

2017 VAB Annual Board Meeting:
Sunday, September 10, 2017, Deer Park, NY

MEETING SUMMARY

Attendees:

Mr. Mahbub Ahmad (Secretary), Mr. Nurul Alam (Executive Vice-President), Dr. Sajeda Amin, Mr. Khurshid Anwar, Dr. Shamim Begum, Dr. Fazlur Rahman Chowdhury, Dr. Maksud Chowdhury, Mrs. Siobhan Hogan, Mr. Syed Zaki Hossain, Dr. Delwar Hussain (Chairman), Mr. Syed Samiul Islam, Mr. Anm Mostafa Khandaker, Ms. Rakiba Kibria, (called in), Mr. Mohammad Monzur, Mr. Matilal Pal (Treasurer), Dr. ATR Rahman (President), Mr. Mizanur M. Rahman, Mr. M. Saeed, Mr. Mohammad Saleh (Vice-Chairman, Presiding over the Meeting).

Documents:

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

Past Documents:

1. Proceedings of last Annual Meeting.
2. 2016 VAB Annual Report.

Background Materials:

3. GOB's Plan for investing \$16 b for Secondary Education in next Five Years.
4. Suggestions for Strengthening VAB from Dr. Iftekhar Mahmood, Founder/President, Hope Foundation, Miami.
5. Remaking VAB- a Detailed Note from Country Director. Two sections from the Note: Immediate consideration for 2018 Programs by VAB Board and Branding VAB is included under Meeting Documents.

Meeting Documents:

6. Country Director's (CD) Report on VAB–BD work.
7. Recommendation for Program for 2018: 40 new schools in four Clusters. Branding VAB: Excerpts from Remaking VAB; Suggestion of TEC (Technology, English & Citizenship).
8. Treasurer's Report: 2016 financial reports; Program/Endowment Funds; Fundraising 2017.

Proceedings:

The President, Dr. ATR Rahman welcomed all Board members for their kind presence and opened the meeting. In his introductory remarks, the President said that VAB Management is accountable to the Board which will provide guidance. He highlighted the fact that the Government of Bangladesh is making investment of \$ 16 billion for secondary education in next five years. He noted that VAB programs are gaining support and popularity in high schools in Shymnangar Upazilla, Satkhira, and

collaboration with agencies, NGOs such as Agami, Teach for BD is increasing. Dr. Rahman emphasized the importance of continuing efforts to make VAB a sustainable organization. He said it was important to publicize the evaluation of VAB Programs at the end of year. He underlined the urgent need to revamp VAB Trust in Bangladesh and organize its first fundraising Event later this year.

He also outlined the challenges facing the organization - limited number of volunteers; limited role of Directors as spokespersons; stagnation in fund-raising both for operations and endowment and a lack of full understanding between VAB-USA and VAB-BD. He outlined the need for systematic collaboration.

In the absence of the Chairman, the President handed over the meeting to Vice-Chairman, Mr. Mohammad Saleh to preside.

Mr. Saleh asked all those present to introduce themselves. He then asked the Secretary, Mr. Mahbub Ahmad to present a summary of the last Board Meeting. Following the brief summary of the last Board Meeting provided by Mr. Ahmad, Mr. Saleh requested a motion to adopt the minutes of the last Board Meeting.

Decision 1: The minutes of the last Board Meeting held on May 15, 2016 were unanimously adopted.

Mr. Zaki Hossain announced that Mr. Nibir Khan was organizing a fund-raising event that evening for the flood victims in Bangladesh at Queens Palace.

Mr. Saleh suggested shortening the meeting agenda and to conclude the meeting in 1 hour. He also requested that VAB should consider using conference call facilities (for Board and other meetings) which might minimize time and logistic hassles for the attendees. He asked for clarification about Cluster Schools - 5 schools within 10 miles. He said the Board should have 5-year performance results of the Cluster schools. Those present supported all points made with the expectation that the suggestions be complied with in the future.

Mr. Khurshid Anwar mentioned that he sponsors 3 schools in Comilla. He wondered why the Comilla Board SSC pass rate this year was 50% whereas the national pass rate was over 90%.

Dr. Sajeda Amin offered an explanation that there was earlier fallout about high pass rates which could have resulted in the sudden drop in the Comilla Board pass rate. He organization 'Population Council' She runs an organization called *Balikipapan*. She suggested using drop-out rate rather than pass rate as an indicator of performance. Mr. Anwar added that girls in grade 9 and 10 are given in marriage and drop out.

