

Press Release - Indian Mobile Games to fight HIV/AIDS in Africa

On World AIDS day – 1st December 2006, Freedom HIV/AIDS not only celebrates its first anniversary in fight against HIV/AIDS using mobile phone games but also adds a new chapter – ‘Africa Reach Program’ with Hivos, a leading Dutch development organization, and KPN, the largest Dutch telecom company, under the STAR programme (www.starprogramme.org). The six countries covered under the Star programme in Africa are Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya in Eastern Africa, and Malawi, Mozambique and Namibia in Southern Africa, some of the most HIV/AIDS affected regions of Africa.

Under this collaboration the ZMQ will design and develop new mobile games on HIV/AIDS awareness for Africa. In the first phase 2 games are launched in Kenya. Apart from English, the mobile games for HIV/AIDS awareness are also being launched in the local language - Kiswahili using local characters, heroes, and local messaging using colloquial. Later ZMQ plans to bring more games and learning solutions on HIV/AIDS for the African nations using local folks, tales and culture.

The First game is AIDS Penalty Shoot-out, a soccer game based, a popular sport in Africa. In this game the player has to save and shoot penalties. On saving a penalty the gamer gets random messages on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, on saving a goal receives message on safety and on scoring a goal receives messages on modes of transmission and myths and misconceptions about HIV/AIDS. The score of a gamer also enables to capture the learning quotient of the gamer thus helping in a behavior change.

The second game Mission Messenger is an adventure game for casual users who enjoy playing exciting but easy-to-manuever games. The gamer flies over the African continent, from village to village, collecting condoms and red ribbons, and distributes them to the villagers on their specific needs and demands, spreading the messages of HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention, transmission and safety. Freedom HIV/AIDS started with 4 games for India, which has been acclaimed as one of the most innovative social development project done using technology. During this period there has been an overwhelming response to these games with a download of over 7 million game sessions in the year. Seeing the tremendous response and effect of the games, more and more groups are looking to use mobile as a medium to create awareness.

On the collaboration for mobile games for Africa between Hivos and ZMQ, Paul Maassen, Programme Manager ICT and Knowledge Sharing, of Hivos said: “Hivos is very excited about our co-operation with ZMQ. They have shown that blending HIV awareness with mobile phone games was not just innovative but highly successful in India and we believe it will do the same in Africa. Hivos partners closely with many African organizations working on HIV/AIDS and youth. Today, mobile phone is as common for the majority of African youth as it is in other parts of the world. Use of HIV/AIDS knowledge games to will be an innovative and effective way of creating awareness and sensitization among the youth of Africa. And this innovative and effective approach very much fits in the Hivos development strategy. The STAR programme hopes that a successful launch of the pilot will lead to further expansion and scalability in other African countries”.

On the above collaboration, CEO of ZMQ Software Systems Subhi Quraishi said, “Fortunately or unfortunately, Mobile reach and HIV/AIDS has seen a parallel growth. Mobile devices are the most widely spread technology tool in the hands of a common man. Using this reach of device, we can fight HIV/AIDS by creating awareness and health management tool”. Subhi Quraishi further said, “Joining hands with Hivos and STAR programme, it has provided us a reach to Africa and we are very excited about it. Reaching the most affected area was our target, and we thank STAR programme to have given this opportunity.

STAR programme is a capacity building programme of Hivos. Hivos will contribute expertise on organisational development within civil society organisations to the programme, as well as ICTs & Development expertise, knowledge on the digital divide and country specific knowledge.

ZMQ is a Delhi based eLearning, Gaming and Edutainment company, specializing in developing innovative communications solutions for grass-root communities using ICT. Through its edutainment based interactive learning solutions in form of mobile games, ZMQ has been a pioneer in developing mobile phone games on HIV/AIDS awareness on World AIDS day in the year 2005. For its Outstanding Contribution in fight against HIV/AIDS and the role of business in the global fight against HIV/AIDS, ZMQ Software Systems won GBC Business Award 2006, and was commended in the category of Core Competency for its innovative initiative by Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS in London in May 2006. The combination of the different skills of these three organizations - Hivos, KPN and ZMQ adds significant value to the programme.

ZMQ is working on various other ICT tools in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Some of which are: Edutainment games for Youth in vernacular languages of India; monitoring and evaluation tools for HIV/AIDS Workplace programs; Journalist Training program for reporting Millennium Development Goal issues, and other concepts and solutions in the area of Child Development, Female Feticides, MDG issues, Health issues such as TB, Malaria, HIV/AIDS, Disaster Management and Preparedness programs, Environment and Climate change etc.

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