real world of work. We recommend that students become aware of different aspects of ethical dilemma to appreciate the problems in the future. For now, they need only to work on the following:

- Decision to be a person of character
- Resolution that one shall practice virtues to make them habits

Students have to be encouraged to win over the habits of vices that one can identify and be a person of character.

And everyone must remember that it is the ultimate edict of all religions.



Appendix d: performAnce index

Performance Evaluation of Schools

VAB identified three primary goals of education as Learning, Competence and Citizenship. The development of a Performance Index was done with the aim of making a quantitative assessment of how well a school meets these objectives.

A direct quantification of each of the objectives is difficult; further, they are not stand alone item, but intricately interconnected. VAB, therefore, looked for an index with a set of composite measurements, **mostly** quantitative, but a few necessarily qualitative.

Performance Criteria

We accept examination results as an important measure; test scores are valued all over the world in spite of concerns whether the tests truly reflect student ability. We consider test results in two categories: percentage of pass rate and percentage of students receiving A grade (A+, A and A- combined) based on the results of two public examinations in high schools, one at the end of Grade VIII designated as the Junior Secondary Certificate (JSC) examination and the other at the end of Grade X, designated as the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination. VAB has a Computer Literacy program aiming at computer literacy for 100% students leading to excellence, an English language program aiming at conversational skill for 100% students leading to excellence in English language skills, and a Math Olympiad program aiming for qualification at the national level. In addition, VAB promotes participation of all students in extracurricular activities in debate, sports cultural programs and volunteering. These activities and the activities in Computer and English are promoted by Student Clubs.

The operating environment of the school and its management are also of great importance in the attainment of quality education; but they are difficult to assess and is open to bias.

VAB therefore considers five different categories in its calculation of Performance Index: Academic (divided into pass rate and A grade rate), Co-Academic (Math,

English and Computer related performance), Co-curricular (debate, sports and related performance), School Environment and School Management.

Score Sheet

We list below individual items under each category. Each item is given a maximum score. This is explained below and presented in a tabular form in Table D-1.

Academic Performance: Maximum Score

- Pass Percentage – SSC: 40
- Pass Percentage – JSC: 40

Total for pass percent: 80

- Percentage of students earning A grade – SSC: 40
- Percentage of students earning A grade – JSC: 40

Total for A Grade: 80

Total for Academic Performance: 160

Co-Academic Performance: Maximum Score

- English Language Skill: 30
- Computer Skill: 30
- Math Olympiad Performance: 20

Total for Co-Academic Performance: 80

Co-Curricular Performance: Maximum Score

- Debate Performance: 30
- Football Performance: 20
- Cricket Performance: 20
- Bonus for Additional Performance (not included above): 10

Total for Co-Curricular Performance: 80

School Environment: Maximum Score

Regular Class: 2

High Attendance: 2

Morning Assembly: 2

Personal Hygiene: 2

Cleanliness: 2

Total for School Environment: 10

School Management: Maximum Score

Accountability: 2

Transparency: 2

SMC Meeting: 2

Headmaster Leadership: 2

Community Engagement: 2

Total for School Management: 10**Grand Total of Scores for all items under all five categories: 340**

Out of 100, this results in a weight of 23.5 for each of Pass Percentage, A Grade percentage, Co-academic performance and Co-Curricular performance, and 3.0 for each of School environment and School management.

Rationale for Score Distribution

We give equal weight for academic (pass rate and proportion receiving A – grade) (47), and co-academic and co-curricular performance (47), because each category contributes to learning as well as to competence and character building. The scoring attempts to give due weight for inclusivity of all students by providing scores for in-class and in-school activities in addition to external competitions. The curricular score covering the concept of Quality for All and Excellence for Teams is reflected through pass rate and A grade. For co-academic and co-curricular, both team competitive achievements and in-class and in-school activities are given weight – to meet the same principle. Fairly low weight is given for School Environment and School Management, because of difficulties in having quantitative assessment for them. However, we include them to reflect our conviction that they are important in the overall performance of the school. This is also to bring to focus of the school the importance of these two categories.

Table D -1 gives the blank score sheet showing the distribution of scores for different levels of performance in different items of measurement.

