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APONJON SETS ON A
WORTHY PARTNERSHIP
WITH **Lalteer**

APONJON HAS **EXTENDED**
A HELPING HAND
TO GET CLOSER TO PEOPLE



APONJON NEWS

Issue 4 | July - September 2013

APONJON MEANS
SAFE MOTHERHOOD
WITH A GREAT SMILE

MORE THAN
150 THOUSAND
SUBSCRIBERS
RECEIVE CARE
OF APONJON NOW

APONJON RESEARCH
TEAM CONDUCTED
A SUCCESSFUL
FIELD RESEARCH

BUSY DAY OF APONJON
COMMUNICATION
TEAM IN THE FIELD

BIT OF A **LEISURE TIME**
TOGETHER
OUTSIDE OFFICE AND WORK

SHAN HUANG
in **BANGLADESH**
TO MEET
APONJON CLIENTS



Aponjon won the mBillionth Award

mBillionth, an international initiative, has described the 21st Century as the era of mobile technology, and awards the best of the best. Taking part at the mBillionth Award competition, Aponjon did not disappoint. Mobile Alliance for Maternal Health (MAMA) initiative, branded “Aponjon” in Bangladesh is the first program in Bangladesh as well as South Asia to move forward with a national scale operation in delivering health information service through mobile technology. Aponjon is a USAID-supported project under the Maternal and Child Health Integrated Program (MCHIP) that delivers stage-based essential health messages to expectant and new mothers and their families across Bangladesh via mobile phones. Implemented by Dnet in Bangladesh, the program has seen a great height of success with client numbers crossing 100,000 and increasing daily. The uniqueness of the service and the quality it maintains, including the impressive popularity and effectiveness it has achieved in such a small time has been an attention drawing factor for the award jury – hence the winning of the mBillionth Award in the ‘m-Women and Children’ category.

The mBillionth award ceremony recognizes the South Asian countries’ outstanding initiatives that use mobile technology and encourages initiatives to delve deeper in their ideas and innovations of mobile technology. This year, the ceremony was held at the Hotel EROS Intercontinental in New Delhi on July 18, 2013. Ms. Shamarukh Alam, Director, Programs of Dnet, received this year’s award on behalf of Aponjon. During her presentation, Ms. Alam said, “There are a lot of challenges to face in order to make technology based services like Aponjon available to the people in developing countries such as Bangladesh.” While talking to correspond-

ents from different international media, she gave recognition to the hard working Aponjon team for this achievement. Such recognition is truly inspiring and encouraging for the hard work put into their innovations.

Aponjon also participated in many other interactive sessions arranged by mBillionth. Throughout the event there were other attractions, including a stall that featured audiovisuals explaining the Aponjon services and its unique features.

Aponjon is an IT based health information service, which is designed for providing health advice to pregnant and new mothers in Bangladesh. Delivering messages designed specifically for expecting and new mothers, the service is accessible to everyone with a mobile phone that uses Grameenphone, Robi, Airtel, Citycell or Banglalink connection through free registration. Once registered, users receive two messages per week at their mobile phones via text or voice message format, depending on the preference of the client. Messages cost two taka per message and are designed according to the phase of pregnancy or the child’s age. In addition, the Aponjon Counseling Line service has recently begun giving clients the opportunity to receive advice directly from a doctor on medical problems experienced by expecting or new mothers round the clock. Not all women and their families have access to health information and services in the hard-to-reach areas of a country like Bangladesh. Yet in the most remote areas of the country, mobile phone use continues to increase every day. Aponjon uses this growing mobile penetration to disseminate essential health information to these mothers, providing—as its slogan says—“power of health in every mother’s hand” which really makes the 21st century an era of mobile technology.



Aponjon team member with all m-billionth award winners

Aponjon sets on a worthy partnership with Lalteer

Aponjon is an initiative for good health and welfare of women and children. This was the factor that triggered an interest in Lal Teer Seeds Ltd. to get involved with the service. Lal Teer Seeds Ltd., which is a sister concern of Multimode Group is on a path of continued strengthening of a worthy relationship with Aponjon.. Sharing each other's views and increasing the level of understanding between the two initiatives made the bond more prominent. An exclusive interview was held by Aponjon team with Ms. Nasreen F. Awal, the president of the Multimode Group. The magnetic portion of the exclusive interview follows.



During the interview session

Aponjon: How did you get to know about Aponjon at first? Why did you become interested to work with Aponjon?

N.A.: About three or four years back, I talked to a few guests from US embassy at my house. We discussed about the real scenario of the rural women in Bangladesh. In course of conversation, they mentioned the global initiative from MAMA. As we had already been involved in some social activities with Johnson and Johnson from the very beginning as part of our CSR activities, our interest grew on the initiatives from the global MAMA program and we came in touch with Aponjon. This is how the journey began.

Aponjon: As we already know, Lalteer is mostly working with the rural people. In the areas that you work, Aponjon is getting visibility with help from Lalteer. How is the acceptance among people?

N.A.: Mostly, Lalteer is doing work with women, who are busy with their household garden. We run our initiative by emphasizing on providing quality seeds among them. Lalteer is capable enough to reach small scale farmers and farmers with great resources.

