



# Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB)

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## VAB Annual Report - 2020

Our third decade of work in Bangladesh dawned with great promise. VAB has achieved remarkable success in promoting high quality education in rural high schools in Bangladesh, concentrating on Learning improvement, Competence enhancement, and Citizenship building. The VAB staff responsible for field operation prepared detailed work plans for each cluster, consisting of five rural schools in geographical proximity. In the area of Competence enhancement, in 2019, VAB made a breakthrough in its design of an English Skills Enhancement Program for students with a goal of English Conversational Skill for 100% students of at least ten schools. Another target was Computer Literacy for 100% students of at least twenty schools. Both were realizable goals, as quite a number of schools were close to English Conversational Skills for all the students (100%) of the respective schools, and in 2019 ten schools attained the goal of Computer Literacy for 100% of their students. VAB Student Clubs and the VAB Character Education program were going to take an institutional shape.

A National Conference on Quality Education dedicated to the Mujib Centenary Celebration was chalked out. A Plan was made for a National Award Ceremony to showcase the success of the overall VAB Program which we call the VAB Model. The award of scholarships under the VAB Student Scholarship program to 1830 students in 71 schools was completed in January. During the first two and a half months of the year, other executed educational programs included: Student Club formation and organization of groups within each Club (in 37 schools); English Skills Training (in 32 schools); Computer Training (in 5 schools); Training for Math Olympiad (in 10 schools); Debate Training (in 5 schools); Meeting with English Teachers (in 14 schools); Headmasters' Seminars/Workshops (with 34 Headmasters); and Parent-Teacher Meetings (in 3 schools). The completion report for the two-year Project, funded by the Bangladesh Bank with a grant of US\$60,000.00 (45 lakh Bangladesh Taka), in 25 schools was prepared and submitted. A plan was made to present the report in person to the Governor of the Bangladesh Bank, along with a new proposal. The Governor suggested a date in April, and work on a new project proposal was initiated.

Then the Covid-19 pandemic became a stark reality and the country went into lockdown on March 19. All the educational institutions were closed, and they are still closed today. Uncertainty looms about when the Government would allow the schools to open.



Education material distribution in Nageswari, Kurigram with the presence of Upazila Secondary Education Officer Md. Kamrul Islam and ten Headmasters.

### VAB's Programs during the Covid crisis:

VAB guided its staff to develop the capacity to execute educational programs online, and the staff also perfected their use of online platforms as they went through the competitions in various aspects of English Skills Enhancement and Debate. Everything was done online – selection, orientation, training, test and assessment. Headmasters and teachers have become familiar with online activities and the use of emails and Internet. The Government was also encouraging the schools towards online activities with lectures delivered through a TV channel and posting in a central website. Of course, the primary obstacle was the availability of smart phones or tablets whereby students can have access to online facilities.

One of the first things VAB did was to link with VAB-partnered schools to find out what the schools were doing and what they could do. Four separate Zoom Meetings were held with the Headmasters in the clusters in Shyamnagar, Nageshwari, Nilphamari Sadar and Keshabpur. There were exchanges of views and information about actions taken by schools to keep the students connected with their studies. Most schools and teachers tried to connect with students and parents through mobile phones. Some schools undertook home visits while a few others tried to bring in small number of students in the school. The general impression was that most of the better than average students remained connected with studies to some extent; connection to studies by average and less than average students most likely suffered a heavy loss. Prolonged closure will surely adversely affect learning and encourage dropout.



A.N.M. Abu Jar Gifari, UNO, Shyamnagar, Satkhira distributing cash among needy families of VAB schools as Covid 19 relief.

VAB attempted to keep up the momentum at least in English conversational skills through training by VAB staff. The conversation program with university student volunteers started in 2019 was also instituted. Students from four universities are now currently involved in the program – University of Asia Pacific, Daffodils University, University of Professionals and Brac University. So far, 242 rural students have been trained by the volunteers and the VAB staff. VAB plans to set up typically a ten-member Volunteer Squad and provide each volunteer an amount of Tk.500.00 for mobile (cell phone) expenses for 450 minutes of total conversation time. Each squad with ten members