Table D -1: Blank Score Sheet – Distribution of Score

Item	Performance Based Score Distribution					
Pass Percent JSC Max Score 40	100%	90%	80%	70%	60%	50%
Score	40	35	30	25	15	5
Pass Percent, SSC Max Score 40	100%	90%	80%	70%	60%	50%
Score	40	35	30	25	15	5
% A Grade, JSC Max Score 40	80%	70%	60%	50%	40%	30%
Score	40	35	30	25	15	5
% A Grade, SSC MaxScore 40	80%	70%	60%	50%	40%	30%
Score	40	35	30	25	15	5
Math Olympiad Max Score 20	National Qualified	Regional Qualified	District Qualified	District Attendance	Attendance in VAB Training	
Score	20	15	10	6	4	
English Skill Max Score 10	Inter-cluster Champion	Inter-cluster Runner up	Inter-school Champion	Inter-school Runner up	Inter-school Participation	
Score	10	8	6	5	3	
English Literacy Max Score 20	100%	90%	80%	70%	60%	40%
Score	20	15	10	6	4	2
Computer Skill Max Score 10	Inter-cluster Champion	Inter-cluster Runner up	Inter-school Champion	Inter-school Runner up	Inter-school Participation	
Score	10	8	6	5	3	
Computer Literacy Max Score 20	100%	90%	80%	70%	60%	40%
Score	20	15	10	6	4	2
Debate Excellence Max Score 15	Divisional Champion	Divisional Runner up	District Champion	District Runner up	Upazila Champion	Upazila Runner up
Score	15	12	10	8	6	4

Item	Performance Based Score Distribution					
School Debate Max Score 15	Good School Teams	Satisfactory Class Teams	Less than Satisfactory	Weak School Team		
Score	15	10	4	1		
Football Excellence Max Score 10	Divisional Champion	Divisional Runner up	District Champion	District Runner up	Upazila Champion	Upazila Runner up
Score	10	8	7	6	5	4
School Football Max Score 10	Good School Teams	Satisfactory Class Teams	Less than Satisfactory School Teams	Weak School Team		
Score	10	8	3	1		
Cricket Excellence Max Score 10	Divisional Champion	Divisional Runners up	District Champion	District Runner up	Upazila Champion	Upazila Runner up
Score	10	8	7	6	5	4
School Cricket Max Score 10	Good School Teams	Satisfactory Class Teams	Less than Satisfactory	Weak School Team		
Score	10	8	4	1		
Bonus Point Max score 10						
Score						
School Environment						
Class Max Score 2	Regular Class	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory			
Score	2	1.5	1.00			
Attendance Max Score 2	High	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory			
Score	2	1.5	1.00			
Assembly Max Score 2	High	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory			
Score	2	1.5	1.00			

Item	Performance Based Score Distribution					
Personal Hygiene Max Score 2	Good	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory			
Score	2	1.5	1.00			
Cleanliness Max Score 2	Good	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory			
Score	2	1.5	1.00			
School Environment Max Score 10						
Score						
School Management						
Accountability Max Score 2	High	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory			
Score	2	1.5	1.00			
Transparency Max Score 2	High	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory			
Score	2	1.5	1.00			
SMC meeting Max Score 2	Regular	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory			
Score	2	1.5	1.00			
Headmaster Leadership Max Score 2	High	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory			
Score	2	1.5	1.00			
Community Engagement Max Score 2	Good	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory			
Score	2	1.5	1.00			
School Management Max Score 10						
Score						
Total Score	340					

Table D-2 below shows the Performance Index calculation using the actual scores in different items obtained by five schools. The sum of the indexes in different categories gives the Performance Index of the schools.

