

# DEVELOPMENT Outreach

PUTTING KNOWLEDGE TO WORK FOR DEVELOPMENT  JUNE 2008

## BUSINESS AND POVERTY

Opening markets to the poor



# ZMQ Enabling Bottom-up Development

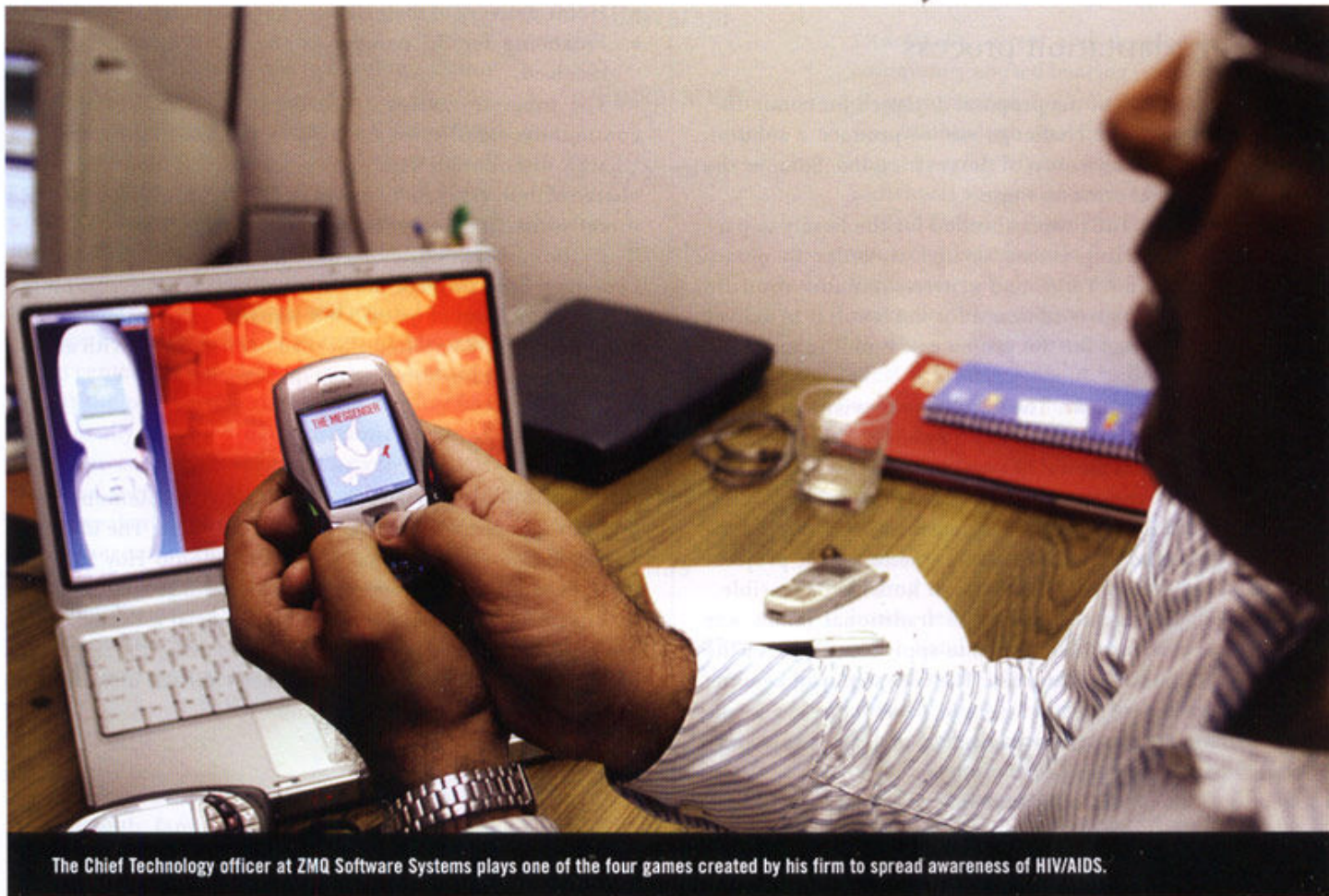
BY SUBHI QURAIISHI

## Introduction

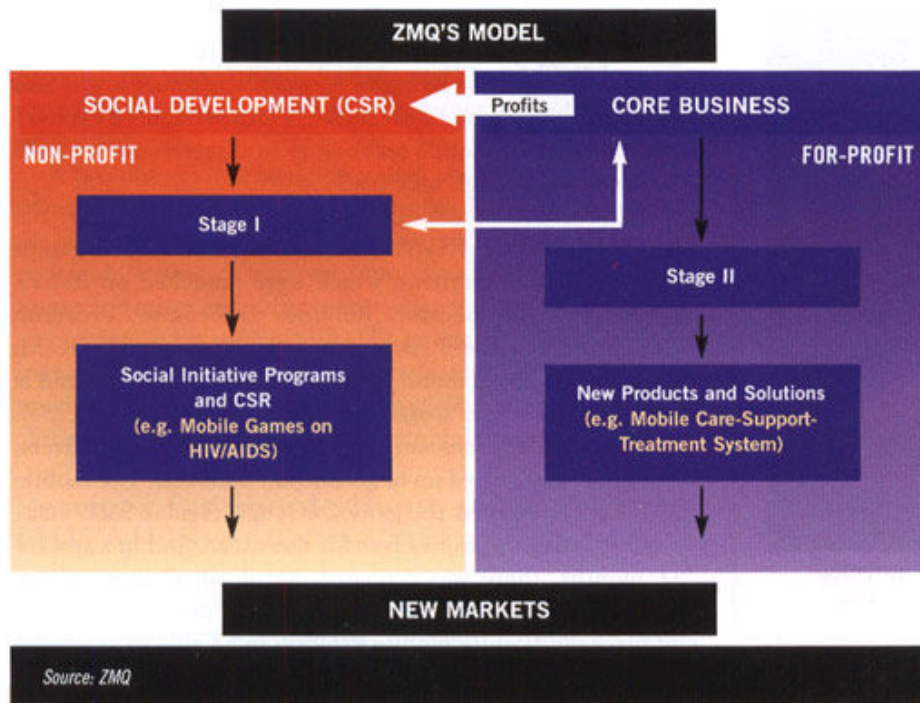
THE RAPID GROWTH of information technology in India has spurred an overall economic growth in the region. India has created a new identity on the world map in this era of globalization. The country is growing with new townships mushrooming with more opportunities for youth to work in the IT industry. This is the story of all major cities of India. Indeed, India is shining. But this is not the entire story. The benefits

of the IT boom still need to reach out to the grass-root level. There still exists a huge disparity among the population, and an even bigger digital divide.

ZMQ Software Systems, a Delhi based innovative software solution provider, has taken up a mission to reach out to the grass-root communities using its core competency of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to provide e-learning, gaming, edutainment, knowledge management and human performance solutions. The company's focus is on developing world class learning, training, edutainment solutions addressing basic literacy, girls and children's



The Chief Technology officer at ZMQ Software Systems plays one of the four games created by his firm to spread awareness of HIV/AIDS.



The company's social development team, which drives its CSR strategy, works hand in hand with its marketing, business development and technical teams. The social development team identifies development issues, finds technology gaps, builds new partnerships with local organizations, and prepares blueprints of products and solutions for the social initiative programs. Then the team hands over the program to ZMQ's core technology and marketing teams to create solutions and prepare the dissemination strategy of the social programs and initiatives. Some of the focus areas are health, education, agriculture, and skill development for the under-privileged.

