



Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB)

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VAB Annual Report - 2019

In 2019, VAB completed 20 years of service to underprivileged rural students of Bangladesh. From a modest beginning in 2000, awarding scholarships to 10 students each in 10 rural schools, over its two decades of work, VAB's services benefited 300,000 students in 115 rural high schools in 30 districts and 52 upazilas. Responding to the dire needs of the country and the rural schools, VAB's focus has been on helping rural students get quality education, attaining *improved learning, *enhanced competence, and *developed citizenship traits. VAB has been implementing a combination of activities – curricular and co-curricular; aimed at classroom learning-teaching methods and contents; designed for better exam results and developed life skills.

A US international Charity devoting itself solely to high school education in rural Bangladesh, relying mostly on donations from individual philanthropists, without any significant institutional funding, VAB has had an amazing journey over the past twenty years. The leaders of the Organization are to be commended. This unique NGO registered with the authorities of both the USA and Bangladesh is the brainchild of a humanitarian Bangladeshi expatriate, academic and international civil servant Dr. A T Rafiqur Rahman. As the Founder and President, Dr. Rahman has been a strong force behind the amazing journey of VAB. As its Country Director since 2010, Dr. Jasimuz Zaman played the leading role in developing and guiding VAB's Quality Education Drive. **The basic strength of VAB, however, lies in its beneficiaries and benefactors.**

Reflection on the august occasion:

First, let us give an account, in synopsis, of what VAB did during these two decades. VAB

- **Awarded** 18,380 high school scholarships and 1,032 college scholarships
- **Tutored** 14,163 Grade VI students in Math & English and 8,708 SSC Examinees
- **Trained** 12,200 students in computers, 1,618 students for Math Olympiads, Students in 50 schools in debating, sports, volunteerism, and Student Club formation, 1,600 students in 40 schools in English Pronunciation and Speaking, 1,777 teachers in English, Math, Science and Computers, and 205 Teachers in English Pronunciation and Speaking
- **Provided** library books in 90 high schools, science lab equipment in 80, computers in 92, furniture in 41, multimedia projectors in 15, photocopiers in 6, sports goods in 49, and cultural equipment in 3



Rayigonj Girl's High School, Nageshwari, Kurigram

- **Organized** 60 Debating Clubs and 45 Sports Clubs, Volunteer Squad Workshops in 28 schools, Teachers' Workshops in 55 schools, Workshops for students for Math Olympiads, Workshops for Student Club formation and management, annual Seminars for Headmasters, School Planning Workshops, Parent-Teacher Meetings Women Empowerment Programs, Community Linkage Programs, and Education Fairs in 111 schools altogether

• **Introduced** Vocational Programs in 6 schools

As for the beneficiaries, in developing the programs, VAB worked with stakeholders of rural education – students, teachers, school officials, and the communities. In turn, VAB aims at strengthening the engagement of all stakeholders in its programs, ensuring their effectiveness and sustainability. Suitable for rural conditions, VAB's programs are bottom-up, proven, replicable and affordable; there is also an emphasis on self-sufficiency and minimization of dependence on external sources.

The beneficiaries found VAB's programs effective and providing practical benefits to them. The parents of many of the children VAB helped are marginal farmers, day laborers and street-side vendors, or single parents, usually female house workers.



Students of Khatalbaria AG High School in Shyamnagar, Satkhira are attending a class

Sadly, some children are orphans. For these children, VAB offers scholarship in cash and kind; it also connects them to other sources of assistance. For most parts, classroom attendance increased, dropout decreased, pass rate of students in public exams like JSC and SSC increased, and their performance level improved. Eight schools witnessed computer literacy for 100% of students, teachers and staff, and many schools noted improvement in computer literacy and English proficiency among their students and teachers.

Students are accomplishing an unprecedented manner in co-curricular activities, particularly in math, science, English, computers, debate, sports, athletics and cultural programs. Many of these competitions are organized by the Ministry of Education. Some schools are leading not only at the upazila level but also making an impact at the district and divisional levels, and in one case, a VAB school became the National Champion in girls' cricket. Independent evaluation confirmed the positives to the beneficiaries. Stakeholders gave encouraging feedbacks. Sister schools in the vicinity look with awe at the drive and success of VAB school students in English, computer, debate and sports performance. More rural schools and communities are now pleading to VAB to work with them.

The benefactors are attracted to the mission and vision of VAB: to help the underprivileged in the disadvantaged segment of the country's population in attaining a better life through education and training. They expressed admiration for the indomitability of the NGO in taking on the challenges, and in successfully addressing the inscrutable issue of quality education through experience, expertise and experimentation, particularly introduction of innovation. They appreciated the value of voluntarism in the face of rampant commercialism. The striving of the Organization for ensuring continuity and sustainability of its mission and work in the future was also found forward-looking and worth supporting – VAB's benefactors enabled it to establish its own office and training facility in Dhaka, and Endowment and Trust Funds.

Looking ahead:

Our reflections on our leaders, beneficiaries and benefactors inspire us to continue our mission and our work in the third decade and beyond, to help increasing number of underprivileged rural children, and to contribute effectively to the enrichment of human resources of the country. **VAB solicits strengthening and expansion of support from its critical stakeholders at both ends – resource mobilization and resource utilization.**

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