Table D-2: Score Sheet and Performance Index Calculation for School

Data Collection Sheet and Performance Index for 5 VAB schools in the Nageshwari Cluster											
Weight Distribution: Pass Rate: 23.5, Grade A: 23.5, Math, Comp & Eng: 23.5, Debate & Sports: 23.5, School Environment: 3.00, School Management: 3.00											
Pass Rate							Nageshwari DM Academy	Adarsha Pilot Girls' HS	Jagarani Girls' BidhyaBithi HS	Nakhargonj M.L HS	Rayigonj Girls' HS
Pass Percent, JSC/Score	100%/40	90%/35	80%/30	70%/25	60%/15	50%/5	35	30	15	35	25
Pass Percent, SSC/Score	100%/40	90%/35	80%/30	70%/25	60%/15	50%/5	35	35	40	35	30
Score to be entered for Pass percentage	80						70	65	55	70	55
Index from Pass Percentage							20.56	19.09	16.16	20.56	16.16
A Grade, JSC/Score	80%/40	70%/35	60%/30	50%/25	40%/15	30%/5	40	35	30	30	30
A Grade, SSC/Score	80%/40	70%/35	60%/30	50%/25	40%/15	30%/5	35	35	40	35	35
Score to be entered for Grade A	80						75	70	70	65	65
Index from Grade A							22.03	20.56	20.56	19.09	19.09
Math Olympiad/Score	National Qualified/20	Regional Qualified/15	District Qualified/10	District Attendance/6	Attend in VAB Training/4		15	15	10	10	10
English Skill/Score	Inter-cluster Champion/10	Inter-cluster Runner up/8	Inter-school Champion/6	Inter-school Runner up/5	Inter-school Participation/3		10	8	4	4	4
English Literacy/Score	100%/20	90%/15	80%/10	70%/6	60%/4	40%/2	4	4	5	2	4
Computer Skill/Score	Inter-cluster Champion/10	Inter-cluster Runner up/8	Inter-school Champion/6	Inter-school Runner up/5	Inter-school Participation/3		10	4	8	4	4
Computer Literacy/Score	100%/20	90%/15	80%/10	70%/6	60%/4	40%/2	4	20	20	2	2
Score to be entered for Co-Academic Category	80						43	51	47	22	24
Index from Co-Academic							12.63	14.98	13.81	6.46	7.05
Debate Excellence /Score	Divisional Champion/15	Divisional Runner up/12	District Champion/10	District Runner up/8	Upazila Champion/6	Upazila Runner up/4			6		4

School Debate/Score	Good School Teams/15	Satisfactory Class Teams/10	Less than Satisfactory/4	Weak School Team/1			15	10	15	10	15
Football Excellence Score	Divisional Champion/10	Divisional Runner up/8	District Champion/7	District Runner up/6	Upazila Champion/5	Upazila Runner up/4	5	4			
School Football/Score	Good School Teams/10	Satisfactory Class Teams/8	Less than Satisfactory School Teams/3	Weak School Team/1			10	10	8	8	10
Cricket Excellence/Score	Divisional Champion/10	Divisional Runner up/8	District Champion/7	District Runner up/6	Upazila Champion/5	Upazila Runner up/4	5	5			
School Cricket/Score	Good School Teams/10	Satisfactory Class Teams/8	Less than Satisfactory/4	Weak School Team/1			10	10	4	8	8
Bonus Point/10 (Achievement out of the above Items)							10	5	5	3	5
Score to be entered for Co-Curricular Category	80						55	44	38	29	42
Index from Debate & Sports score							16.15625	12.93	11.16	8.52	12.34
School Environment											
Class	Regular Class/2	Satisfactory/1.5	Less than satisfactory/1.00			2	2	2	2	2	
Attendance	High /2	Satisfactory/1.5	Less than satisfactory/1.00			2	2	2	1.5	1.5	
Assembly	High /2	Satisfactory/1.5	Less than satisfactory/1.00			2	2	2	2	2	
Personal Hygiene	Good/2	Satisfactory/1.5	Less than satisfactory/1.00			2	2	2	1.5	2	
Cleanliness	Good/2	Satisfactory/1.5	Less than satisfactory/1.00			2	2	2	1.5	2	
Score to be entered for School Environment	10						10	10	10	8.5	9.5
Index from Environment							3.00	3.00	3.00	2.55	2.85
School Management											
Accountability	High/2	Satisfactory/1.5	Less than satisfactory/1.00			2	1.5	2	1.5	1.5	