As Aponjon is getting more visibility among the people of remote areas through all the Lalteer printing and communication materials, they are getting to know about Aponjon more and more. At the same time, people have developed a belief, that, Lalteer, beside the business, has some good motivation for social welfare. Actually, that also helps us to keep a good relationship with the mass people. Aponjon is helping us a lot to strengthen the trust between us and the general people.

Aponjon: Do you have people asking your team about the service of Aponjon?

N.A.: Whenever one receives a prescription for seeds from Lalteer, they see the Aponjon logo placed at the bottom. People usually ask about that. And, in the rural areas, everybody keeps the prescription carefully for the sake of their crops. The prescription is a valuable instruction for them. Other than that, Aponjon logo is visible more or less in every printing materials from Lalteer, giving a visibility which gets attention from everybody. The farmer who is not married yet will also get to know about Aponjon, which may be useful for him in future. Then, when the time comes, he will still have that prescription with him; as the farmers usually try not to lose that paper.

Aponjon: Do you think, the partnership between Aponjon and Lalteer would be effective for providing health services to pregnant women?

N.A.: As we all know, in our society the women from rural areas are deprived from a lot of benefits. Most of the times, they cannot share their problems with their mothers in law, not even with their husbands.

Nasrin F. Awal, Chair person of Multimode group

health information for expecting and new mothers through mobile phone
Mother & child's Aponjon, Call 16 22 7 for registration

Interview

As Aponjon is coming up with a doctor counseling line, they can share their health problems during pregnancy period easily with the doctors. Already Lalteer is working in many remote areas where Aponjon has not reached yet at the field level. In these places, through getting visibility, Aponjon is becoming a familiar name to all. For Aponjon, that would make it easy to work there in future.

Aponjon: Aponjon is passionate to move forward. Aponjon hopes to be together with Lalteer for a long time to come. Lalteer and Aponjon, walking hand in hand, how do you feel about that?

N.A: In Bangladesh the mortality rate of expecting women and children are decreasing day by day. To bring the rate down to the lowest level, I feel that Aponjon and Lalteer can work together successfully. It's our dream that the name of Aponjon will be placed side by side with Lalteer in the face of the future that will change the social condition of women. One conscious mother can change the nation. 16227 will not only be the number or a solution to get health advice. Aponjon health service can be the driving force to develop true consciousness among pregnant women; can build up a regular practice among mothers to maintain a healthy life. That will bring the change for everyone. And that, in effect, would be a revolutionary change for the whole society; that I am sure of. Aponjon and Lalteer will walk the long path together.

Aponjon: Thank you so much for your time and for sharing your thoughts with us.

N.A: Thanks to you too. I wish the greatest success for Aponjon.

Aponjon has extended a helping hand to get closer to people

“ ‘Why are you in such a hurry? In your delicate condition, please try to move carefully.’ - Just after getting inside the walls of a household, I saw a mother in law giving this advice to her daughter in law; it's an unusual scenario in a usual rural context”- said Shefali Rani Das. She works at Baniachong, Habiganj as a community health worker with Save the Children in the ‘Mamoni’ project. Until now, she has helped 94 mothers get registered to Aponjon. Shefali said, “Aponjon is contributing to the change in quality of the lives of

Aponjon team in action

rural women in a unique way. Those who were not aware of their health and wellbeing before are listening to ‘Doctor Apa’ by taking her as a trustworthy source of health information. And most of the time they get positive results. Many people are asking questions about food chart and health of babies and the mother these days, a lot frequently than before. Even in a place like Habiganj, where most of the families belong to a culture which is a little bit conservative in nature, mothers in law and husbands of these families grew a keen interest about this health information services. At first, I had to face some challenges, but now that time has passed. ‘Aponjon’ has extended a helping hand to me to get closer to the people.” The delighted Shefali uttered these words in her local dialect as, “Amare Mynshor Aro KandotJawar lagi Aat Awggai disej Aponjon”.

Busy day of Aponjon communication team in the field

Aponjon is adamant to take the service to every corner of the country. To that end, it is working towards deployment of different types of mass communication tools. In September, the Communication team went for shooting of a new TV advertisement at a location near Dhaka, at Manikganj. A bunch of children and women from the rural areas portrayed their tremendous acting skill on a drama based script. The advertisement reflected the aspects of Aponjon as a health information service and the necessity of the service in the society . The Television Commercial places the plot in a semi-urban context. To make a presence in a multiple platforms of mass communication, Aponjon will also go for visibility in Billboards and placards in many places of the country very soon.



Aponjon team busy during the TVC shooting

The television advertisement is scheduled to be aired in October on the state owned channel Bangladesh Television, as well as other satellite channels, namely My TV and ATN Bangla. The advertisement will also be published at Aponjon's own website and other social media sites. These tools of mass communication is expected to take Aponjon closer to the mass people in the country.

