

2016 VAB Annual Board Meeting:
Sunday, May 15, 2016: 11 AM
Star Kabab & Restaurant: Basement: Adjacent to Sagor restaurant.
168-21 Hillside Ave. Jamaica, NY 11432

MEETING SUMMARY

Attendees:

Dr. Delwar Hossain, Dr. ATR Rahman, Mr. Mohammed Saleh, Mr. Nurul Alam, Mr. Mahbub Ahmad, Mr. ANM Mostafa Khondkar, Mr. Syed Zaki Hossain, Mr. Asabur Rahman, and Dr. Ehsanur Rahman.

Documents:

The following Meeting working documents had been circulated earlier by email to all the members of the Board of Directors:

- Proceedings of the Annual Board Meeting, 28 June, 2015 (Document AGM/2016/1)
- Presidents Report: Brief Comments for 2016 VAB Annual Meeting (Document AGM /2016/2)
- Annual Report (2015) by the Country Director (AGM/2016/3)
- VAB Treasurer's report , May 2016
- Presentation of 2016 Budget

Proceedings:

Item 1:

The Chairman welcomed all Board members for their kind presence and opened the meeting.

Item 2:

The Proceedings of the Annual Board Meeting held on 28 June, 2015 (Document AGM/2016/1) was approved unanimously.

Item 3:

2015 VAB Annual Report by the President including Report by the Country Director (AGM/2016/2 and AGM/2016/3)

The President highlighted the main points in the Country Director's Report. Evaluation of 3 Clusters of 5 Schools in Nilphamari, Kurigram and Sathkhira showed: increased access to education; decreased dropout; increased pass rate; and excellence in grades. Teachers are better able to teach and more computer literate. Students are more active in sports, debate and other co-curricular activities including volunteering. Math Olympiad is conducive to student interest in Math and there is better link with parents and community.

Recent visits to Nilphamari and Sathkhira Clusters by VAB Team led by Country Director confirms the evaluation findings as well as increased acceptance by the school and the community of VAB's approach and its affordable improvement Model with four empowerments:

students, teachers, schools and community linkage. The biggest hurdle to expand this Model as seen by VAB-BD is Fund Constraint.

A query was raised as to whether there was information on what percentage of the students achieved Golden A+ GPA as that is now the new standard of outstanding achievement. The question was whether VAB should set the benchmark of excellence at Golden A+, without which students cannot advance farther. The President confirmed that such data is available. However, the meeting recognized that VAB should be realistic in its expectations. It would not be realistic to expect that students at a school in a remote village (with marginal support from VAB) will be able to demonstrate performance at the same level as a school in a relatively more accessible location which may have better infrastructure, faculty and support system.

The participants felt that the important criterion was overall improvement of student performance over time and that the benchmarks may vary by school depending upon their initial level.

The President then presented some salient points of the VAB Annual Report which he divided into three headings:

i) Context of using 2016 as Transition Year for VAB

Program wise: VAB's Model completes 5-year cycle and shows high potential of becoming affordable and effective;

Organizationally: VAB has a new group of Directors in both USA and BD for four years

Sustainability: VAB has its own office, part of which is rented out for income. VAB has an Endowment Fund (\$100,000) and a Trust Fund from which income is used for current budget; Political Stability in BD is expected to last for the next 2/3 years.

ii) VAB's Role as Model Builder:

VAB's Model, based on 16 years of work currently works in 67 schools in various stages of intervention. In this Transition year VAB will review performance, capacity and willingness of each school to determine their participation in implementing the full VAB Model and prepare a school-specific program with a time-line and budget. 60 schools are expected to qualify.

iii) VAB's Role as Model Promoter:

VAB aims to expand its Model to at least 100 new schools for two reasons: to cover at least 1% of the 16,000 high schools in BD to assure credibility of its Model and for protecting its pioneering role in helping rural schools. VAB needs to raise additional \$100,000 to \$150,000 and introduce strategic publicity to establish and promote key linkages in Bangladesh.

