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Grameen Foundation Launches Mobile Services Tailored to the Poor with Google and MTN Uganda

Initiative promotes innovative use of existing technology to empower the world's poor

Washington, D.C./Kampala, Uganda, June 29, 2009—Grameen Foundation today announced the launch of a suite of mobile phone applications developed with Google and MTN Uganda (MTN) that deliver services and information that were previously unavailable to Uganda's poor and disadvantaged communities.

This launch makes available the first suite of applications resulting from an endeavor initiated by Grameen Foundation 18 months ago called the Application Laboratory (AppLab). The five mobile phone applications provide real-time health and agricultural information and a virtual marketplace for buying and selling goods and services. This field-based program in Uganda is based on an innovative partnership that strategically combines the resources and experience of Grameen Foundation, Google, and MTN.

The suite of five mobile services, provided using Google SMS Search technology and the MTN network, includes Farmer's Friend, a searchable database with both agricultural advice and targeted weather forecasts; Health Tips which provides sexual and reproductive health information, paired with Clinic Finder, which helps locate nearby health clinics and their services; and Google Trader, which matches buyers and sellers of agricultural produce and commodities as well as other products. The services are SMS-based and designed to work with basic mobile phones to reach the broadest possible audience. Users can access the services quickly and privately at the time of their choosing and search relevant content on-demand, like someone with access to the Internet.

AppLab Uganda, which is located in Kampala and directed by Grameen Foundation's Technology Center, focuses on creating opportunities for poor people to share and access essential information through innovative uses of mobile phones which are in the hands of over four billion people around the world. The new services in Uganda can be accessed by existing Village Phone Operators (VPOs) who extend service to people without mobile phones as well as by people who have their own phones. VPOs and other trusted intermediaries serve as a bridge between communities who lack access to essential information and the sources that can provide it. Building on the pioneering work of Grameen Telecom in Bangladesh, Grameen Foundation and MTN Uganda launched Village Phone in Uganda in 2004 to expand telecommunications access to poor people.

"AppLab is a great example of innovation from and for the base of the pyramid, bringing relevant, actionable information to communities where access to the Internet is unavailable," said Alex Counts, president of Grameen Foundation. "Through an approach including sector research, field-based rapid prototyping, extensive interaction with target users, and carefully structured field pilots, we have been able to gain deep insights from the people who benefit directly from using these applications. We are excited to take the next big step – going from an innovative product development approach to scaling proven and sustainable applications across

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Uganda for the benefit of the poor and poorest.”

The information in the applications was developed in collaboration with key local partners. The Busoga Rural Open Source Development Initiative (BRODSI) provides locally-relevant and actionable agricultural information created and tested by small-holder farmers and designed to meet their needs. For the health application, AppLab works with Marie Stopes Uganda, the local affiliate of a leading service provider for sexual and reproductive health, and Straight Talk Foundation, a Ugandan NGO which specializes in health communication.

Using the Google Trader application, local buyers and sellers, such as small-holder farmers, are able to broaden their trading networks and reduce their transaction costs. AppLab worked with the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture, TechnoServe and SNV Netherlands Development Organisation to hone the concept with banana and pineapple farmers in southern Uganda (Mbarara region).

“These sustainable and scalable models put critical information and knowledge directly into the hands of poor people who have access to mobile devices, in an effort to further alleviate poverty,” said Joseph Mucheru, Google’s lead for Sub-Saharan Africa. “This work is significant both for individuals and for the broader regional economy.”

”These services represent the first of what will be many initiatives reaching the segment of our market that has been underserved for a long time,” said Noel Meier, CEO, MTN Uganda. “We are hoping to reach people in rural and disadvantaged communities while we build up a new line of business for the company.”

With the nationwide launch, Innovations for Poverty Action, with the support of Google.org and AppLab, will also conduct a social assessment to determine the effectiveness of the Health Tips service in changing the knowledge, attitudes and behavior of users.

Looking ahead, the Grameen Foundation Application Laboratory will continue to develop applications and related services tailored to the needs of poor communities. It will work on a project basis with technology partners such as Google, mobile operators such as MTN, NGOs, foundations and government entities to develop new applications and innovative services for the poor in Uganda and beyond – working to transform lives through innovation in information access.

About Grameen Foundation

Grameen Foundation, a global nonprofit organization, helps the world’s poorest people access financial services and technology solutions by providing financing, technology support and management strategies to the local organizations that serve them. It also spearheads technology initiatives that create new microbusiness opportunities for the poor, provide telecommunications access for the world’s rural poor, and improve their access to health and agriculture information and other services. Founded in 1997, Grameen Foundation has offices in Washington, D.C. and Seattle, Washington. Dr. Muhammad Yunus, the founder of Grameen Bank and the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, is a founding member of its board of directors and served on the board for 12 years. Since April 2009, he has served as Grameen Foundation’s first Director emeritus. For more information, please visit www.grameenfoundation.org.

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About Google

Google's innovative search technologies serve the company's mission of "organising the world's information and making it universally accessible and useful", and connect millions of people around the world every day with the information they need. Founded in 1998 by Stanford Ph.D. students Larry Page and Sergey Brin, Google is now a top web property in all major global markets. Google's targeted advertising program provides businesses of all sizes with measurable results, while enhancing the overall web experience for users through free online services. Google is headquartered in Silicon Valley with offices throughout the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa. For more information, please visit <http://www.google.com>

About The MTN Group

Launched in 1994, the MTN Group is a multinational telecommunications group, operating in 21 countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The MTN Group is listed on the JSE Securities Exchange in South Africa under the share code: "MTN". As at 31 December 2008, MTN recorded 90,7 million subscribers across its operations in Afghanistan, Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Republic, Iran, Liberia, Nigeria, Republic of Congo (Congo Brazzaville), Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Syria, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia. The MTN Group is a global sponsor of the 2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa™ and has exclusive mobile content rights for Africa and the Middle East. Visit www.mtn.com and www.mtnfootball.com.

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