The social programs and initiatives are well integrated with the core business strategy of the company. The prime objective of the CSR strategy is to empower masses with technology tools and solutions related to health and edu-

education, health, skills development, micro-finance and environment. Entrenched in ZMQ's mission is the fervor to use its core competency to offer assistance to communities through social development projects.

ZMQ recognizes HIV/AIDS not only as a health issue but also an economic issue. As a member of Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, the company has taken up a pioneering initiative to reach out to the common person in India using technology. One such initiative has been the use of mobile phone games to educate on HIV/AIDS, and create awareness of it among people. The program has been christened "Freedom HIV/AIDS" ([www.freedomhivaids.in](http://www.freedomhivaids.in)).

## ZMQ—a strategic mission

ZMQ HAS BEEN DEVELOPING commercial software solutions for a variety of clients from corporate to government and from academic institutions to schools. The company's prime business is developing innovative e-Learning solutions, mobile games, human performance management systems, and knowledge products. Around 80 percent of the company's turnover comes from this source.

As a socially conscious organization, ZMQ is driven by the need to develop socially relevant information and communication technology for the benefit of the masses, and uses its experience to develop innovative solutions for the grass-root communities using ICTs. Since inception, ZMQ's founders made a commitment to spend a substantial percentage of its profits in social development using its core competency to reduce the digital gap. One indication of ZMQ's dedication to this cause is that 12 percent of its annual profits go into Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities. It is important to point out here that funds are not earmarked for community development work, as such, but for the development of tools.

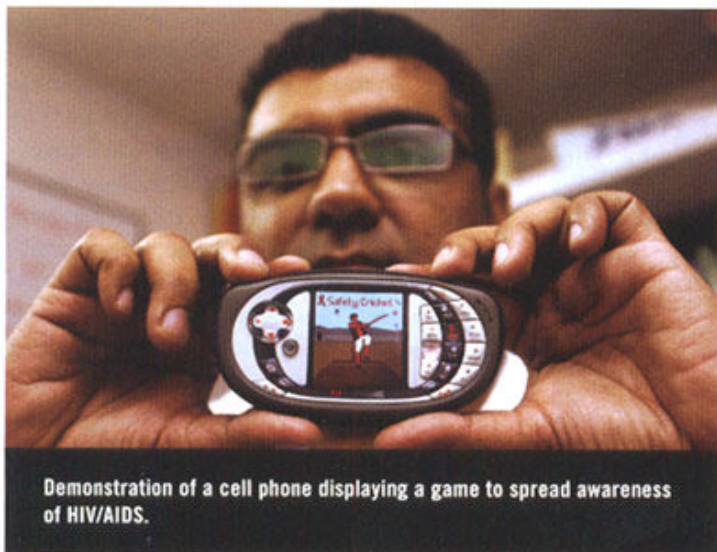
At the same time, it also creates environments and channels for ZMQ business for these newer markets. Apart from its pure philanthropic initiatives, ZMQ's social team creates new programs before entering a new region or market. This exercise serves a dual purpose, it not only empowers the masses and bridge the digital divide, but also provide feedback to the business development team for creating new products, solutions and services for the region. ZMQ firmly believes that in the new market scenario, the future of any enterprise is a right blend of both business strategies and development programs.

ZMQ's success is attributed to 3 main features: technology innovation, understanding issues related to grass-root communities and using local resources (like, multi-lingual content and local knowledge). Nevertheless, there has always been a challenge, the mammoth task of reaching out to the community for effective dissemination. This issue has been successfully tackled by collaborating with local partners, at the local, regional, and national levels.

By working closely with NGOs and local communities to identify their needs and possible solutions to developmental challenges, ZMQ is able to create tools that can be used to address these challenges. The company firmly believes that social development can be complementary, and that for a successful business to thrive in the new markets it is important to have both running in synchrony.

