

**Media Contact:**

Lucy Valentine Wurtz +1 650/303-4126, [lucyw@villageenterprise.org](mailto:lucyw@villageenterprise.org)

## **Village Enterprise Joins Mercy Corps Partnership in Kitgum, Uganda To Create Youth Entrepreneurs in Agriculture**

San Carlos, California February 1, 2018. Village Enterprise has joined Mercy Corps on an initiative to equip rural youth in Northern Uganda to start and run successful agriculture-related businesses. The Mastercard Foundation-funded DYNAMIC program (Driving Youth-led New Agribusiness and Microenterprise) is a five-year rural market development program that is part of the Youth Forward initiative and aims to increase the employability of youth and promote agricultural market systems.

Uganda has the youngest population in the world, with 77% of its population under 30 years old. The DYNAMIC initiative aims to increase opportunities for agriculture as a viable economic activity for this population.

Village Enterprise joins the consortia with existing DYNAMIC partners GOAL, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), and Restless Development. Through its Graduation program, Village Enterprise aims to improve the employment, incomes, and resilience of out-of-school youth ages 15-24 in the Kitgum region. In pilot year 2018, Village Enterprise will launch 420 youth-based agribusinesses across 1,000 households and create 42 new savings groups. This partnership has the potential to expand in future years.

In rural East Africa, where little formal employment exists, sometimes starting a business is the only way to create an income. Village Enterprise seeks to unlock the potential of those who are entrepreneurs by nature and instill the skills of entrepreneurship in those who are not. Village Enterprise's Graduation program equips the ultra-poor with the resources to create small businesses that generate sustainable savings and incomes. Village Enterprise uses a community-driven process to target the ultra-poor, then provides them with a capital seed grant, business and financial literacy training, and mentoring to start small, sustainable businesses and savings groups.

Village Enterprise was selected to participate in the DYNAMIC program based on its expertise working in Northern Uganda as well as its experience in launching youth-based businesses. From 2014-2016, Village Enterprise partnered with fhi360 on the successful USAID Community Connector (CC) project in Uganda, part of USAID's flagship Feed-the-Future initiative to reduce poverty, food insecurity, and under-nutrition. As part of this project, Village Enterprise researched the preferences and habits of rural youth and then trained and started 120 youth-based businesses in 2015. Village Enterprise currently works with Geneva Global on their Speed School program to help out-of-school children get back into the classroom in the remote Nwoya district of Gulu in Northern Uganda, another area with a high refugee population.

According to Village Enterprise's CEO Dianne Calvi, "We are thrilled to be working in partnership with Mercy Corps on the DYNAMIC program. Based on our experience working with youth and in the northern Uganda region, we believe that youth can become successful entrepreneurs in the agriculture sector and have a transformative impact in the region."

**About Village Enterprise**

Village Enterprise seeks to end extreme poverty in rural Africa through innovation and entrepreneurship. Working in rural Sub Saharan Africa, the Village Enterprise “Graduation” program provides business and financial training, ongoing mentoring, seed capital and business savings networks to individuals living on less than 1.90/day. Since 1987, Village Enterprise has started over 39,000 businesses, trained over 156,000 new small business owners and lifted over 850,000 people out of extreme poverty. Village Enterprise was recently selected as the service provider on the first Development Impact Bond in Africa.

**About Mercy Corps**

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action—helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within.