

# Connecting And Collaborating With Communities



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A globally recognized business leader and philanthropist, Subaskaran Allirajah, Chairman and Founder of Lyca Group of Companies, UK, calls Sri Lanka his home. Having migrated to the UK, he was able to establish the largest and most successful platform to connect people around the world and has set benchmark in the MVNO market. Lyca has expanded its portfolio to include not only telecommunications but financial services, media, entertainment, travel and film production. While expanding his business, Subaskaran Allirajah has not forgotten those in need. As such through the Gnanam Foundation, which was founded by him and his mother projects are implemented in various parts of the world including Sri Lanka. He says that Sri Lanka will always be home and it is his aim to contribute towards the development of the country.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe

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**Lycamobile was established in 2006 with the aim of setting a benchmark in the MVNO market. Today Lycamobile has a customer base of over 15 million across 20 countries. How was this achieved?**

In ten short years our growth and success have been phenomenal - our turnover now stands at \$1.8bn - and those achievements are the end result of the determination, experience, expertise and hard work of the team here at Lyca. We have the best product solution for the needs of our consumers and our strength is how we match that to our target customer communities.

**With the focus of 'connecting friends and family around the world', Lycamobile provides low-cost high-quality international calls and now operates across five continents. What was your strategy?**

We started in Europe where millions of migrants from different ethnic origins have settled over the years. We know how hard it is to travel to a new country and start a new life, and how important it is to be able to speak to your family, your friends and loved ones, from your life back home. My family and I went through that journey when we came to Europe from our home in Sri Lanka. As migrants, we understood the needs and desires of migrant communities and set to work developing a product solution that connected with their hearts and minds. The rest is history.

We Saw The Needs Of Communities In Situations That Were Very Close To Our Hearts. Even When Living Thousands Of Miles Away, Our Hearts Are Always With Our Homes.

**Lycamobile has become the largest Mobile Virtual Network Operator in the world; in 2006 when you started what was the reason behind entering this particular segment of telecommunication?**

We saw the needs of communities in situations that were very close to our hearts. Even when living thousands of miles away, our hearts are always with our homes. At the time there were no options for people to call internationally on a high quality service at affordable rates. We launched our services to fill that gap and bring friends and families closer together.

**Lyca is not only about telecommunications, it is also the global leader in providing financial services, media entertainment and travel. Can you elaborate on this expansion?**

Our vision was to expand the business with new and innovative products for the migrant and expatriate communities. Even though we have diversified, our core focus has stayed the same. Whether it is travel, media or financial services, we have endeavoured to address that emotional need to be in touch with family and friends. All our products deliver exactly that and help keep our target consumer communities in touch with their identities.

**You are also developing a great movie reputation through Lyca Productions. Tell us more about this aspect?**

I have always been a big movie fan and I am inspired by the movie talent in South Asia. We have already committed over \$200m in a number of successful movies and we have invested a further \$60m in a new production called 2.0 (Robo 2.0) to be released in 2017. This is the highest ever budget for a film production in India. It is a serious long term venture for Lyca and we believe that this will be the highest grossing film ever in India.

We Would Be Delighted To Support The Sri Lankan Film Industry With A Future Lyca Productions Blockbuster If The Right Script And Crew Become Available.

**Are you open to film production facilities in Sri Lanka?**

Of course, we would be delighted to support the Sri Lankan film industry with a future Lyca Productions blockbuster if the right script and crew become available.

**Lyca Chat, Lyca remit, Lyca TV, Lyca Health and Lyca Cargo are some of the products that are available. They are multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic platforms. The scope is massive. What was the thinking behind these endeavours?**

Ethnic communities are at the center of our business, to the extent that we now employ over 52 nationalities around the world. We are a truly one multi-national family and we want every one of our team members to feel like they belong to that family.

Every member of the Lyca Group family has the skills and expertise to deliver high quality products and strategically connect those products with the lives of our consumer target communities.

**Globeman is the company's icon, why was this particular symbol selected to represent Lyca?**

We are all members of one global family. Globeman represents every ethnic community from different corners of the world. He is the uniting symbol of humanity. We want to rise above community lines and geographical separation. It's the market place we want to be in and win.

