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Millennium Villages, on Track to Reach 2015 Goals, Launch Final Phase

Over \$72 Million in New Funds Will Aid Push for Business Development

NEW YORK, October 3, 2011 – The Millennium Villages Project, the most important science-based partnership in rural Africa working to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, launched its second phase today at the United Nations. The project is on track to enable 500,000 people in 10 countries to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, and to point the way for the rest of rural Africa.

The program will move into its next and final phase with more than \$72 million in new pledges, including \$47.4 million announced today by George Soros, Founder and Chairman of the Open Society Foundations. The second phase will focus on business development to break the poverty trap and to ensure that communities are on the path to self-sufficiency when the project ends in 2015, said the program's leaders.

The launch of phase two of the project was attended by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Mr. Soros, and dozens of other supporters and partners of the project from around the world.

“As we look toward 2015 and beyond, we can be tremendously optimistic,” said the Secretary-General. “For one example of how we can advance the Millennium Development Goals in sub-Saharan Africa, we need only look to the Millennium Village Project. At the project in Mwandama, Malawi, I saw first-hand how an integrated, holistic approach to development can help entire communities lift themselves out of extreme poverty. It gave them the tools they need to build a brighter future.”

The event included the release of *The Millennium Villages Project: The Next Five Years: 2011-2015*, a report detailing gains made since the project's start in 2006, as well as plans for the project's next five years.

Highlights from 2006 to 2009 across 11 Millennium Villages include the following:

- Malaria rates fell by 72% over the first three years
- Households with access to improved drinking water more than tripled
- Across six sites, average maize yields doubled, and in some sites quadrupled
- Rates of chronic malnutrition dropped by one-third among children under two
- Students

benefitting from school meal programs increased to 75%

The project accomplished these results while keeping within its donor budget of \$60 per person per year, a level of support consistent with internationally agreed upon targets for official development assistance, said the organizers. “The Millennium Villages Project is showing that communities can make progress toward ending extreme poverty using an affordable and accessible approach, one that governments can replicate and implement on their own,” said Mr. Soros. “We are proud to support this groundbreaking effort, and inspired by the tremendous progress Millennium Village communities are making across Africa.”

The Open Society Foundations, which have provided key support since the project’s beginning, announced today that it would renew the partnership. For 2011-2015, the Foundations are pledging \$27.4 million to support core project interventions, key staff positions, and the project’s monitoring and evaluation activities. In addition, the Soros Economic Development Fund said it would provide up to \$20 million in loans to support investment-worthy business projects that arise within the villages over the next five years. Additional pledges to date in support of the next phase of the Millennium Villages total more than \$22 million.

“We are thrilled by the rapid gains that the Millennium Village communities are making in the fight against poverty, hunger, and disease,” said Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Millennium Villages Project, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, and President of Millennium Promise. “With the significant improvements already achieved in health, education, agriculture, gender equality, and incomes, plus the continued progress that we can expect in the second phase of the project, the Millennium Villages are on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.”

In phase two, the Millennium Villages Project will focus on raising incomes through business development and linking farmers to larger markets to ensure continued growth and greater economic stability. The project will also work to fine-tune service delivery and other local systems put in place in the first five years; to ensure sustainability by gradually withdrawing financial support from the project as governments scale up investments; and to document and replicate project interventions through rigorous monitoring and evaluation, as well as an open-source online toolkit.

The program has been cooperating closely with several UN agencies, and will continue to do so over the next phase. The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) provides critical operational support. The World Food Programme (WFP) is helping strengthen nutrition and build markets for farmers in the project through the breakthrough Purchase for Progress initiative, while the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) is focusing on promoting universal access to

reproductive health within the communities. Together with the joint United Nations program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the project is monitoring acute malnutrition, and working to strengthen health in the villages by eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV. The project works with the UNDP on policies related to scaling up the lessons of the project.

Other private sector support has come from a wide range of leading companies, including Agrium, Ericsson, General Electric, JM Eagle, Mosaic, and Sumitomo Chemical. Partnership with these companies has allowed village residents to access mobile connectivity, modern health technology, free mosquito nets, improved seeds and fertilizer, and more than 300 miles of piped water systems.

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The Millennium Villages Project is an initiative of The Earth Institute and Millennium Promise, working in close partnership with the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), and many partners in government, business, and civil society. The MVP collaborates with impoverished rural communities, African governments, and a global network of scientific, corporate, and non-governmental partners to apply evidence-based policies and interventions recommended by the UN Millennium Project, combined with local on-the-ground knowledge.

Approximately 500,000 people live in the 14 Millennium Villages, all of which are located in "hunger hotspots" and characteristic of major farming systems across ten sub-Saharan African countries. The Project is demonstrating that the MDGs are achievable through a targeted, holistic, and cost-effective approach to community- and national- level investments.

For more information, please contact:

NEW YORK Erin Trowbridge: trowbridge@ei.columbia.edu or by phone: +1-917-291-7974 Kyu Young Lee: klee@ei.columbia.edu or by phone: +1-212-851-0798

NAIROBI Natalia Mroz: n.mroz@cgiar.org or by phone +254-71-820-0952)

PARIS Joelle Bassoul: j.bassoul@cgiar.org or by phone: +33-63-812-5645