Transparency	High/2	Satisfactory/1.5	Less than satisfactory/1.00				2	1.5	2	1.5	1.5
SMC meeting	Regular/2	Satisfactory/1.5	Less than satisfactory/1.00				2	2	2	2	2
Headmaster Leadership	High/2	Satisfactory/1.5	Less than satisfactory/1.00				2	1.5	2	2	1.5
Community Engagement	Good/2	Satisfactory/1.5	Less than satisfactory/1.00				2	2	2	2	2
Score to be entered for School Management	10						10	8.5	10	9	8.5
Index from school management							3.00	2.55	3.00	2.70	2.55
Total Grade	340	Total Score					263	248.5	230	203.5	204
Performance Index							77.38	73.11	67.69	59.89	60.04



Appendix e: VAB Model School

Why Model School

The primary purpose why VAB is considering designating some schools as Model Schools is to showcase the achievement of excellence in implementing the measures under VAB Model. At the same time, such schools will be exemplary of what VAB Model can accomplish in attaining sustainable quality education. A related purpose will be to fulfill VAB's own desire to leave a footprint. Over the last twenty years, VAB worked in over one hundred schools. VAB lost connection with half of those schools, and one cannot establish whether or not VAB intervention had a long term benefit to the school.

A different paradigm for work in schools was developed in 2012 with an approach for sustainable quality attainment. VAB worked with a total of fifty schools with this approach and has not cut off connection with them yet.

VAB developed a “parting scheme” with 15 of these schools which will keep the thread of connection alive. However, with time, VAB will work with many more schools and keeping active link with all of them will be a gigantic task.

VAB Model School provides a resolution to the problem.

The proposition now is to select one school per cluster as a Model School.

VAB will interact with the Model School. In addition to working for its own excellence, the Model School will engage with other schools in the excellence achieving process. The Model School will be a representative of VAB for the other schools in the upazila, not only within its own cluster, but outside the cluster also.

Role of Model School

The Model School basically has the following roles:

- It ensures its own quality
- It allows VAB to try out new concepts, methods and techniques
- It helps other schools to ensure their quality
- It keeps VAB informed about itself and other schools

Role of VAB in the Model School

VAB has a dual role in the Model School.

- It keeps the school updated, as VAB acquires expertise in new methods and techniques in education
- It mentors the school and demonstrates how the school could provide services to other schools

VAB Vision of a Model School

The Model School will necessarily be a school that showed drive and initiative in implementing VAB Model and improved its performance over time. The VAB vision for the Model school should meet the following characteristics:

- Dynamic and student-centric education environment
- The Headmaster is a leader and is capable of decentralized operation with responsibility shared with teachers
- The school has a quality focus and is geared to outcome oriented action plans
- Transparency in school programs and financial management
- The school is ready to venture into new approaches and techniques in education
- The school is connected with parents and the community
- The school has a positive image in the community
- The school has a commitment to service

Selection Criteria for Model School

The Model School will not only be successful itself, but will have the aptitude and ability to be a leader among schools in the upazila. Given satisfactory performance in implementing the Quality Education Model, VAB will assess the leadership and effectiveness of the Headmaster, the ownership of the model by teachers, the role of management committee and the evidence of goodwill in the community about the school and its leadership.

Effectiveness of Headmaster

It is universally recognized that the leadership of the Headmaster is the single most important factor in turning around things in a school. There is no example of an excellent high school with an ineffective Headmaster. The Headmaster needs to have the ability to lead not only his/her school, but also to provide leadership, guidance and services to other schools.

The qualities that VAB would look for in the Headmaster would be a combination of the following:

1. Understand the Importance of Empowerment of Stakeholders

The Headmaster would understand that the school is a community institution, serving a key function for the community – education of its children. The Headmaster needs to seek out and build relationship with the parents and the community and get their partnership in fulfilling the mission of the school. The Headmaster must build a congenial environment among the teachers and the students, in general and particularly among those in leadership roles in their respective areas of work.

2. Have a Vision and a Plan

The Headmaster must be a leader, must have a vision for the school, and set goals and have a plan of action to reach the goals. The Headmaster needs followers, not subordinates to carry his mission forward. His steadfastness combined with passion to attain objectives should inspire the teachers, the students and the community.

