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NEXT STEP

THE 10 MILLION CONNECTION

Synergy, the social business platform that aims to revolutionise the bottom of the pyramid

Social business is considered the next evolutionary step from orthodox business practices. Comprehending the impact it can make worldwide, Clinton Global Initiative and Hult Business School organises an international accelerator program that aims to solve the world's greatest problems with the help of young social entrepreneurs.

This year Synergy Global.co, a team from Bangladesh won the title of regional champion for the first time by defeating 45 teams from top business schools in the Shanghai Regional Round. Come September, Team Synergy will be contending with four other teams in the Global Championship. Shahriar Rahman from Next Step got in touch with Team Synergy's members: Mirza Tanzim Sami, Tasneem Omar Ava, Mohammad Saad, and Arafat Ahmed to find out more about their project.

TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR PROJECT.

We provide entrepreneurs with a collaborative business platform, which connects them to capital goods and partners, while vastly expanding their market reach through a human network. We focused on entrepreneurs because they already have an established business. Expanding and building upon that will not only increase their income, but it also create employment opportunities for many.

During our field work, we realised that the key to success for these businesses is connection. That is where we innovated. We connect people using the most common and accessible technology in the world: mobile phones. Mobile phones are the key to



connection, innovation and growth for people in the bottom of the pyramid. We harness the power of this technology via USSD cloud-based telephony to connect these people better within their community.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WORK ON THIS PARTICULAR PROJECT?

Our inspiration has always been the idea of being part of something larger than ourselves, and the Hult Prize provided us with just the right platform for it.

It has brought a sense of meaning to our lives: to work for a better world, to bring smiles to the faces of

those who need it the most, to leave a mark on this planet that will enrich lives in the years to come. It aggregates undergraduate, Masters and PhD students from all around the world, and demands of them to come up with an idea of a social business that can tackle different social problems faced by the people in the bottom of the pyramid.

Each year, Bill Clinton picks the challenge himself. This year he challenged the students to come up with an idea of a social business that can double the income of 10 million people living in crowded, urban spaces within a span of five years. The challenge also asks to better connect

these people with people, capital, and goods.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SCALE UP IF YOU WIN THE HULT PRIZE?

The prize money for the winning team is one million dollars. We plan to utilise this prize money mainly to expand our project and scale it globally. To grow our venture, we plan to partner up with different national and international NGOs and foundations working for different social causes. On this note, we plan to expand our projects only to countries where our partner NGOs and foundations are already in operation and

have an established foundation there for our project to expand.

We also have plans to run our project in the slums of Bangladesh for the first three years of our operation to start with. Eventually, we would like to scale our project to Indian, Indonesian and Kenyan high-impact city slums. The prize money is simply a boost for us to reach 10 million people within five years, globally.

HOW MANY PEOPLE DO YOU THINK IT IS GOING TO IMPACT?

Implementing our project successfully will strategically impact 10 million people within five years. However, the impact will be on a much larger scale. We will significantly increase the income of 10 million people in a way that will create job opportunities and ensure better living standards of even more people.

HOW SUSTAINABLE IS THE BUSINESS MODEL?

The biggest advantage of our business model is that it is not at all capital intensive. The major investment of this model is in bringing the cloud server in-house and its maintenance. The rest is for bringing pre-existing stores under the Synergy brand moniker. Furthermore, our business model is scalable and replicable in any part of the world, making it even more sustainable.

INTERVIEWED BY SHAHRIAR RAHMAN

Engineer-turned-writer, Shahriar Rahman is Sub-Editor of the tech publication of The Daily Star. He is also Head of Operations at HiFi Public.

Bangladesh Brand Forum presents Leadership Summit 2016

With the aim of materialising the huge potential of the country through enhanced leadership, Bangladesh Brand Forum is organising the 2016 Leadership Summit. The day-long summit will take place on April 23rd at Radisson Blue Water Garden Hotel. This year's theme is Realising Potentials.

The summit will be replete with a number of programs, including five keynote sessions, panel discussions on economic growth, and launch of Mind Your Marketing, the journal of the World Marketing Summit. A special youth engagement session will also be held for university students with global and local speakers.

This year's keynote speakers are: Prof. Amitava Chattopadhyay, GlaxoSmithKline Professor of Corporate Innovation, INSEAD; Ripa Rashid, Executive Vice President at the Centre for Talent Innovation and Managing Partner for Hewlett Consulting Partners, New York; Sanjiv Mehta, MD and CEO of Hindustan Unilever; Alia Khan, Founder and Chairwoman of Islamic Fashion and Design Council (IFDC); and Tom Cummings, Founder and Owner, Leading Ventures, B.V, Netherland.



BE THE CHANGE

Demo Day of Innovate, Incubate & Grow's 5 finalists

Organisations of all sorts aim to become sustainable and profitable, but some end up doing unscrupulous activities in the process. But sustainability and improving lives can certainly go hand in hand; such is the model of social enterprises.

