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Global Entrepreneurship: Doing Well by Doing Good - The MIT Enterprise Forum

Iqbal Quadir is internationally known for developing a new vision for universal information access, which he realized as the [GrameenPhone](#) network and its famous village phone ladies. Grameen Bank developed its Village Phone program in 1997 in collaboration with companies in the US, Norway and Japan. Although considered unrealistic at the time, today it is widely considered to be one of the world's most important poverty alleviation inventions.

On September 21, members of the MIT Enterprise Forum of Atlanta gathered to view a satellite broadcast of a program called "Global Entrepreneurship." The program explored the opportunities for entrepreneurs in developing markets around the world and here in the U.S. Attendees heard real-world success stories from Quadir and other entrepreneurs and found out how MIT is taking a leading role in globalization efforts for the 21st century.

Quadir is founder of the GrameenPhone cellular network in Bangladesh and co-founder and director of the MIT Program for Developmental Entrepreneurship. Villages across Bangladesh have crossed the digital divide through a program that turns local women into successful telecommunications entrepreneurs. Through Grameen Telecom's innovative Village Phone program, a Bangladeshi woman can obtain a cell phone kit through a micro-credit 'in kind' loan, and then become the operator of a phone service for the rest of her village. In addition to the obvious benefits of enabling millions of locals with access to phones, village women received much-needed financial independence in one of the poorest countries in the world.

"The GrameenPhone cellular network has given access to close to a hundred million people. This is a great example of how a private business contributes to the total GDP of a nation by three times more than the outside aid that country receives. The wealth created by a company is also dispersed as opposed to being centralized by the government. Centralizing aid in a developing nation's government leads to a concentration of power and perhaps promotes corruption," said Quadir.

"I'm working on a new project that is similar to what we did with GrameenPhone. We are hoping to provide rural villages with a central power plant to distribute electricity throughout. These types of projects are important because they help educate and empower the people in these areas."



From 2001-2005, Quadir was a fellow at Harvard's JFK School of Government, teaching how technologies can affect change in developing countries. He is now co-founder and director of the MIT Program for Developmental Entrepreneurship (DE), and organizing projects providing electricity, fertilizers, and potable water in Bangladesh and other countries.

"By creating products, services and jobs, entrepreneurs expand economies, improve people's lives, and bring about competition. A competitive environment, in turn, gives rise to efficiency, meritocracy, and further innovations and entrepreneurial drive. Moreover, the potent combination of entrepreneurship and technological innovations contributes to an ecosystem - including government policies - that is conducive to further entrepreneurship and technological innovations." (The MIT Program for Developmental Entrepreneurship)

MIT is hoping to play a fundamental role in starting cycles of entrepreneurship and technological innovations in places that have otherwise been subject to poverty and stagnation. At its core, the program helps MIT students invent new technologies and organizations, increases their understanding of the challenges faced by low income communities, connects them to other resources at MIT and elsewhere that may help them design and implement sustainable enterprises, and conducts research that may be useful to entrepreneurs and enterprises.

DE already has a strong record of success. It has produced spin-offs such as:

- [Way Systems](#) added a card reader and banking network to convert existing cell phones into low-cost point-of-sale devices. Their goal is to enable the world's 100M village entrepreneurs to participate in a credit economy and provide simple banking services.
- [United Villages](#) delivers voice messaging and email to rural areas using ultra-low-cost WiFi technology.
- [CellBazaar](#) creates a local electronic marketplace for villagers via cell phones. With 8.5M villages in Bangladesh, its goal is to become the eBay of the developing world.
- [Howtoons](#) produces cartoons that show kids of all ages 'How To' build things. These 'Tools of Mass Construction' inspire kids everywhere to think about hopeful futures while developing the practical skills and creative savvy to solve real problems.
- [Dimagi](#) uses PDAs and cellular phones to help deliver healthcare services around the world. Their product line provides rural healthcare workers with up-to-date medical information and creates aggregate databases to help in the management of global disease.
- [blueEnergy](#) is a provider of low-cost, sustainable energy to underdeveloped communities in Central America using locally-made micro wind turbines. blueEnergy's efforts provide local jobs, boost local economies and provide those in need with critical basic energy services.

Other members of the feature panel included Alex Pentland (moderator), professor of Media Arts and Sciences at the MIT Media Lab and co-founder and director of the MIT Program for Developmental Entrepreneurship; Damien Balsan, co-founder and vice president of business development for WAY Systems, a leader in mobile point-of-sale devices; Rick Burnes, co-founder of the venture capital firm Charles River Ventures; Iqbal Quadir, founder of the GrameenPhone cellular network in Bangladesh, and co-founder and director of the MIT Program for Developmental Entrepreneurship; and Randy Zadra, managing director of the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas.

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