3. Encourage Risk-Taking

Instructional pedagogy is continually evolving. Technology in education will continually change the learning environment. New ideas and thoughts about the goals of education will emerge with changes in market forces. The schools need to be ready to experiment with new techniques and methods in instruction. The Headmaster must have the courage to wade new waters, and must empower the teachers to take risk and manage the risk.

4. Have Positive Attitude and High Expectation

The Headmaster needs to have a positive attitude towards the school and its strengths – strengths and potential of its students, teachers, parents and community. The Headmaster must build on the positive features and create positivity in others. A collaborative environment should be created to live up to high expectation.

VAB promotes the idea that no student is a poor student and no teacher is a poor teacher. It also puts forward the idea that no individual in the society is uneducated.

5. Must Persevere

Success demands innovation, success requires adjustment, and success takes time, and may need a change of course. The Headmaster must be a great learner and an inclusive learner, from all sources. As new measures and new ideas are put into effect, small failures should be accepted as a way of learning to achieve greater results.

Ownership by Teachers

Most work in schools is to be executed by teachers and so the teachers should become an integral part of all programs in schools. A Headmaster cannot be successful with ineffective teachers. All teachers have the potential to be effective with self-help or with collaboration of colleagues.

A Google search that referred to a recent Gallup poll revealed “31% of U.S. teachers are *engaged* in their work, meaning that less than one in three teachers are involved with, enthusiastic about, and committed to their work and their school. More than half of the teachers, 56% are *not engaged*, meaning they just go through the motions of the workday, putting in the time, but not the energy or passion that the most successful teachers do. What's worse, 13% are *actively disengaged* at work. These teachers are not just unhappy at work, they are often busy acting out their unhappiness and undermining what their engaged coworkers set out to accomplish.”

VAB believes the above poll depicts quite well the situation existing in rural high schools in Bangladesh. School teachers in the USA are fully trained and are given a decent salary. The poll indicates that training and compensation may not be the key factors for engagement. This is also borne out in Bangladesh, as there has not been any noticeable difference in teacher productivity even as the salary and benefits of the teachers were raised substantially in recent years.

There is a need to understand that teaching is not a job, but a service and that there is a social responsibility to provide that service with dedication and diligence.

Given that premise, it is important to get the teachers understand that high performance of the students resulting from increased effort by the teachers is a win-win situation for all.

This will be a challenge for the Headmaster and the 31% teachers who are engaged with commitment and dedication.

Role of Management Committee

The School Management Committee (SMC) is the apex body at the school level to oversee the affairs of the school. SMC will be a partner in all agreements with the school regarding it becoming a Model School.

Based on input from the Headmasters, the Performance Index developed by VAB should be a good indicator of whether a school meets the characteristics of a Model School. A Performance Index of 70 at the end of Year 5 of the VAB program could be taken as the baseline for consideration for choosing a Model School by VAB.

VAB will hold a workshop with the Headmaster, Teachers, SMC Members and Club Presidents (students) and Club Secretaries (students) as well as selected community leaders to assess the strength of purpose and commitment to continue performing at the same level or better with local initiatives.

VAB will adopt a school as Model School when all criteria are met and VAB feels assured of success in its mission.

Tables: application of Vab Model

Milestones

Table 1 presents the important milestones for VAB, starting with its formation in New York. The sequence of events show the gradual development of VAB as an organization. Starting with scholarship program for students in 2000, VAB gradually extended activities to teachers training, student tutoring and providing needed educational supports to the schools. In 2012, it expounded an integrated program for quality education in the form of VAB Model. The Table shows the gradual expansion and evolution of the programs in VAB Model, as the schools got ready for greater level of performance. The pandemic in 2020 obstructed VAB from achieving some targeted outcome, but created the opportunity to develop online implementation of meetings, workshops, training and competitions.

