

Annual Meeting of the VAB Board of Directors (Zoom Session), December 19, 2020
Minutes

Participants: Mr. Syed Zaki Hossain, Chairman, VAB Board of Directors, Dr. Fazlur R Chowdhury, Vice Chairman, Mr. M Nurul Alam, Dr. Maksud Chowdhury, Mr. Peter von Christierson, Ms. Sabina Hai, Mr. Samiul Islam, Mr. Matilal Pal, Dr. A T R Rahman, Mr. Mizanur M Rahman, Ms. Nashra Rahman, Mr. Mohammed Saleh, Mr. Abdus Sikder

Chairman: Mr. Syed Zaki Hossain, Chairman, Board of Directors of VAB

Prayer: The meeting started with a prayer offered by Mr. M Nurul Alam, Executive Vice President of VAB. In the trying times this year, prayers were offered for those who left us. For those who are fortunate and still carrying on with their lives, the Almighty's mercy and blessing was sought for the safety and security of their families and the rest of mankind.

Remembering Prof. Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, past Chairman of the Advisory Board of VAB Bangladesh: A minute of silence was observed in memory of Prof. Chowdhury who passed away on April 28.

Documentation for the meeting: In order to facilitate the meeting, a number of documents were circulated in advance among the Directors, Associate Directors and VAB Officials. These include Minutes of the 2019 Annual Board Meeting, reports by the President, the Secretary-cum-Treasurer, as well as the Country Director, financial statement of VAB Bangladesh and status of the VAB Trust.

Minutes of 2019 Annual Board Meeting: The Minutes were approved without any modification.

President's report: VAB's Founder and President Dr. A T R Rahman presented a report on selective activities that the VAB Office carried out during the difficult and challenging year because of the pandemic. He talked about contacts with VAB officials, donors, patrons and other individuals and agencies via telephone, internet and mail in USA. He noted his interaction with VAB Office in Bangladesh offering support and guidance. He highlighted raising funds for Covid relief of about \$20,000 from the Directors. Another Covid relief activity was implementing a Partnership Project with the Chittagong Medical College Alumni of USA.

The President then talked about important "Transition Issues" such as the selection of the Chairman of the Advisory Board of VAB Bangladesh, Dr. Sultan Hafeez Rahman, the preparation for the selection of the next Country Director to be accomplished by mid-2021, and the need for new arrangements for the VAB Office. He concluded his report by noting attention to VAB overall fundraising process and issues including its financial sustainability and drawing attention to the process of reviewing and guiding the work of VAB Country Office.

Secretary and Treasurer's Report: VAB's Secretary-cum-Treasurer, Mr. Matilal Pal, presented his report. He focused on the finances of VAB overall, including both VAB USA and VAB Bangladesh. He informed the participants that VAB has over half a million dollars in investment (Current total in USA and BD in USD:\$552,000) and a balance of \$170,000 available for programs and other expenses in Bangladesh and the USA. As advised by the Board last year, VAB is progressing well in strengthening financial security through safe investment and deposits over time while keeping sufficient fund for current operations. As for funds raised this year in the USA, despite the severe financial problems as well as perpetual anxiety among VAB's donors and patrons caused by the pandemic, VAB did fairly well. As of mid-December, it raised nearly \$80,400 from 94 individual philanthropists, who include a number of Directors. If VAB receives Director's Annual Contributions from all the Directors, as they pledged to pay before the end of December, VAB may most likely add another \$20,000, reaching its expected annual donation target of \$100,000. VAB Bangladesh raised \$16,200 in donation from local sources. (**Not sure about this figure**)

On the expenditure side, \$58,000 were remitted from VAB USA to VAB Bangladesh for the purpose of program execution. VAB USA's own expenses were about \$2,000. As for VAB Bangladesh, it 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.

Country Director's (CD's) report: The CD's report, which includes a "List of Activities" as an Appendix, details all the relief activities and the educational activities of VAB Bangladesh during the year. The relief activities include cash relief for distressed families of VAB school communities, assistance for distressed teachers, mask distribution and partnership with the Chittagong Medical College Alumni of USA, mentioned in the President's report. **Cash relief for distressed families was given to the tune of of Tk.1,500 to each of 1,200 families, 20 families in each of 60 VAB-partnered schools totaling approximately 18 lac takas. The whole amount, approximately \$21,400 was donated by Mr. Syed Zaki Hossain, Chairman of VAB Board of Directors.** There was serious logistic problem in the distribution of the relief. With the help of sister organizations, VAB BD staff completed the distribution task. Three teachers facing severe financial problems were helped with Tk. 30,000 (about \$360). 3,300 masks donated by a Rotary Club in Australia were distributed among students in Shyamnagar upazila. Finally, through a special project account opened newly under the NGO Bureau of Bangladesh, VAB Bangladesh disbursed \$77,000, raised by the Chittagong Medical College Alumni in USA. The money was for the purchase of medical equipment, particularly oxygen supply equipment, for Covid patients in the Chittagong Medical College Hospital. 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, amounting to nearly \$2,000.