Critical Challenges /Opportunities for VAB:

Two challenges: dedicated leaders and infrequent meetings.

Suggested Modalities: active engagement of Directors/ Patrons in publicity and fundraising; annual fundraising event; developing access to Second-Generation Bangladeshi Americans; publicizing VAB in US cities with large concentration of Bangladeshis; Organizing the Second Campaign for significant addition to VAB's Endowment Fund; and improving management practices including Virtual Meeting.

Discussion: In the discussion following the presentation of the report, the following issues were raised which needed urgent attention by the Board.

Potential constraint as a model promoter- VAB needs to upscale its model. This would require a stronger interface with the Public Sector. There needs to be a strong interaction at two levels: the education ministry and the policy level to disseminate the success of the model and its consequent benefits at the district, Upazilla and local level for the recognition of the success of the model and its potential uptake by the education ministry. Without the acceptance of the model by the government, the scale will never be reached. Although the Public Sector officials may have been involved at the local level, it has not been programmatically significant and it was not with the objective of getting support for promotion or up scaling of the model. It was felt that there is the need to get involvement from the top-down i.e. to liaise with Ministry officials and to convince them to support VAB programs. The Country Director's views on this aspect would be useful for further thinking.

Institutional sustainability and organization of work - This issue has been in the discussion in various Management Committee and Board meetings. The substantial workload (currently being mostly shared between the President and the Treasurer) requires an organized structured support mechanism so that any succession of responsibilities may pose least disruption institutionally. This was amply argued for by many Board members (refer to email by Pete Christerson dated May 14, 2016,). It was proposed that for sustainability, VAB-USA needs to hire a an employee – perhaps a college graduate for about 20 hours a week to do the legwork needed for corporate fundraising as well as other organizational support work. Without this investment, VAB may not be able to proceed to the next level. All Board members present supported the proposal and considered that this arrangement will help VAB to strengthen its institutional base to make the leap to next higher level of operation and performance.

Involvement of Younger generation in VAB Volunteer base: This issue has always been raised in the past but little progress was achieved. There was a suggestion that a few young people be brought together and given the opportunity to create their own sub-organization with minimal intervention from and reporting to VAB. They would devise their own working methods and spread the word about VAB and be involved in fundraising either as whole or for specific projects or both. Such an initiative had been launched in the past but somehow failed to take hold. It was mentioned that there had been a good number active young volunteers in the past that moved on to pursue their own commitments and somehow the youth interface slowly faded away. All participants felt there was a need for further discussion at the management Committee level on this aspect to explore more concrete action strategy.

Following decisions were taken after the discussion.

Decision 1: It was decided to explore the options of hiring a part time employee for VAB to carry out critical legwork needed for corporate fundraising as well as other organizational support work. Mr. Zaki Hossain , the Vice President and the Secretary will prepare an option analysis with the details of job description, reporting mechanism, accountabilities and financial implications and submit to the next Management Committee meeting.

In this context the Board also approved the gracious offer of a room by Mr. Zaki Hossain (Board Member) in his Office at 505 Acorn Street, Deer Park, NY 11729 to house this staff of VAB and use of the space for VAB official purposes. Mr. Hossain stated that his office would also provide basic services. The Board members accepted the offer and thanked Mr. Hossain for his generous gesture. The Management committee will assess the performance of this office and the personnel structure for a year and look into the option of eventually transforming it into a VAB Corporate Office set up.

Decision 2: The President also introduced a motion to add a new portfolio in the Management Committee entitled ‘Special Initiatives and Events’. He also moved a motion to co-opt Mr. Zaki Hossain into the VAB Management Committee and assign the new portfolio. The Board of Directors unanimously agreed to the proposal and co-opted Mr. Zaki Hossain as a member of the VAB Management Committee with responsibility for ‘Special Initiatives and Events’

Decision 3: The Board decided that a fund raising event will be organized in 2016 with a bigger target of raising funds. Mr. Zaki Hossain was assigned the responsibility to organize the 2016 fund-raising event in September/October. He will form an organizing committee and will determine the location, date/time and direct all logistics. Mr. Hossain hoped that this year an effort will be made to organize the event in a different format to enthuse the guests for a deeper commitment to VAB.

