

December 25, 2006

Computer Literacy Program Status Update

Dear Patrons:

The Volunteers Association for Bangladesh, New Jersey (VAB-NJ) initiated the Computer Literacy Program (CLP) three years ago. With your help, we have been able to take a few small steps towards attaining the CLP goal - *to promote knowledge and usage of computers among the underprivileged youths in Bangladesh*. As of October 2006, 42 Computer Literacy Centers have been set up in 22 of Bangladesh's 64 districts and have trained 97 teachers (20% female) and graduated 5,163 students in basic computer literacy.

CLP Status as of October, 2006

- # CLCs: 42 (39 schools, 2 community centers, 1 library)
- 20 opened in 2005 and 22 in 2006 (2 CLCs sponsored by Bank Asia)
- 11 urban, 31 rural
- 7 all-female and 35 co-educational
- # districts covered: 22 out of 64
- # teachers trained: 97 (20% female)
- # students graduated: 5,163
- Male-female ratio: 56: 46

Expanding Possibilities

The CLP program has created the foundation for exciting possibilities for rural underprivileged youth. For example, 2 CLCs (Hazi Kasem Ali Mohila Degree College at Muktagacha and Hazi Kasem Ali Degree College at Mymensingh) have recently conducted a course for B.Ed. students through CLP lab. A total 65 B.Ed. students have successfully completed the course and received a score of 40-46 out of 50.

There are many stories of how students are being successful in being gainfully employed by leveraging the skills gained from CLP.

Companies like Bank Asia and Microsoft Actively Participating

The impact the CLP has been able to create within a relatively short amount of time and solely with funding from expatriate individuals has inspired and attracted companies like Bank Asia in Bangladesh and Microsoft in the US. Bank Asia has sponsored 2 CLCs and Microsoft has committed to sponsor 13 Community for Learning, Information Communication and Knowledge (CLICK) centers to expand the CLP model to the next level. The objectives of the CLICK project are:

- Creating a global-standard technology learning space for underprivileged groups in rural Bangladesh
- Nurturing technology skills for emerging ICT-based professions in rural areas
- Facilitating rural community information centers in achieving sustainability
- Enhancing information and knowledge acquiring scope for rural youth

The CLICK centers will be hosted in community centers as opposed to schools (almost all CLCs are currently hosted in schools) and will offer more advanced training than the CLCs. The training will include Desktop Publishing, Web Development, Database Programming, and Infomediary Training (the last one refers to training for a specialized job that is just evolving in Bangladesh to provide information services to the rural people). The CLICK curriculum will ensure training to community members, especially unemployed educated youth, with the specific objective of helping them to be employed by virtue of their newly acquired skills.

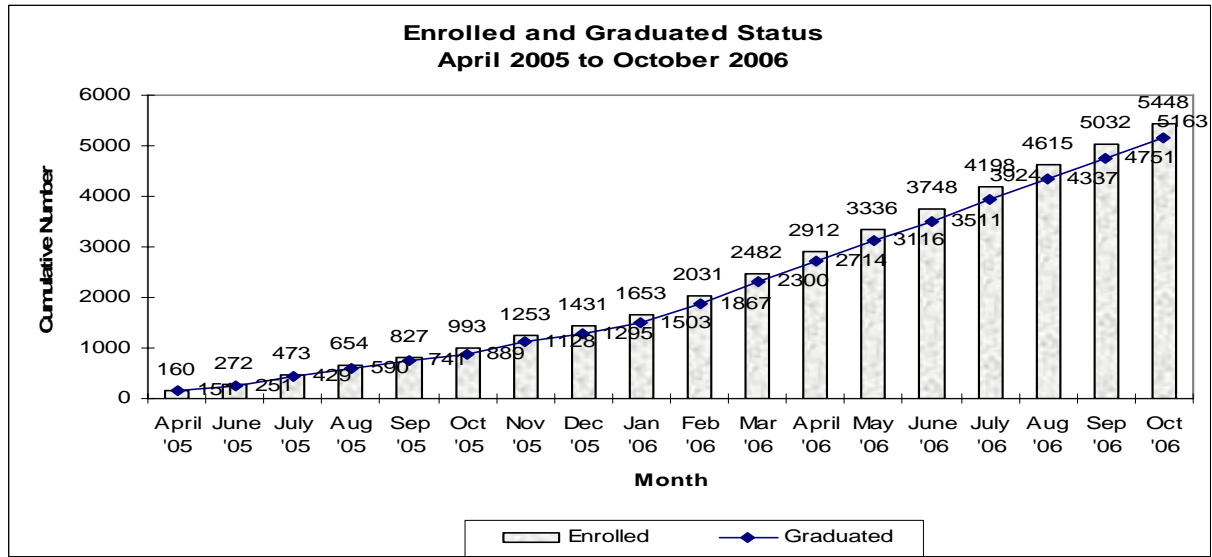
VAB-NJ volunteers gratefully acknowledge your help and generous contributions that have been a continuous source of inspiration for all of us in this endeavor. We would like to provide you an update on progress made to date.