The President said that reducing drop-out rate was the first priority for VAB when it launched its program in 2000 and continues to be one of the main objectives today. Mr. Nurul Alam further emphasized that the VAB's program effectiveness indicators in the

schools go well beyond pass rate and dropout rates, which were initially tracked. VAB now introduced a composite set of indicators for tracking learning effectiveness comprising competencies in core subjects, acquisition of civic values, social and extra-curricular skills .The evaluation of VAB program which is nearing completion will address all these issues in an evidence-based analysis of these composite indicators .

At this point, the Chairman, Dr. Delwar Hossain arrived and he requested the Vice-Chairman Mr. Saleh to continue presiding over the meeting.

The Vice-Chairman said it was important to know what graduates from VAB-supported schools are currently doing. There should be follow-up to see how they can be used for future publicity. In this context VAB-BD is organizing a get-together of its past scholarship recipients in October / November this year. The Treasurer, Mr. Mati Pal indicated that it was a big problem tracking these graduates down. VAB-BD had opened a FaceBook Account for ex-students of VAB-supported schools.

Mr. Zaki Hossain said there is no such thing as a "VAB School". If we take a school as a model - such as Guava Garden in Sylhet - and develop it as a model of how to prepare students with knowledge, this model can then be replicated. This may be called a VAB Model School. We must pick on a sustainable model so as to continue on a sound financial footing.

He emphasized VAB's financial sustainability (as a basis for overall sustainability) should be a high priority of the management. He said that the financial income-expenditure pattern of the recent past years do not bode well for building reserves or assets annually, which cumulatively would generate earning in future years for funding major part of the program. He said that annual overhead expenditure of over \$30,000 in VAB-BD and the increasing cost of expanded program is perhaps leaving no room for credible reserve building or asset acquisition. He suggested that expenditure in future years should be planned based on allocating funds for programs, overhead and setting aside a fixed proportion as reserves every year. He then indicated that it is important to optimize current fundraising methods but more serious efforts for corporate fund-raising is of vital importance for sustainability.

Decision 2: In this context, the Board decided to establish a 3-member Finance Committee to assess the whole financial sustainability issue based on current budgeting strategy, structure and process including prospective additional avenues to expand fundraising. The Finance Committee would also review funding implications for proposed program expansion, VAB Model School and VAB Endowment/Trust Fund. The 3 members are Mr. Syed Zaki Hossain, Mr. Nurul Alam, and Mr. Matilal Pal.

Ms. Rakiba Kibria (on phone) agreed with Mr. Hossain about long-term sustainability. We must have solid evaluation to use as back-up. She suggested using the Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide for outcome-oriented

evaluation and we must work out the indicators by first deciding how we internally want to measure success.

Mr. Nurul Alam asked what should we measure to monitor change? We are providing some assistance to schools and are not really able to concretely say our input has achieved a given result.

Ms. Siobhan Hogan said it was important to capture qualitative data. We should have a clear Mission Statement with a 5-page hand-out indicating our 1-year and 3 to 5-year strategic business plan.

Mr. Samiul Islam emphasized the need for a strong Mission Statement.

Mr. Ahmad drawing attention to a concern, stated in previous meetings by members, about the constraint faced by many in explaining VAB's mission and goals in a concise and crisp fashion to third parties or prospective patrons. He suggested that VAB should develop a 30 second "elevator pitch", a model used by many well-known non-profits for advocacy and fund raising purposes.

Ms. Kibria said Bangladeshi donors are not exhausted but different communication plans need to be effectuated to target various groups of expatriate Bangladeshis.

The Vice-Chairman suggested that a retreat about the ultimate mission of VAB, fund-raising and 'elevator pitch' or punch-line should be organized. We have to invest money to get the money for the Organization's future. Following detailed discussion, it was agreed that a one-day Retreat may be organized with detailed planning sometime in March/ April 2018.

There was some discussion about the qualifications of a Director. Three qualities were mentioned - wealth, work and wisdom. Of these 3, 2 qualities are must for a Director.

Dr. Maksud Chowdhury spoke about a Pilot project for health monitoring of school students. He had some discussion with VAB official about this activity in two VAB partnered schools sponsored by Dr. Chowdhury last December. The idea would be to get neighborhood doctors to enroll by providing incentives, a certificate or monetary benefit from the project. He will create and circulate guidelines for this proposed project. Dr. Chowdhury is also in contact with Dr. Golam Mostafa, a VAB Advisor in Bangladesh who is working on similar services in Agha Khan Foundation supported schools in BD.