## Empowering communities

ONE OF ZMQ'S VERY FIRST INITIATIVES for grass-root communities has been the development and dissemination of an educational package called the "Entry Level Literacy" program. The program is designed for three categories of people; female children, out-of-school children, and adults. Each package is



Demonstration of a cell phone displaying a game to spread awareness of HIV/AIDS.

comprised of 3 basic modules, two of which are common for all the 3 categories—Basic Alphabetization and Basic Numeracy. In addition to this, there is a Basic Life-skills development module for female children; Scientific Games for out-of-school children to inculcate scientific thinking; and a Rural technology module for adults to be able to produce useful products themselves. The package was developed in two local languages—Hindi and Urdu—for the northern Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

ZMQ has also developed a livelihood package for rural women titled “Technology for grass-roots women.” The package is comprised of over 20 different rural technologies for women to generate livelihood using basic village resources, such as making soap and urea or extracting oil. The package also has a micro-finance module to train women about basic economics, creating awareness and involving them in income generating activities to sustain their families; and explaining concepts of money transactions, profit, loss, loans, etc. The package was again developed in Hindi languages blended with iconic language to be useful to a maximum number of potential users.

## ZMQ’s fight against HIV/AIDS— Creating awareness

OVER 2.5 MILLION PEOPLE in India are infected with HIV/AIDS (National AIDS Control Organization of India, December 1, 2007). Acutely aware of the magnitude of the problem, ZMQ recognizes it not only as a health problem but also as a business and economic issue, which affects labor and productivity. In the global fight against HIV/AIDS, ZMQ has found a major break-through by reaching out to grass-root communities using mobile phone devices.

Recognizing the lack of information and health management tools on HIV/AIDS, ZMQ committed itself to develop quality content and applications to reach the common person. Over the last 10 years, the reach of mobile devices has increased not only in urban areas but also in rural areas at the grass-root level. The mobile phone is the most popular tech-

nology tool in the hands of the common person across the globe. Today youth, mobile workers, truckers, farmers, laborers and people living in medium and small towns and villages are using mobiles. Hence, ZMQ, thought of exploiting the reach of mobile technology to disseminate valuable information through mobiles.

On World AIDS day—December 1, 2005—ZMQ under the aegis of “Freedom HIV/AIDS,” released four mobile games for HIV/AIDS awareness, which were launched on India’s largest mobile operator, Reliance Infocomm. Freedom HIV/AIDS was the first initiative to disseminate health awareness through mobile games and mobile devices, and is now the largest ever social initiative on mobile devices.

Initially the games were launched on 9 million handsets, and later were scaled up to 40 million handsets. The mobile operators promoted the games through regular SME messages offering the games free for download, and in a span of 14 months, there was a record download of 10.4 million game sessions. The games were specially designed for low-end black-and-white mobile devices, to be able to reach the grass-root communities. Different mobile technology platforms were also considered to cater to over 100 devices and handsets covering over 80 percent of device specifications. The games were deployed on everything from low-end and low cost handsets to sophisticated high-end devices.

Freedom HIV/AIDS comprises four different types of mobile games involving different mindsets and psychologies of mobile users. The game Safety Cricket is a role-play game with awareness messages based on Cricket, which is like a religion in India with a huge following. Ribbon Chase is an arcade based game, and is for people who are engaged in game playing. The Messenger is an adventure game for casual users, who enjoy playing exciting but easy-to-handle games. Finally, Quiz with Babu simulates a live quiz show, attracting users whose bent of mind is more towards quizzing, questioning and reasoning.

## Scaling to new regions: The Africa Reach Program

AS AN EXTENSION to Freedom HIV/AIDS, ZMQ later launched the Africa Reach Program, to reach Africa with more region specific games and applications in the local languages. The Africa Reach Program is a classic example of scaling local innovations, creating successful new multi-stake holder partnerships in new regions, and creating a sustainable business model for new markets. ZMQ tied up with Hivos, a leading Dutch development organization, and KPN, the largest Dutch telecom company, under the STAR program to reach out to Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda in Eastern Africa and Malawi, Mozambique and Namibia in Southern Africa.

