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House of Commons  
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**Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Party Group on Microfinance**

I am so sorry that I cannot be with you today. I always love any opportunity to share my enthusiasm for microfinance with others and it has taken a broken hip to keep me away today.

My involvement with microfinance started shortly after I was first elected in 2001, when a constituent came to one of my surgeries to lobby me to support and to write letters to Government about the importance of microfinance. My interest was captured and I subsequently set up the APPG. Initially we saw the prime purpose of the Group to raise awareness amongst parliamentarians. This we have done through meetings, questions, speeches and early day motions and by getting as many MP's as we could to add their names to lobbying letters to the World Bank and other important Development Banks. All of this has involved spreading the word.

The APPG was allowed to be the basis for the UK National Committee for the United Nations Year of Microcredit in 2005. This led to a sub committee being set up drawing in corporates, journalists as well as NGO's. One of my favourite memories was when we launched the year at the London Stock Exchange, and Alice a chicken farmer from Zambia gave a presentation explaining how her business had grown from an initial small loan and how she was now able to house and educate her family. This presentation was given alongside a speech from the Chairman of the Stock Exchange!

The setting up of the Microfinance Club in the city followed and the APPG maintain links with this.

We have just launched a new website – [www.appg-microfinance.org](http://www.appg-microfinance.org) – which provides a variety of resources and contact information for interested individuals. Currently we are planning a publication of about 20 pages with articles about microfinance and we hope to involve Mohammed Yunus amongst others. We will obviously plan a launch for this and we want to organise a significant meeting to correspond with the halfway point to the Millennium Development Goals.

I do hope that you have an inspiring meeting. Both Street Cred and Five Talents are doing tremendous work in their respective contexts - London and the Developing World.

I am aware that in the microfinance world there is a place for commercial profit-making microfinance and also a significant place for non-profit organisations. The two microfinance organisations represented today are good examples of the latter group - seeking to help the disadvantaged with relational business training and small loans, in situations where the commercial sector is currently unable to serve. I commend their work to you and I personally find the geographical comparison fascinating. For me it emphasises the significant role that microfinance is playing, and will increasingly play, in support of the Millennium Development Goals.

Once again, I apologise for not being with you - and I wish you all a constructive meeting.

A.B. 20<sup>th</sup> March 2007