Accomplishments

- In addition to the 20 CLCs opened in 2005, a new 22 CLCs have been opened in 2006 (including 2 by Bank of Asia). Please see the attached map of Bangladesh showing the geographical spread of the centers.
- All 42 CLCs are covered under the CLP program:
 - Each center is equipped with a computer lab consisting of at least 4 PCs, 1 printer, and other necessary accessories.
 - 90 teachers, 2 from each CLC (and some replacement teachers), were trained to administer the unique hands-on curriculum developed specifically for CLP (20% are female teachers).
 - A teacher incentive program has been instituted, under which a sum of Tk 1,500 per month (= USD 25) is being paid to two CLC teachers from each center.
- The length of each course is 32 hours (2 hrs/day X 2 days/week X 8 weeks).
- Over 5,000 students graduated through October, 2006 (see the chart enclosed)
- Periodic monitoring of all the CLCs indicates that the program is running well. A thorough evaluation using structure questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions conducted by a graduate student from Tufts University Fletcher School of Government revealed some very interesting findings:
 - Students in the CLP course exhibit a high degree of collaboration, teaching and learning from others.
 - According to the CLP teachers, the CLP course improves the students' math, Bangla and English skills.
 - The presence of a CLC positively affected the enrolment and transfer of students to schools with CLCs.

The same study made some vital recommendations about creating more opportunities for the students to practice, teaching a more advanced CLP course, conducting refresher training for teachers, upgrading the honorarium paid to the teachers currently, and leveraging the CLCs for mainstream academic subjects such as mathematics and science which can be visually taught very effectively through multimedia learning materials.