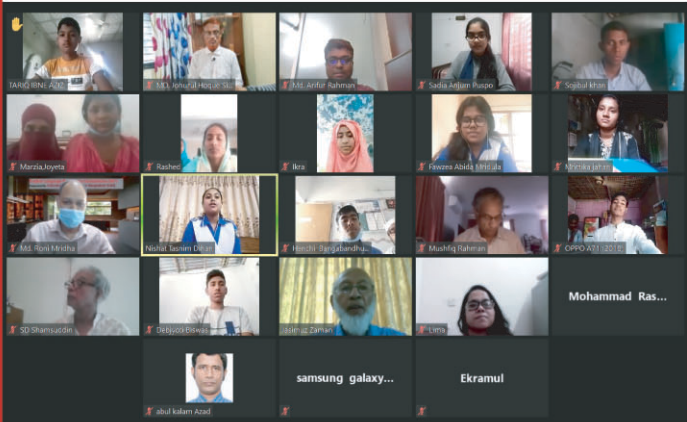
will cost Tk.5,000. VAB is heartened to have received sponsorship for several Squads already. Many of the volunteers doing the telephone conversation with the rural high school students have taken the work to heart. They wish to continue and stay with VAB in the future. A new cadre of volunteers called “Life-Long Volunteers” has been created.

VAB was also engaged in a unique collaborative debating project with governmental offices at the local level. The Shyamnagar Upazila authorities organized a Debate Competition among fourteen schools as a Public-Private Enterprise. VAB provided technical support and a local NGO, Nawanbeki Ganomukhi Foundation, supported financially. The schools were selected by the Upazila authorities based on their past performance in debate. Seven schools under the VAB Program were selected under their criteria of selection. The Competition was a contribution to the celebration and commemoration of the Mujib Centenary Year. It was a month-long event with training and competition in October. VAB is proud that the Debating Team of one VAB school, Kanthalbaria High School, became the Champion. This is indicative of the effectiveness and success of the VAB Student Club program on Debating.

### **Rotary Global Grant Project: Preparatory work.**

The Rotary Global Grant Project on “Quality education for poor rural children in Bangladesh through Teacher Training” was approved with a budget of US \$38,170 spread over three years. It is a joint international project, in which a Rotary Club in the USA, the Rotary E-Club of Heritage New York, is the International Partner and the Banani Rotary Club of Dhaka is the Host Partner. VAB is the local partner selected to implement the Project. It will have direct and immediate benefit for 200 teachers and 12,500 students in 25 rural high schools in Bangladesh, five each in five upazilas. Meanwhile, Professor Dr. Ranjit Podder of the Government Teachers Training College, Dhaka and Professor Zoynul Abedin of Cambrian High School and College prepared the training materials for English. Dr. Podder is a recognized trainer in Government training programs and Professor Abedin has been an effective trainer for VAB for the last three years.

The ICT training will be offered by VAB staff in collaboration with experts in the field. VAB identified 20 schools in four clusters and virtually briefed the Headmasters and the proposed trainees in English and ICT. The Host Partner, Banani RC, is in the process of identifying five schools in a cluster for the Project. The launching of the Project has to wait for the opening of the schools.



VAB online English Conversation Competition on the occasion of the Birth Centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

### Seizing opportunities from crisis.

VAB took advantage of the opportunities provided by the Covid crisis to further train VAB staff so that they could conduct, on their own, the “Conversation” component of VAB’s English Skills Enhancement program. All VAB staffs were trained in extended use of computers, including photo shop, data base, publication and graphic software. Covid-19 allowed the Country Director time to compose the full document for the Empowerment Model for Sustainable Quality Education in Rural High Schools in Bangladesh. Two VAB Directors helped finalize the draft as a book. It was composed in celebration of twenty years of VAB, and 2020 being the Mujib Centenary Year, it will be a fitting contribution to education by VAB to commemorate the Mujib Centenary Year. The book describes the need and rationale for working with rural high schools, the rationale and details of the individual activities, the methodology for implementing the different activities, and their expected outcomes. We trust we have been able to provide enough content and methodology to make it useful as a resource material for the educationists, policy makers, government agencies

and non-government organizations to launch programs in quality education.

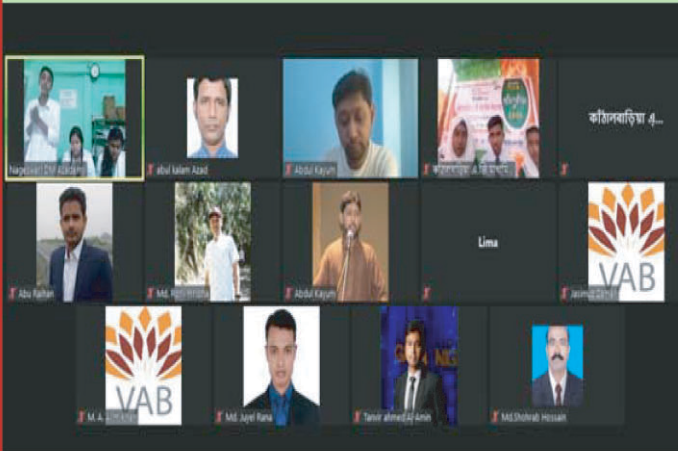
### VAB’s relief work during the Covid crisis.

