

Good morning and thank you for joining us at today's launching event. We are so pleased to see the project moving forward and so pleased that we can be a part of it.

The Women's Union is the national leader in micro lending. Dedicated, experienced staff, including people living with HIV, work with small entrepreneurs at the local level to plan sustainable income generating ventures, to support these ventures – and more importantly, to support the women running them – and to ensure that funds are repaid on a schedule that is suitable to all. The Women's Union's screening, planning and support systems are so strong that historically and currently they enjoy a 98-100% return rate on their loans.

This means that the same money can be available, again and again, to support an almost infinite number of borrowers. Unlike most poverty reduction efforts, which are limited in time and place, microfinance emphasises patience and breadth over short-term goals. It encourages us to appreciate the whole table of food, rather than just to focus on a single bowl of rice (tham bat bo mam).

For this project's beneficiaries in Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh City, An Giang, Nghe An, Hai Phong, Quang Ninh and Can Tho, a micro loan will turn thorns into knitting needles. Stones into rice. Rain into harvest.

Mohammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, once said that 'Each of us has much more hidden inside us than we have had a chance to explore. Unless we create an environment that enables us to discover the limits of our potential, we will never know what we have inside of us. One day our grandchildren will go to museums to see what poverty was like.'

We wish the Women's Union and the hardworking national United Nations Volunteers great success and commend them for taking on this ambitious project. We look forward to hearing many more success stories in the future.

Thank you and chuc suc khoe.