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**Gates and MasterCard Foundations Partner with
Opportunity International to Provide Financial Access
to 1.4 Million of the Rural Poor in Africa**

\$16 million program focuses on smallholder farmers

Oak Brook, Ill. (Feb. 23, 2010) — Opportunity International has announced a \$16 million program co-funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and The MasterCard Foundation to provide access to savings accounts and agricultural loans in rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa, where less than 10 percent of people have access to comprehensive financial services.

Opportunity will use the joint grant to provide over 1.4 million people with access to savings accounts, including 950,000 in rural areas. It will also roll out innovative, comprehensive financial services to more than 90,000 smallholder farmers living in poverty. To reach both agricultural and non-agricultural borrowers and savers in rural markets, Opportunity will deploy a range of cost-effective delivery channels, including satellite branches, kiosks, mobile vans, ATMs and point-of-sale devices to expand the number of banking outlets. Beginning in Malawi and Ghana, the program will be expanded to two to three additional countries over the next five years.

"The MasterCard Foundation believes that Opportunity International's innovations in microfinance will prove to be key contributions to helping Africa's poor and rural families become self-sustaining," said Reeta Roy, President and CEO, The MasterCard Foundation.

While there is a general lack of financial access in sub-Saharan Africa's rural areas, financial services designed to meet the needs of farmers are even scarcer. Opportunity's strategy will go beyond simply providing agricultural credit and will create a model designed to increase the

farmer's chance for success while mitigating risk. As a key component, Opportunity will develop strategic partnerships with extension service providers to equip farmers with training and market linkages that can help to improve crop productivity and household income.

“Opportunity International is grateful to The MasterCard Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for their support which will help developing agriculturally-based communities transition to thriving and diversified economies,” said Paula Curtis, CEO, Opportunity International Canada. “We hope this tremendous partnership will encourage other individuals, foundations and corporations to join this effort. Opportunity is committed to raising an additional \$15 to \$20 million over the next three years to increase food security, alleviate poverty and enable long-term self-sufficiency for the people of Africa.”

“Access to savings accounts and other financial services help poor people manage life's risks and take advantage of life's opportunities,” said Tamara Cook, program officer for the Financial Services for the Poor initiative at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “Opportunity International is creating new, sustainable business models and scaling up its programs, helping bring financial security to more people in Africa.”

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About Opportunity International

Opportunity International provides small business loans, savings, insurance and training to over two million people working their way out of poverty in the developing world. Clients in over 25 countries use these financial services to start or expand a business, provide for their families, create jobs for their neighbors and build a safety net for the future. For more information, visit www.opportunityinternational.ca

About The MasterCard Foundation

The MasterCard Foundation believes that every person has the potential to transform their lives and to improve the lives of their families and their communities. By increasing access to microfinance and youth education to people in developing countries, the foundation is enabling them to realize their potential and lift themselves out of poverty. The foundation's vision is to make the economy work for everybody. It is an independent, private foundation based in Toronto, Canada and was established through the generosity of MasterCard Worldwide at the time of the company's initial public offering in 2006. For more information, see <http://www.mastercardfdn.org/>

About Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett. Learn more at www.gatesfoundation.org or join the conversation at [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

This grant, which builds on previous grants the Gates Foundation has given to Opportunity International, is part of the foundation's Financial Services for the Poor initiative, which is working with a wide range of public and private partners to harness technology and innovation to bring quality, affordable savings accounts and other financial services to the doorsteps of the poor in the developing world.