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PROGRAMMES & PROJECTS

Extending computer training to all in Bangladesh

Recognizing the growing importance of computer literacy in terms of access to information and social literacy programme (CLP) aims to spread computer education and usage in Bangladesh.

The CLP is a comprehensive programme which covers: establishing computer labs, curriculum development for teachers and students, and equipment maintenance. The CLP also provides teachers with a financial grant. The programme was initiated by the New Jersey arm of the Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB-NJ), in partnership with the D. Net Network (D. Net).

The programme requires the active participation of rural schools and communities, with school management, furniture and electricity. School staff and community members also encourage the teachers and students to participate in the programme.

The first activity in the programme was to establish Computer Learning Centres in educational institutions. In selecting sites for learning centres, consideration was given to geographical location, availability of electricity and the community's willingness to help.

Every learning centre has a computer lab and is provided with a minimum of four second-hand computer equipment. An introductory curriculum was developed in consultation with computer scientists. Subsequently, "Computer Shikhi" (Let Us Learn Computers), was published. Two teachers from each learning centre were trained from D.Net. They are also provided with a teachers' manual. CLP pays each teacher Tk750 (approximately \$15) per month.

Students receive hands-on training on computers free of charge and are given a copy of the students' manual. The training covers about the parts of a computer, fundamental usage, word processing, spreadsheets, and other program applications over a period of eight weeks. The classes are provided outside of the normal school schedule and there are 15-20 students per class.

The CLP began in 2004 with the objective of setting up 20 learning centres. In June 2007, 54 learning centres were opened in 15 districts, and another five were due to be opened by July 2007. Of the learning centres, 54 are located in community centres and one in a library.

As of May 2007, 90 male and 24 female teachers have been trained. A total of 7,945 students participated in the programme and received a certificate of completion. Of these, 48% are female students.

According to the VAB-NJ, students wait eagerly for an opportunity to participate in the programme and enrollments as a result of having the computer labs.

As a result of the programme, students and computer teachers are venturing out of their own spaces and

steps. Trained teachers are beginning to use computers for tabulating and analysing students' grades budget management. Furthermore, teachers of other subjects are becoming interested in learning to use computers. One remarked, "I keep hearing terms such as "hardware," "software," "mouse," "log-in," "log-out" all the time. It's time I became computer literate as well."

The VAB-NJ has reported that administrators of a teacher education institution (Mymensingh Teachers' College) from the CLP when their Bachelor of Education students needed computer training. Subsequently, 6 and Mymensingh learning centres.

The VAB-NJ has also reported that so far two CLP graduates secured employment in computer related fields and have used their skills to start their own computer store.

VAB-NJ is financing the CLP by raising funds and grants. A sponsor can help through direct cash contribution to "computer" and "adopt a computer learning centre" projects.

Under the "adopt a computer learning centre" project, a sponsor can choose an educational or social centre is established in that institution provided it satisfies the core requirements of space, furniture, and electricity. Sponsor's contribution is two-thirds of the cost, the remainder is paid by the programme funds. Alms centres have been established under this project.

The VAB-NJ emphasizes that support for the CLP should be seen as an "investment in the underprivileged" that Bangladesh is optimally suited for such investment because of its sizable workforce and low labour costs.

Recently, a graduate student from the Fletcher School of Government of the Tufts University carried out a study titled "Bridging Digital Divide for Rural Youth: An Experience from Computer Literacy Program". The report states that CLP graduates tend to collaborate with and learn from one another more than their peers who did not go to the CLP. The report also states that CLP-trained students perform better than their peers in other subjects.

The evaluation study came up with the following recommendations:

- More time for students to practice using the computers
- Introduction of advanced courses
- An increase of teachers' incentive honorarium
- Refresher and more advanced training for teachers
- Leveraging the existing computers for more effective teaching of other subjects, such as science

In response to these suggestions, and in consideration of potential impact at the grassroots level, some such initiatives are being implemented. One such initiative is the "Computer teaches everyday English" (CTEE) project which aims to leverage computers to improve English skills. The project will be piloted in five centres.

Another new initiative is in the area of locally-developed instructional materials. D.Net is in discussion with the Bangladesh Research and Invention (FERI), Bangladesh Math Olympiad, and the Institute of Education of Bangladesh to develop instructional materials for enhancing the quality of mathematics and science education.

VAB-NJ provides the conceptual framework, implementation directives, computers, teachers' honorarium, and other resources. D.Net assists in selecting the host institution, production of the manuals and curriculum, establishment of the computer lab, technical maintenance (for one year) to keep the computers operational, and overall management of the programme.

Further information:

- An innovative approach for spreading IT to rural Bangladesh

<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=3192>

- Volunteers Association for Bangladesh – NJ Chapter

<http://www.vabonline.org/vabnj/index.html>

- Development Research Network

<http://www.dnet-bangladesh.org/main.html>

- Computer Literacy Programme - Brochure

<http://www.vabonline.org/vabnj/CLPBrochure.pdf>

Related links:

- UNESCO Dhaka office

<http://www.unescodhaka.org/home>

Previous issues of the e-newsletter:

- UNESCO “ICT in Education” Announcement e-newsletter
www.unescobkk.org/education/ict/eneewsletter

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URL	http://www.vabonline.org/vabnj/index.html
Country/region covered	Bangladesh
Strategies	ICTs for development ICTs in non-formal education ICTs in primary and secondary education Professional development/training
Themes/focus	Capacity building and training Community learning centres Community telecentres ICT access and connectivity ICT and youth Computer training
Target beneficiaries	Teachers Students

Contributed by General public/community people
Villagers
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