**Grameen Foundation USA Releases Village Phone Replication Manual**

*First manual to provide a proven model for establishing telecommunication access in poor, rural communities through microfinance.*

Washington, D.C. (PRWEB) November 14, 2005 -- Grameen Foundation USA (GFUSA) is working to spread the successful Village Phone model throughout the developing world with the release of its Village Phone Replication Manual. The manual, which draws from the experiences of Village Phone in both Bangladesh and Uganda, provides a blueprint for bringing affordable, accessible telecommunications service to poor, rural areas through microfinance. With its release, GFUSA hopes to catalyze a global movement that make telecommunication access a reality for more than 50 million of the world’s rural poor by 2010.

Peter Bladin, GFUSA’s vice president and director of GFUSA’ Grameen Technology Center, will unveil the Replication Manual on November 16, during the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Tunis, Tunisia. The announcement will take place at the infoDev Pavilion in the ICT4All Exhibition Hall and will feature several distinguished speakers, including José Antonio Ocampo, UN Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs; Mostafa Terrab, Program Manager, infoDev; and Amir Dosal, Executive Director of the UN Fund for International Partnerships.

“In remote areas with little infrastructure, the Village Phone program lays the foundation for overall development and gives these rural communities better options for improving health, education and living conditions for themselves and future generations,” said GFUSA President Alex Counts. “In addition to the microbusinesses it creates, mobile phone access is also a critical connection to government services, the doctor, markets for goods, and loved ones.”

Authored by David Keogh and Tim Wood of GFUSA’s Grameen Technology Center, the manual was funded by infoDev, an international consortium of official bilateral and multilateral development agencies, facilitated by an expert Secretariat housed at the World Bank and published by the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force (UN ICT Task Force).

“This experience in Uganda is a remarkable study in development. We hope that the replication manual will provide broader lessons to others who may want to carry this work further,” said Mostafa Terrab. The manual is being released without proprietary controls and updates from replications in other countries will be integrated into future revisions.

“This Replication Manual is an invaluable how-to source for setting up a Village Phone project. It contains a realistic, practical, and detailed set of instructions, templates, and lessons learned, and it is generic enough to be applied in any context where a Village Phone initiative can help empower people and promote development,” said Sarbuland Khan, Executive Coordinator, UN ICT Task Force.

The Village Phone program partners microfinance institutions with telecommunications providers to offer both microenterprise opportunities to the very poor in rural regions, as well as provide the entire community access to telecommunications that are generally unavailable.

Microfinance is a proven poverty reduction strategy. Very poor people, mostly women, receive very small loans to start income producing businesses. The income allows them to improve their lives and help their families
overcome the ravages of severe poverty.

About Grameen Foundation USA
Grameen Foundation USA (GFUSA) is a global non-profit organization that combines microfinance, technology, and innovation to empower the world's poorest people to escape poverty. Founded in 1997, GFUSA has established a global network of 52 partners in 22 countries that has impacted an estimated 5.5 million lives in Asia, Africa, the Americas, and the Middle East. The Grameen Technology Center, an initiative of the Grameen Foundation USA, was founded in 2001 to leverage the power of information and communication technology in the fight against global poverty. For more information on GFUSA, visit www.gfusa.org.

About infoDev
infoDev is an international consortium of official bilateral and multilateral development agencies and other key partners, facilitated by an expert Secretariat housed at the World Bank. InfoDev’s mission is to help developing countries and their partners in the international community use information and communication technologies (ICT) effectively and strategically as tools to combat poverty, promote sustainable economic growth, and empower individuals and communities to participate more fully and creatively in their societies and economies. www.infodev.org

About United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force
The Task Force was established by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to help identify ways to harness the potential for ICT for economic and social development by promoting partnerships of public, private, non-profit and civil society stakeholders to advance the global effort to bridge the digital divide. www.unicttaskforce.org

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