VAB was deeply concerned about the miseries and economic hardships imposed by the corona virus pandemic on the most distressed among the severely disadvantaged families in the school communities with which VAB works. VAB Bangladesh submitted an appeal to raise 18 lakh takas (about US \$21,500) to provide relief to the extremely distressed families who lost their sources of income. Engr. Syed Zaki Hossain, Chairman of VAB Board of Directors, donated the full amount. With the help of sister organizations, a relief amount of Tk.1,500 was distributed to each of 1,200 families, 20 families in each of 60 VAB schools. The relief met the household needs for about two weeks for each family. The Alumni of the Chittagong Medical College living in the USA approached VAB to help them disburse payment for materials and equipment to help treat patients in the College Hospital. VAB Bangladesh opened a separate project with the NGO Bureau to carry out the work. The project was completed successfully. VAB was pleased to be a part of this noble venture, even though it involved quite a bit of work. VAB also did not charge any administrative and implementation costs. Two other relief projects of VAB included providing assistance for three teachers who faced serious financial problem; and distribution of 3,300 masks among students, with the help of volunteers in Shyamnagar, Satkhira, complying with all needed precautions. The masks were purchased with funds provided by the Rotary Club of Wheelers Hill in Melbourne, Australia, at the initiative of Rotarian Amin Rahman.

### Financial matters.

Despite the severe financial problems caused by the pandemic, in 2020, VAB USA raised \$126,794 from 112 individual philanthropists. This amount and the number of donors are comparable to those in previous years. Some donors gave more than once, up to 3 or 4 times. Perhaps this is an example of Covid bringing out the best in us. VAB USA made a remittance of \$58,000

to VAB Bangladesh for program execution. VAB USA's expenses in the year were about \$2,500. VAB Bangladesh had a total of about \$167,000 for the year during which it spent about \$103,000, thus leaving the balance of \$64,000 for 2021. Significant proportion of the fund was raised in Bangladesh.



VAB online final debate competition: Nageswari D.M. academy vs Kanthalbaria A.G. high school, Shyamnagar, Satkhira.

## Organizational matters.

The 2020 Annual Meeting of the VAB Board of Directors was held by Zoom on December 19. One of the most significant developments in the Meeting was a pledge of an annual contribution of \$50,000 for the coming ten years to the VAB Endowment Fund, by the Chairman, Mr. Syed Zaki Hossain. Another was a conclusion by the Board that “in view of the aging leadership in the USA, there is a need for younger members of the Board to gradually assume leadership roles”.

It is with great honor and pride that we announce that Marquis Who's Who, the world's premier publisher of biographical profiles, has presented, on November 3, Dr. A T Rafiqur Rahman, VAB's Founder and President, with the Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award, for his “achievements, leadership qualities, and the credentials and successes he has accrued in his field”.

On April 28, 2020, Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury passed away. Professor Choudhury had been a tireless worker in many spheres of national development. In general education at high school level, he made significant contribution to the promotion of Math and Science, two areas of special interest for VAB. Professor Choudhury had been the Chairman of the VAB Board of Advisers in Bangladesh for the last ten years, lending immense support in its activities. The entire VAB family will miss his work and his charismatic personality.

VAB also mourns the loss on June 1, 2020 of Mr. Khandaker Tajuddin Ahmed, VAB's former Treasurer from 2015 to 2019. Mr. Ahmed was with VAB, in one capacity or another, since 2010. In his career, he had the unique honor of working under three Presidents of Bangladesh.

Dr. Sultan Hafeez Rahman, an internationally reputed professional in development economics was chosen as the Chairman of the VAB Board of Advisers. The term of Members of the old Board was renewed for the next five years. One new member, Professor M. Kaykobad, a former Professor of BUET and currently Distinguished Professor at BRAC University was inducted into the Board.

## Concluding remarks.

A study of the activities carried out in 2020 by the Executing Office, VAB Bangladesh, shows that a total of 41 activities were accomplished in 2020 in 72 rural schools in seventeen upazilas representing the whole of the country, from east to west, from north to south. Work was impeded because of Covid-19, yet the inauguration of the third decade of VAB augurs well for the decade and beyond. With you by our side, we will go further and deeper.

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

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