In order to successfully replicate the program in Africa, it was also important to create local partnerships. A Nairobi based local technology company Mobile 4 Good has been partnered with to manage the program in East Africa. To make the program sustainable it was important to replenish it with new mobile content and games, for which more new partner-

ships were created. NGOs and knowledge organizations were also invited to be partners, such as Mathare Youths Sports Association (MYSA), Skills for Life, and Straight Talk for excavating local content, creating new games and other mobile properties.

A revenue sharing business model was set in place for sustaining each organization. To maximize the reach of games to the last mile customers, the games were also designed for low-end mobile phones with an innovative pricing model. The games and other mobile properties like wallpapers, ring tones, and screen savers were priced at 60 percent less than the existing mobile products on the market. Seeing the success of the program, the company is planning a second phase of expansion of the business in Africa—both horizontally and vertically.

## Services for people living with HIV/AIDS

MOBILE DEVICES can also be highly effective for patient management and monitoring, specially suited for those patients who are situated at remote locations. In the absence of any preventive medication against HIV/AIDS, patient management is the only effective solution to prolong the life of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs). Today, there are no ICT based tools or applications which can be used to monitor and manage the medication and medical history of patients living with HIV/AIDS.

ZMQ is developing the M-CST System (mobile care, support and treatment), which is a universal solution for treatment and diagnostics of PLWHAs. The application will be available in two modes: single patient management and group management for organizations working with PLWHAs. Now in the pilot phase, the application will eventually be made available for free to people affected with HIV/AIDS. ZMQ is currently identifying partners for scaling the application to a much larger level.

## Conclusion

AS A SMALL-MEDIUM SIZED company, ZMQ believes that by contributing 12 percent in the form of hard cash would only be a drop in the ocean. So ZMQ churns this 12 percent of its profits for social development in form of tools, products, applications and solutions using its core competencies. As there is a huge digital divide, we believe that we can contribute by bridging the gap by developing appropriate solutions for global need.

The company has hugely benefited from this approach, and has gained global recognition for its work. This could not have been possible for a small company like ZMQ by spending that small 12 percent of its profits on promotional activities. ZMQ's social development initiatives have been a blessing in disguise for the company's growth. ▲

Subhi Quraishi is CEO of ZMQ Software Systems.

- Enhancing safety and security via outdoor lighting for personal, business, and community activities.
- Creating conditions to attract teachers, retain students, expand time for student reading and studying, and improve grades and school retention rates.
- Providing opportunities for adult literacy and higher education programs.
- Improving health services delivery and thus reduce productivity loss due to illnesses.
- Reducing GHG emissions and toxic gases, decreasing risks of illnesses caused by air pollution and mitigating the impact of climate change.
- Reducing fire hazards associated with kerosene lamps and candles which every year lead to tens of thousands of fires causing serious injuries and destroying assets.

## A good start...towards a promising future

UNTIL RECENTLY, the global lighting industry had shown little interest in the African off-grid lighting market, generally unaware of its vast potential. But through the *Lighting Africa* program, and with the support of its sponsorship, the World Bank, IFC, and their partners have been able to attract hundreds of global and local entrepreneurs to look into this emergent market, and to support the group's effort to provide millions with exciting new off-grid lighting alternatives. As the program's agenda moves full steam ahead, this new market area is poised for take-off and the excitement is becoming contagious.

Rising fuel prices and market volatility continue to exert pressure on African consumers who may become unable to afford lighting services, making the development of modern lighting markets more urgent than ever. Time will tell when lights will begin to shine in Africa and the shadow that looms over the continent will dissipate, slowly giving way to a brightly lit future for millions of lives. ▲

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*Lighting Africa* is supported by multiple donors. Key partners include: The Global Environment Facility; the World Bank's Public-Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility (PPIAF) and Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP); Good Energies Inc.; the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership; the European Commission; and the Governments of Norway, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.