Finance:

Treasurer Mr. Mati Pal, presented the financial report. He indicated that local donations appear to be substantial, but come from 4 sources, two of which are of US origin: (a) Income from Trust Fund financed from the Endowment Fund of VAB-USA, (b) US Donors paying in Taka, (c) Bangladeshi institutions, and (d) Bangladeshi individual donors. All VAB-BD staff expenses were put in Programs rather than

Administration. Seven paid professionals are engaged in program activities in VAB-BD. If 50% of local staff salaries are taken into administration, then total administrative cost becomes 21%.

As for VAB-USA, donations raised for programs were \$100,600 and contributions to the Endowment Fund were \$77,000. Expenditures for VAB-USA was \$4,000 - most of it to the restaurant for the VAB- BHI fundraiser. Overhead expenditure in the US is 2%.

He said, as for the VAB-BD Endowment Fund it is practically closed because the Bangladesh Government will not allow any money to be sent to the Endowment Fund. The idea now is to strengthen the VAB-BD Trust Fund and treat it as an Endowment Fund. To this end, the aim is 2-fold: raise as much cash as possible in USA and send to the Trust Fund in Bangladesh, and mobilize contributions in Bangladesh, in cash and in kind, for it.

Mr. Pal indicated that we have 84 donors this year. Organizationally, 700 appeal letters requesting donation and more than 400 publicity letters went out. Thanks to Mr. Anm Khandaker and his 2 children.

Mr. Zaki Hossain suggested that the 20 Board Members should give \$5,000 each, either themselves or by getting donations. Ms. Rakiba Kibria suggested that VAB should openly state that Board Members cover all administrative costs. This should be a change in marketing tactic. Major Donors must be made to feel special. Only about 10-15% of the donations are from micro-donors.

Decision 2: It was unanimously decided that the Directors would each continue to give \$2,000 per annum and also get another \$2,000 in donations.

At this point, Vice-Chairman Mr. Mohammed Saleh had to leave the meeting for another appointment. The Chairman Dr. Delwar Hossain took over.

Mr. Mohammad Manzur proposed that he is interested in having a relationship with VAB Trust in Bangladesh, which he discussed with the President. Although he was a VAB Patron for some years, he came from Albany, driving about four hours to attend the Meeting to learn more about the working of VAB. He plans to donate a lump sum to the VAB Trust Fund. The income from his donation is to be used in part for VAB programs and in part for scholarships and other support for students at the college he sponsors as well. He will contact the President with more specific ideas. The President informed the Board Members that there are now four such partnerships in VAB Trust in BD.

Mr. Mizan Rahman suggested that VAB should consider and actively promote the IRS-approved **Charitable Remainder Trust** (CRT) which is an irrevocable trust that generates a potential income stream for the donor to the CRT, or other beneficiaries, with the remainder of the donated assets going to the donor's favorite charity or charities.

Publicity:

Secretary, Mr. Mahbub Ahmad gave a summary of the VAB website, stating that new content is needed to revamp the VAB website. The key requirements are content structure, bearing in mind usability, content creation, bearing in mind the necessity of brevity and imagery, and content uploading. He said Mr. Mati Pal and Ms. Siobhan Hogan had developed a general structure of the content. Simply rearranging current content would not be enough – there is a need for new content, particularly news and stories on activities on the ground, for which contribution of material from BAB-BD is essential.

Mr. Ahmad also indicated that VAB had received \$72 last quarter from Amazon.com as part of VAB's participation in the Amazon Smile Program.

Ms. Hogan indicated that she would devote Friday mornings to ensure that the VAB Facebook page is kept updated.

Highlighting the need for info-graphics, Mr. Zaki Hossain indicated he will make available the services of a good graphics artist to assist in graphics for the website. He also suggested the services of a web site technician may also be made available if needed by VAB

It was decided that Mr. Mahbub Ahmad, Mr. Matilal Pal and Ms. Siobhan Hogan will work on revamping the contents of the VAB Website.

Other Matters:

The President suggested that donations be sought for flood-affected schools in Bangladesh. He circulated an Appeal at the Meeting initially suggested by the Country Director for participant's consideration.

The next Management Committee meeting will be held in November 2017.

In December 2017, there will be a meeting in Dhaka with Government officials.

The next Board Meeting date will be in February/March 2018, potentially a half-day or full-day retreat.

Closing:

The Executive Vice-President, Mr. Nurul Alam thanked Mr. Zaki Hossain for generously offering the meeting venue and for hosting the luncheon. He thanked all Board Members for attending and preciously contributing to the deliberations.

The Meeting adjourned at 1:35pm and was rounded off by a lunch also kindly hosted by Mr. Zaki Hussain.