Recently, there has been a flurry of social enterprises in Bangladesh's startup scene. To foster social startups, British Council in partnership with ChangeMaker launched Innovate, Incubate & Grow (IIG). IIG invited teams from all over Bangladesh to submit their startup ideas. 171 youths from across the country participated with 57 innovative social enterprise ideas in the competition. 10 teams were selected after careful scrutiny to attend the Boot Camp where they further groomed and developed their ideas. All this led up to 5 of the most promising teams being selected for the Business Planning Workshop.

The final presentation took place at the Demo Day on March 29 at The British Council Dhaka. The 5 teams presented their ideas in front of a wide audience consisting of mentors, experts, and leaders from various fields. Each presentation was followed by feedback and advice from the relevant members of the audience. There were also opportunities for training and funding up for grabs. Let's take a look at the finalists.

HAPPY ORGANIC HOUSE

Happy Organic House aims to address human health and the

environmental hazards that transpire from indiscriminate use of chemical fertiliser, pesticides, and other toxic inorganic elements in crop production. In the startup stage, this team plans to organise 100 farmers in 10 community-based organisations and provide them with technical know-how about producing organic fertilisers and pesticides and vegetable farming.

SHONJIBON

Shonjibon plans to provide livelihood for unemployed adult family members of tea garden workers in the Sylhet region. These households are completely dependent upon the income of the tea garden workers, whose daily incomes are below than USD 1. Many adults are unemployed due to the absence of job opportunities outside the garden work. Shonjibon aims to organise these workers to produce paper and cloth bags. Profits will be re-invested for community development.

POKA

In Bangladesh, children below five face the greatest risk from eating unsafe food. On the other hand, farmers are being deprived of the just price for their products due to the non-activation of government policies related to processing, storage & preservation, improvement of transportation system of agricultural product, market-related information services, export of agricultural products, agricultural price commission, etc. POKA will work

with marginalised families to produce safe vegetables and establish market linkages with sustainable customers.

BONDHON

This is a daycare complex for the elderly and the young children. Bringing the elderly and the younger generation together under the same roof will enable them to interact with each other, and share stories and experiences. Bondhon's prime concern is ensuring their members feel as happy as they would in their homes. Their childcare is focused on early child development and care for the elderly is focused on 'helping yourself'.

GREEN FIGHTER

As the second least liveable city, there is no space for greenery in Dhaka. Children and senior citizens do not have enough open space for recreation. This team plans to design rooftops for buildings, making them aesthetically pleasing while allowing them to cultivate premium flowers and vegetables. The garden will have a children's corner, amenities for relaxation, lights, music, shade, small fountains, etc. Green Fighter aims to use hydroponic technology and vertical cultivation to achieve their goals.

SHAHRIAR SHARIF

The writer is a sophomore at the Institute of Business Administration, University of Dhaka.

Making a DIFFERENCE

Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards middle income status by 2021. Our businesses definitely offer immense opportunities for the growing economy and this diversity needs a stage for the stories untold. See Bangladesh make its mark on the global map as Making a Difference brings you our proudest success stories from across the country.

PRODUCTIVITY HACKS TO HELP YOU PRIORITISE

We start Sunday with a plate full of work left over from the last week. And straight till Thursday, we keep piling on more and more things to do. Of course we get some work done, but how many of us can attest to being at our productive best? We spend our days constantly burdened with everything we need to get done, never fully at peace. And while all of us make mental notes and are fully confident in our abilities of prioritisation, our judgment is often clouded by this very self-confidence. But there has to be a method (or rather methods) to this madness. So let's go through some steps.

First thing's first: list out your tasks. Most of us stop at this part. Heck, I stop at this part. But the ginormous list that you've just come up with is counter-productive—it's sheer length discourages you from looking at it again the rest of the week. So what do you do?

Sort. Sort tasks by Must, Should, and Want. We all know how this works. Your musts are the tasks that you have say deadlines for, that need to be handed in as soon as possible. Then come the shoulds and the wants.

Want to go the extra mile? Write tomorrow's to-do list tonight. If you get into the habit, you're definitely going to start seeing results.

If you're still not getting anywhere, break it down even more. What are the three most important things you need to get done? Write them on a sticky note and stick it on your desk or your bedroom mirror (whichever you frequent



more often).

Your number one most important task is the thing you should do first. There really shouldn't be a doubt about it. And if it's something you really don't want to get involved with, you should start with it right away. Get it done; nothing will beat the feeling of relief afterwards.

To help you with prioritising, ask yourself a series of questions about each task: Will it help me reach a goal? Can this only be done by me? Is it important? Does it matter to my boss? Does it make money? Does it make my life eas-

ier? Does it have to be done today? Sort out your tasks based on the number of yeses.

And if you can't get started on that scary "number one most important task", do something on your list that is comparatively more fun or creative—that gets the juices flowing when nothing else does.

AMIYA HALDER

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