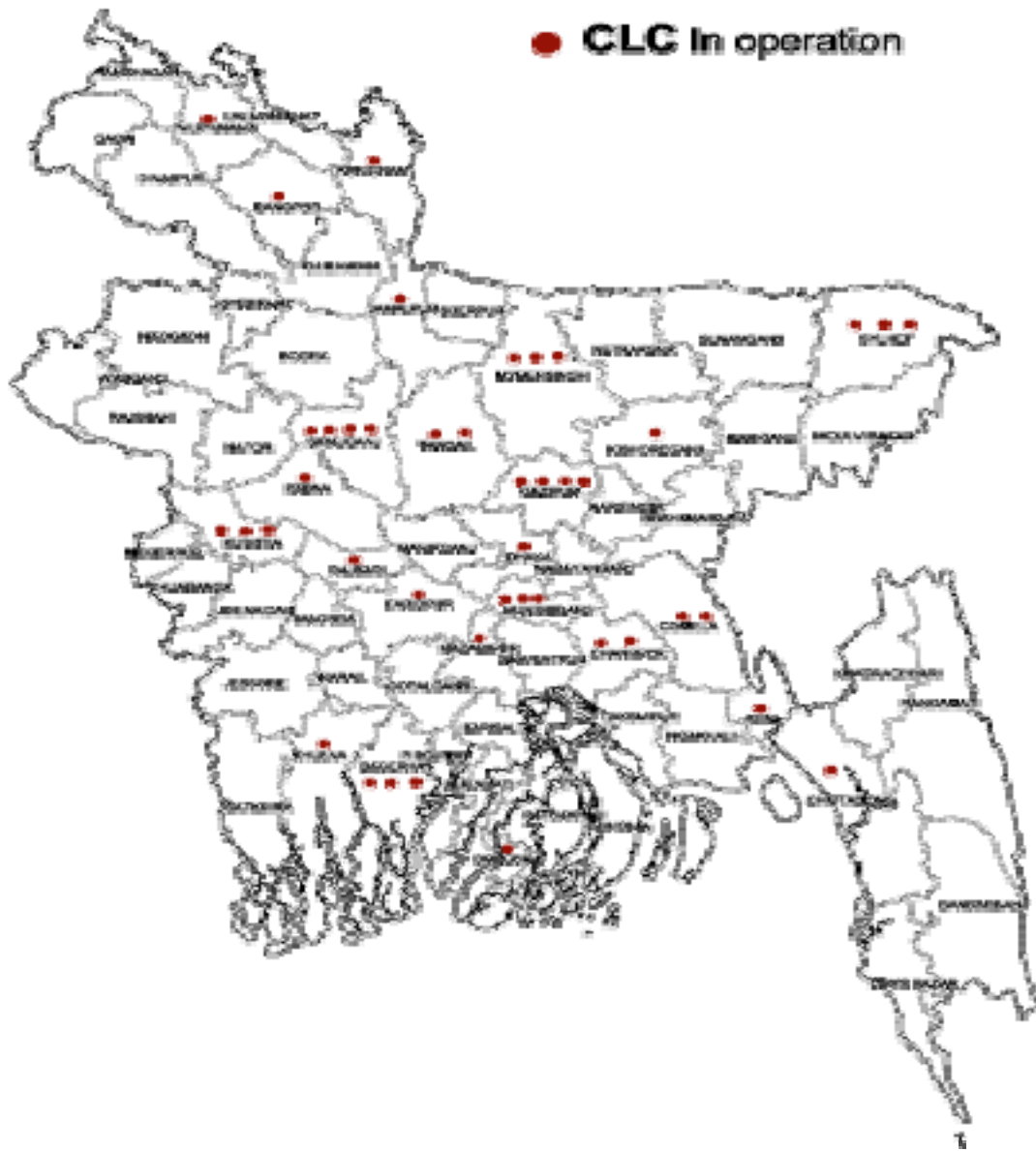
- A printed newsletter was launched in December 2006 to network all the CLCs by establishing a forum where the students and the teachers can send their ideas, thoughts, stories and answers to quizzes. In a networked environment, they would be doing this using the internet discussion groups or blogs. In the absence of that, we are mimicking those features through printed material.
- BankAsia has sponsored 2 CLCs in 2006 in addition to the 40 CLCs sponsored by VAB-NJ.
- 5 old computers have been replaced with new equipment in 5 CLCs.
- 4,000 books on the CLP curriculum were printed and over 2,100 sold at a significant discount to students.



2007 Activities and Plans

- The fundraising dinner event of June 17, 2006, to raise funds for 2007 activities was a success. Approximately \$20,000 net was raised from that event. More importantly, a larger participation and enthusiasm shown by our youths at this event was very encouraging.
- Our Plans for 2007 are as follows:
 - Continue to provide necessary funding to run the CLCs established in 2005 and 2006, including the teachers' incentive pay.
 - Establish 10 additional CLCs.
 - Implement an advanced curriculum, development of which is under way, at selected CLCs geared to train and prepare the graduates of the basic course for the job market and/or higher education.
 - Provide internet connection to CLCs where available, as a supplementary educational tool.
 - Provide printed training manuals to the students at a subsidized price (50% of the cost).
 - Provide the new patrons with an option to sponsor a CLC with all new computers for a donation of \$2,600, or a CLICK center for about \$5,000.
 - Develop and implement a new project called "ICT in Education" which will leverage multimedia educational content for teaching students mathematics and science. Foundation for Education Research and Innovation (FERI) and BRAC University's Institute of Educational Development (BU-IED) may come on board as development and research partners.
- VAB-NJ and D.Net representatives have been collaborating effectively through regular conference calls. VAB representatives are also visiting D.Net in Dhaka and the CLCs.

Geographical Coverage



VAB-NJ sincerely appreciates your support for the program to help Bangladesh. In order to maintain the current level of services to the existing CLCs and fund 2007 projects, your continued support and generous contributions are very important and critical to the overall success of the program. We are inviting you to our 2007 fundraising event, which is tentatively scheduled for June 09, 2007, at *Rutgers University, New Jersey*. Please mark your calendar now; we will contact you with details of that program as the time approaches. We look forward to your participation at the event. Thank you.

Yours truly,
On behalf of the volunteers of VAB-NJ

Hammad Farooque