**What has been your distribution strategy?**

Our distribution strategy is based on building sustainable and lasting collaborations with key partners that share our goals and philosophy. We have over 2,000,000 outlets across the world and we work with major retailers such as Tesco, Walmart/Asda, Lidl and Carrefour and together we forge a mutually beneficial relationship.

Many of our distribution partners have businesses that service ethnic and expatriate communities so they share our approach and direction, as well as understanding how our product benefits the consumer.

**Partnerships have been essential for the success of your business. Can you elaborate on this?**

Our key partnerships are with more than 30 global mobile network operators including Telefonica, Vodafone and T-Mobile. More can be achieved together than striving alone. Good, lasting relationships built around shared goals and objectives have been a fundamental part of our success. Whether those relationships are between the business and its partners, or the internal business team, it is the principle of winning together that brings the best results.

**You are considered as one of Britain's top entrepreneurs. Why is that? How did you come to this position?**

I don't consider myself to be a top entrepreneur however, we have never rested on my laurels, and we compete hard to win.

Every penny we have earned as a business has been re-invested for the expansion and development of it and everybody from the top, to the bottom works hard and shares the same values.

Right from the start we have pushed us to keep expanding and improving. We do not compromise on what we want and we never accept no for an answer. We have to get this done now and today.

### **What is your advice to upcoming entrepreneurs?**

Never rest on your achievements. You are only ever as good as today and tomorrow will be another challenging day. Patience and compromise will only delay your progress. Do not compromise on what you want to achieve.

Subaskaran Allirajah Is Listed At Number 13 In The Sunday Times UK Giving List Having Donated £14.8 Million, Over Nine Per Cent Of His Wealth, For Overseas Humanitarian Assistance.

### **You are also one of the top philanthropists in Britain supporting charities such as British Asian Trust as well as through your own organization the Gnanam Foundation donating over 9 per cent of your wealth to humanitarian needs overseas. Can you elaborate on this?**

Success brings its own rewards, and one of the rewards for us was that we could give back to communities and people in need through a number of charitable projects. As one global family we should look out for each other and there should be more done to help people in desperate or tragic circumstances who don't have the tools to help themselves.

I was inspired to start the Gnanam Foundation by my mother, and my wife is also a strong supporter of the foundation. The Gnanam Foundation was founded as a charitable organization that supports disadvantaged and vulnerable people from all walks of life. It also provided aid relief for international crisis such as: the ebola virus epidemic in Africa, the extreme weather in Romania, Tsunami in Indonesia and parts of Sri Lanka affected by different causes.

The Foundation does not accept donations from external sources and is totally funded by the Lyca Group.

### **The Gnanam Foundation was established in 2010, with the mission 'Don't give me a fish but teach me to fish', and the organization implements projects worldwide with over 15million pounds set apart for this aim. What was the thinking behind this?**

We believe in helping people to help themselves. We want people to feel

confident, be able to earn their living and support their families. Our projects are focused on long term solutions rather than short term fixes.

**There are many projects being implemented by the organization in Sri Lanka, can you expand on the work done so far?**

Sri Lanka - our home, is very close to our hearts and minds. Whatever we do here does not satisfy our desire to do more.

Our key project objectives are: We help children to continue their education so that they can secure their future; We help widows and vulnerable families become self-employed so that they stand on their feet without depending on others; We are building a complete village of 150 houses to help re-settle families toiling in refugee camps; We provide support for senior citizens of Sri Lanka; And, assistance for disadvantage families so they can have healthy lives.

**What motivates you?**

It motivates me every day to see how far the team can take the business. There are no limits to what we can achieve and it is our aim to continue this journey of expansion.

**Future plans?**

The Lyca Group will continue its journey to areas it has never been before. Our footprint will touch every ethnic community of the globe. If the opportunity arises and the environment is receptive, Sri Lanka will be part of our world in the very near future.

**Other thoughts?**

Wherever we go and whatever we do, our thoughts are always with home. We are proud of our journeys, origins and cultural identity. We have always maintained and cherished our ties with home. This is what attracts us back to Sri Lanka and we want to invest here and contribute in whatever way we can.