As for educational activities of VAB, currently VAB is implementing its composite set of interrelated measures, dubbed as the VAB Quality Education Model for Rural High Schools. The educational measures are aimed at enabling the four principal stakeholders of rural education -

students, teachers, schools and communities – to utilize their innate abilities for the purpose of education. What is extremely impressive is that, despite the ravages of the pandemic, VAB forced itself to implement the major activities under each of the four groups of empowering measures. The implemented activities under student empowerment measures were regular and special scholarships, Group-Based Learning Method, training of students in English skills, participation in nationally organized Math Olympiad, character education, debating, sports and volunteering; under teacher empowerment measures were Headmasters' and Teachers' Seminar/Workshop, teachers training, teacher inspiration (performance) awards; school empowerment measure was school inspiration (performance) award: and community linkage measure was Parents-Teachers Meeting.

Some of these activities were accomplished on-site prior to the lockdown which started in the third week of March. Some were implemented online.

VAB has been awarded a \$38,000 Rotary Project, an International Global Grant Project. Some of the extensive preparatory activities for the Project were carried out online. The 3-year 30-school project is on "Teachers Training in Rural High Schools".

Despite the severe restrictions imposed by the pandemic on VAB's work, VAB could achieve all of the above relief work and educational work; it was considered a remarkable accomplishment.

Discussion and major conclusions: Following the presentation of the reports by the Officials of VAB USA and VAB Bangladesh and other documents, a very fruitful and lively discussion ensued among the participants, and a number of major conclusions were reached.

Participants focused on sustainability of VAB in financial terms and also in organizational terms. This is perhaps because of uncertainty and volatility in annual fundraising and concerns about the aging leadership after two decades of continuous functioning. The Chairman himself emphasized the issue of sustainability and elaborated on it. He explained that sustainability in financial terms can only be achieved through strengthening and building up Endowment and Trust Funds. In 2018 and 2019 two fundraising events were held under the leadership of the Chairman. The 2019 event was organized by the Hossain Family – Mr. Syed Zaki Hossain, Mrs. Rahat Hossain and Ms. Moumita Hossain. The amount of funds raised in the event was matched by the Hossain Family. Altogether funds raised were \$233,000 - \$97,000 in the 2018 event, \$68,000 in the 2019 event and matching fund of \$68,000. These funds combined with contributions raised by VAB USA for its Endowment Fund, totaling an amount of \$300,000, have been invested in secure "preferred stocks" with 6% annual rate of return. The Chairman informed the participants that the goal was to reach \$1,000,000 in ten years. To this end, the Chairman announced that

- **For the VAB Endowment Fund in the USA, he was pledging to donate \$50,000 per year for the next ten years.**

The Chairman added that the newly appointed Chairman of VAB Bangladesh Advisory Board is in complete agreement with the sustainability arrangements. He also emphasized the need for efficient management of Endowment and Trust Funds both in the USA and Bangladesh.

There was discussion about the VAB program of activities which seemed to have transformative impact on 60 rural schools in terms of attaining quality education, but the program needed to be applied in a wider scale. Participants who have been following VAB's program development from the inception highlighted the basic similitude of VAB's program of activities over the past two decades, the consistency and continuity of VAB's quest for quality education in the disadvantaged rural Bangladesh, and the constancy of VAB's focus on individual students and also schools. The program has become larger, more secure and impacts more students now. In this perspective, modifications that were made over the years were around the fundamental identicalness. Programmatically, this is a strength of VAB; issues of sustainability in terms of program of activities thus do not arise. However, the meeting reached a number of important conclusions with a view to strengthening VAB's position in terms of its program of activities.

- **There was a need for independent evaluation of the program of activities by outside Evaluators as to what extent the program did make a difference.**
- **Serious efforts should be undertaken to follow up what VAB scholarship holders and graduates of VAB-partnered schools do in post-high school days.**
- **There was an offer of assisting successful graduates when they move to higher studies.**
- **In view of a severe lack of systematic screening process for admission to higher education institutions, a need for VAB to develop effective admission tests was suggested.**

The Chairman elaborated on the sustainability issue in terms of organization. He concluded 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.**

The selection of rural schools for VAB's partnership was discussed. A rigorous process should be followed along with meeting VAB's own criteria. Sponsors may sometimes offer finances for their chosen schools. VAB should critically examine if its criteria are met, particularly the "cluster school" criteria.

There was an offer of giving highly effective digital educational programs, free of cost, to VAB-partnered schools. It was concluded that

- **A detailed proposal on the IT-related offer should be submitted to VAB.**

Other agenda items: It was felt that all the remaining items in the agenda were addressed, in one way or another, during the above discussion.

The meeting was then adjourned.