Table 1: Milestones of VAB: 1998 - 2020

Serial No	Milestone	Year
1.	Establishment of VAB	1998
2.	Registration in U. S. A.	1999
3.	Initiation of Programs on Student Scholarship and Teachers Training	2000
4.	Operation from own Office in Bangladesh	2005
5.	Registration in Bangladesh as International NGO	2006
6.	Ten –Year Anniversary Celebration	2011
7.	Launching of VAB Model	2012
8.	Formation and Registration of VAB Trust	2013
9.	Launching Student Club Program	2014
10.	Inauguration of VAB-owned office and training center in Bangladesh	2014

11.	Fifteen-Year Anniversary Celebration	2015
12.	Launching Computer Literacy program for all students	2016
13.	Launching of Group Method Pedagogy	2017
14.	Rotary Club of Wheelers Hill English Training Project	2017
15.	National Award Event	2017
16.	Launching Character Education Program	2018
17.	Launching English Conversational Skill for 100% students	2019
18.	Award of Rotary International Grant Project under Banani Rotary Club, Dhaka	2020
19.	Online Debate Tournament	2020
20.	Online English Conversation Competition	2020

Tables 2 to 5 provide lists of programs that VAB carried out to implement the empowerment measures in VAB Model. VAB Model has been implemented in fifty schools, but VAB also worked with an additional number of schools in specific programs. The number of schools shown in different Tables indicate this.

Empowerment Measures: Students

Table 2 shows clearly the efforts undertaken by VAB to bring the benefits of quality education not to the top students only, but to all the students of the school. The Table indicates the number of students directly benefitted by the programs. The benefits eventually transmit to the whole body of students. The computer literacy program is carried out by the teachers, following a curriculum and methodology developed by VAB. Group method was introduced to the teachers in meetings and workshops, and then demonstrated in the class so that the students also have a clear appreciation of their roles and responsibilities.

Table 2: Programs in Student Empowerment Applying VAB Model: 2012-2020

Name of Program	Program Components	Coverage		Remarks
		Students	Schools	
Scholarship	High School Scholarship	14476	84	Both in Cash and Kind
Students Club	Formation of Debate, Sports, English and Volunteering Clubs	7340	50	
Tutoring	Grade VI	8356	60	In Math & English
Training	Leadership Groups of the four Clubs	6000	50	Debate, Sports, English and Volunteers Clubs
	How to run an effective Club	1800	50	Debate, Sports, English and Volunteers Clubs
	English Conversation and Pronunciation	6500	50	Online and Onsite
	Computer Literacy	12200	50	Trained by the Schools
	Math Olympiad	1648	40	
	Group Method	25000	50	
Competition	English Poetry Recitation	29	15	
	Math Olympiad	1648	40	
	Football and Cricket	1700	52	
	Computer Proficiency	140	20	
	Spelling Bee	550	30	
	Debate	744	50	Onsite and Online
	English Conversation	250	25	Online

Empowerment Measures: Teachers

Table 3 shows the programs carried out to empower the teachers. It may be mentioned that most VAB training had components for both students and teachers. For example, for English conversation and Debate, the training given to the leadership groups for clubs was also given to the teachers. VAB found this to be an empowering force for the teachers to impart training and guidance to all students and also a factor contributing to reduction of program costs.

Table 3: Programs for Teacher Empowerment: 2012-2020

Name of Program	Program Component	Coverage		Remarks
		Teachers	Schools	
Training	English Speaking and Pronunciation	255	50	
	Basic Computer Training	1398	55	Included both Teachers and Headmasters
	Group Method Pedagogy	350	50	
Workshop	English Language and ICT	150	25	Included both Teachers Headmasters
	Debate	150	50	
	Planning for Quality Education	550	50	
Performance Award	100% pass rate of students in English and Math	225	50	In SSC examinations in different years

Empowerment Measures: School

Table 4 presents a list of initiatives taken to empower the schools through provision of essential education resources. The School is also empowered through Headmaster Seminars and meetings with community leaders and school management committee members.

Table 4: Programs for School Empowerment: 2012-2020

Name of Program	Program Component	School Coverage	Remarks
Need Based Assistance	Library Books and Furniture	114	
	Computers, Multimedia Projector and Photocopier	58	180 Computers, 24 Multimedia Projector and 6 Photocopier
	Sports Goods and Cultural Equipment	68	
	Science and Vocational Equipment	84	
Seminar	Headmaster Seminar	84	180 seminars
Performance Award	100% success of students in SSC	41	In different years
Disaster Assistance	Repair And Maintenance	7	Affected by flood and cyclone

Empowerment Measures: Community

Table 5 lists the programs carried out to connect the schools with parents and community leaders. VAB treats success in empowering this relationship as an essential pillar for sustainability.