Item: 4:

Treasurer’s Report: In the absence of the Treasurer Mr. Mati Pal, Mr. Ahmad introduced the Treasurer’s Report. Mr. Pal had been hurt a few days before the meeting and could not attend. The Treasurer’s report stated that VAB started the year with \$106,900 in total in the Savings and the Checking Accounts. There was a 2015 year-end balance of \$19,322 in the Endowment Fund (to be noted that \$100,000 from the Endowment Fund was sent to the Endowment Fund of VAB Bangladesh, which earns 10%-12% annually). In the first quarter of 2016, donation of \$19,468 was received, and there was an expenditure of \$797. A remittance of \$30,000 was made to the VAB Bangladesh Office.

The Treasurer’s report reiterated a number of fundamental finance-related issues::

- VAB’s donor base is shrinking – some ways must be found to expand it.
- Both in the USA and in Bangladesh, VAB’s success with institutional grant has been extremely limited – some ways must be devised to turn the tide.
- There is a feeling that online funding has a great potential -- but effective means to realize that potential must be developed.
- After some initial success, the contribution to the Endowment Fund is also drying up -- the Endowment Fund offers all the “causes” that make life and after-life worthy and thus, should be extremely attractive to thoughtful mortals.
- On the expenditure side, the greatest good news shared with the Board of Directors is that their contribution is sufficient to take care of the overhead costs of both VAB-USA and VAB BD – this achievement must be maintained at present and in the future.

The Board of Directors thanked Mr. Pal for his substantive report. However, it was pointed out that a total financial statement of income and expenditure for the reporting year is a customary attachment to the report for records. It should be attached to complete the report. They also extended to him their best wishes on his upcoming surgery and wished him a quick and full recovery.

Item 5:

The 2016 Budget Presentation (document AGM/2016/4 Budget 2016) highlighted three Main Points:

Budget Summary: Total Budget: US \$168,401 for 67 schools. VAB Model Programs in 34 schools take 81.6%; VAB Scholarship Program in 23 schools take 16.0% and VAB Introductory Program in 14 schools take 2.4%.

Expenditure Summary: Educational Programs -68.6%; Research/Evaluation-5.9%; Salary - 17.8%; and support items-7.6%.

Sources of Funding Summary: VAB US \$112,247 (66.6%); VAB BD: US \$56,154 (33.3%). Endowment Income is 8.2% of VAB-USA

Decision 4. The Board adopted the proposed 2016 budget.

Item 6:

Open Discussion Items:

Additional fundraising avenues: Mr. Ahmad announced that registration had been completed with the Amazon Foundation, so that anyone who buys products from Amazon.com can now make a one-time designation of VAB (must use full name – Volunteers Association for Bangladesh) as their favorite charity. Amazon will then donate 0.5% of all of their purchases to directly to VAB's bank account at the end of every quarter. The only requirement is that buyers sign up on smile.amazon.com and use that site to buy their products. The VAB website will also feature a prominent link to the Amazon smile site with all instruction. All participants felt that this could be a new way to involve young people.

Decision 5: Mr. Ahmad will prepare a brochure about the Amazon program for circulation and also update the website to include this information.

Future meeting venues: The Vice Chairman suggested that the venue of future Annual meetings should be a more convenient location with better facilities including easy parking. Since the meeting is paid for by the participants, it could be held at a more decent environment and location (avoid sub-standard basements).

Decision 6: Mr. ANM Mostafa Khondker and Mr. Ahmad will look into this and suggest an alternate location for consideration by the Management Committee by February 2017.

Item 8:

All matters having been addressed, the Vice Chairman, Mr. Mohammed Saleh adjourned the meeting.