Aponjon research team conducted a successful field research

The Aponjon team conducted a field survey in different areas of 8 districts in Bangladesh to collect data and information as well as to assess the acceptability of Aponjon among the mass. The field survey for this research has already been completed under the umbrella of the 'sample survey'. Aponjon worked in the remote and hard to reach areas of the country to collect information on different issues. This brought forth a number and varieties of case studies. The Aponjon messages have taught people that infants should not be left in contact with wet bed sheets; people were not in the habit of following simple health instructions like washing hands regularly – Aponjon messages have changed all that by endorsing the importance of these habits through the voice of 'Daktar Apa', the lady doctor. Mafruha Alam, who is working in the research department of Aponjon said that the research findings notably portrayed the effect of Aponjon messages to bring such behavioral changes among the people to a considerable extent. She also said, that the researchers have observed a keen interest to adopt Aponjon service among women in many highly conservative families of the remote rural areas of the country, which is a very hopeful sign.



Researchers are busy with field data collection

Another observation was that, when an Aponjon subscriber listens to the message in her mobile phone, mothers and expecting women from neighboring houses also come to her house and want to listen to the Aponjon messages. And they also try to follow the instructions and health tips for their own case. These messages also encourage the other family members in the family to take good care of the mother's health.

Aponjon means safe motherhood with a great smile

"Aponjon gives such a great service, which gives a lot higher value in comparison to the small price of 2.30 BDT per message. For any subscriber, the cost bearing for the service is not a major issue. When asked about the price, everybody said that this small amount could be spent for hundreds of reasons. If the expense is done for a quality health service, then it should be worthwhile for anyone", said Selina Parvin. She lives in Rajshahi and is a brand promoter working for Aponjon. She stated her experiences of dealing with Aponjon services and at the same time highlighted the acceptance of Aponjon among the general people all over her city.

In the semi urban or rural areas, most of the pregnant women spend most of their time of the day busy with their household activities. They usually do not take sufficient care of themselves. They don't even take notice of the date of vaccination of their babies. Aponjon played a big role to change this scenario. The voice message from Aponjon shows the right path for healthy outcomes from the good things in life. This made the subscribers take the advices seriously, said Selina quoting the statement of a subscriber named Shanti. Receiving advices from a quality service like Aponjon has also increased the interest of the subscribers' neighbors. Chit-chats among neighbors has made Aponjon a familiar name day by day.

Shan Huang in Bangladesh to meet Aponjon clients

I was an Aponjon subscriber before my first child was born. I would love to subscribe to Aponjon again if I conceive in future. The statement from Ms. Lucky, one of the Aponjon subscribers is proof of popularity of Aponjon among people. Shan Huang works as the Health Project Director at the Relief and Development department of People in Need (PIN).

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Aponjon team in action

She came to Bangladesh with an aspiration to launch a similar kind of service in Cambodia. She visited the Aponjon clients at Bhashantek, Mirpur in Dhaka on 24 September. The Aponjon team and the health worker from BRAC, Ms. Parveen took Shan to the homes of the Aponjon subscribers in the area. Shan asked the subscribers how they see the new innovation in health information delivery. Ms. Lucky, Ms. Josna and many other subscribers responded by saying, the life has been made a lot easier by use of mobile phones; and such a wonderful health information service like Aponjon has managed to show the right path in delivering livelihood information that matters. The popularity and acceptance of Aponjon has helped Shan return to her country with high hopes.



Shan Huang with Aponjon subscribers and health worker

Aponjon on field

More than 150 thousand subscribers receive care of Aponjon now

It happened on a regular day at office. A countdown had begun. Tension was in the air everywhere! As if, the final moments of a final match was going on with the favorite team on the verge of win. Then suddenly, the whole office screamed out with joy. Aponjon had just achieved the milestone of 150K subscribers with flying colors. The team celebrated the achievement wholeheartedly. The efforts from Aponjon team finally showed results in September 2013. The milestone of 150K subscribers was achieved only within a month of reaching the previous milestone of 100 thousand subscribers. Aponjon is becoming a service closer to heart of people every day. Every achievement becomes an inspiration for the team to work harder and harder to make the future path more successful. In small steps, Aponjon has passed almost a year since the national launch setting examples along the way. The team is determined to keep working for continuous improvement of the service for a long time to come. The team is committed to put all possible efforts to enrich the service and contribute in reduction of child and maternal mortality in Bangladesh. Aponjon has a dream to become the most trustworthy health service for every pregnant and new mother in our country.



150,000 lives



and counting fast.....



www.aponjon.com.bd/sponsor-mother

Bit of a leisure time together outside office and work

How often does one get to spend some time together with the team outside work? Be it to sing a few songs together, or to enjoy the beautiful greenery of tea



Aponjon team together at outside of workplace

gardens? Rarely. That is what led the work-weary Aponjon members to take the whole team to the Tea gardens of Srimongol in Moulavibazar. The whole team remained captivated in the dream of a beautiful and promising future for a full stretch of 2 days, away from the pressures of office files and computer work. A rough sketch came into picture showing how everyone envisioned the coming years, ways of getting nearer to the common people. Other than the workshop, visiting beautiful places nearby, chit-chats, fun and games was part of the schedule as well. Aponjon planned this retreat with a thought that some good laughs, fun, games and singing together in the embrace of nature works wonders to refresh people to give renewed energy for work. Thoughts, then turned into plans and actions followed.



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