Table 5: Programs for Community Empowerment: 2012-2020

Activity	Name of Program	Community Coverage – No of Schools	Remarks
Community Engagement	Parents' - Teachers' Meeting	60	148 meetings
	Education Fair	46	9 Education Fairs
	Mothers Assembly	15	
Meeting	Round Table with Community Leaders and Government Officials	50	
Pandemic Aid	Corona Relief	60	For 1200 Families
	Reusable Mask	17	For 1650 Individuals

Achievements of VAB

Programs in VAB Model are outcome directed. The different measures are meant for the achievement of success of students in learning, competence and citizenship. The success is indicated by the evidence of performance of students in academic, co-academic and extra-curricular activities. Table 6 describes success of students in selected areas.

Table 6: Achievements of VAB: 2012-2020

Field	Achievements	Remarks
Academic Results	100% pass rate in SSC examination from 41 schools	In different years
	100% pass rate in JSC examination in 73 schools	In different years
Debate	Division Level Debate Champion	Panchopukur Girls' High School
	Upazila Level Debate Champion	Kantalbaria AG High School Panchopukur Girls' High School

		Islami Academy High School Mahamuni Anglopali High School
Sports	National Champion In Girls' Cricket	Panchopukur Girls' High School, Nilphamary Sadar
	District Champion In football and cricket	In National School Sports Program: Panchopukur Girls' High School Safurunnesa Girls' High School
	Selection in Talent Hunt for sports	6 Students got selected from Shyamnagar, Satkhira
Math Olympiad	Math Olympiad at National level	3 Students qualified for National level competition
	Math Olympiad at Regional level	102 students in the Junior category and 35 students in the secondary category
Computer Skill	100% Computer Literacy	11 Schools
National Competition (Ministries)	Math and Science program and Talent Hunt program	5 schools champion at upazila level

Awards of VAB

In 2005, the New York City Council honored VAB and its President by name as the leading “Volunteer for services to the needy of the world”. In 2007, the Assembly of New York State “awarded the thanks and recognition of the entire community” with a citation stating that “the efforts of **Volunteers Association for Bangladesh** has touched the lives of countless people”.

In the Global Conference at Atlanta, USA in 2015 on Innovative Social Business Projects in Health, Technology and Education, organized by the Nobel Peace Laureates, VAB Model won the first prize. VAB submitted its model as a solution to poor quality education in rural Bangladesh, which can be applied to any Third World country. The model’s focus on the empowerment of the stakeholders of rural education combined with low cost, effectiveness and sustainability won the prize.

In 2020, Dr. A.T. Rafiqur Rahman, Founder and President of VAB was endowed with the Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award for his achievements, leadership and success. The citation highlighted: “As a commitment to his country, Dr. Rahman established the Volunteers Association for Bangladesh [VAB]. A nonprofit organization designed to improve the economic and social well-being of the rural people of Bangladesh, it also provides scholarships, tutoring and teacher training services, and equipment for rural high schools in the poverty-stricken country.”

Highlights of VAB Model

Quality Education for All

The essence of how Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB), an NGO, attains quality education in rural Bangladesh is

Empowerment of Stakeholders of the Rural School

Empowerment leads to Engagement, Engagement leads to Commitment, Commitment leads to Action, and Action leads to **Sustainable Quality Education**.

How VAB Empowers Stakeholders

- ❖ All VAB programs are developed through a participatory process with the stakeholders
- ❖ VAB relies on major stakeholders by tapping into unutilized resources of rural Bangladesh and bringing out the innate resources of stakeholders
- ❖ VAB develops measures empowering students, teachers, schools, and communities; trains them how to implement those measures; and then entrusts the implementation of the steps to these stakeholders

VAB Model has a track record of success enhancing students' learning, competence, and character; it is doable, affordable, and replicable.