

## Grameen Bank: servicing the poor world-wide

By Christina Robertson *NewsNet Staff Writer* - 21 Mar 2001

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Mohammed Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank, speaks at the first session of the Marriott School's Microcredit Conference.

*Morgan Van Wagoner*

Mohammed Yunus sacrificed breakfast with former president George Bush to speak to BYU students on March 20.

Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank, spoke at the first session of the Marriott School's Microcredit Conference.

The Grameen Bank, commonly known as microcredit, lends money to impoverished people throughout the world without giving charity or pity, Yunus said.

He said we live in a world based on money.

"If you don't have money you don't exist. If you want a dollar, you need a dollar," Yunus said.

Yunus traveled to Bangladesh in the early 1970s to help reconstruct the country after a civil war. While teaching economics at Chittagong University, he saw people dying from famine.

He said he felt useless because the theories he taught in the classroom could not be applied to help the suffering people.

He went into the village to see if he could help even just one person.

"If I could do that, I could feel that I was fulfilled for a day," he said.

Yunus said he saw how the people suffered because they did not have access to even small amounts of money.

He began by making small loans to around 42 people, totaling at 27 dollars.

"If you can make so many people happy with such a small amount of money, why aren't we doing it more?" he said.

In an effort to help more people, Yunus asked the banks to help. Unfortunately, Yunus said the banks claimed the poor were not creditworthy.

"If anyone says the poor are not creditworthy I will scream; I will shout; I will tell the world this is a lie because I have seen it," he said.

Yunus finally persuaded a bank to loan him money that he could lend to the poor. After the microcredit projects proved successful, Yunus said he wanted to expand, so he created his own bank -- the Grameen Bank.

Today it has more than 2.4 million borrowers throughout the world. Yunus has adopted the policy that the bank exists to serve the poor.

"People should not come to the bank, the bank should go to the people," he said.

Rock Magleby, 23, a senior from American Fork, Utah, majoring in economics, is involved in microcredit at BYU.

Magleby said a group of students met Yunus at a poverty alleviation conference at the University of Michigan. He said they created the microcredit program at BYU in 1997.

He said it has helped BYU reach out to the world.

"Microcredit activity on campus is an excellent representation to show the role BYU can take and should take and does take with regards to humanitarian development and services throughout the world," he said.

Donald Adolphson, professor in the Romney Institution of Public Management, is the chair of the Microcredit Conference.

He said Yunus' speech encourages student involvement in the Microcredit Conference.

"I hope they are inspired to be involved in the effort to eliminate poverty from the earth in a way that serves everybody, those being helped and those helping," he said.