Pride is swelling at the Holcim Foundation: Professor Muhammad Yunus of Bangladesh, founding member of the Advisory Board, along with his Grameen Bank wins the Nobel Peace Prize 2006.

Foundations: What has been the impact of the Nobel Peace Prize win? Muhammad Yunus: The Nobel Peace Prize is a huge endorsement to our work – and clearly says that anyone working towards eliminating poverty is working toward peace.

What was the reaction in Bangladesh to the announcement? The news was met with tremendous enthusiasm in Bangladesh. People started flooding my house and office, everywhere – hundreds and thousands of people kept coming, photographers and television crews from around the world. Everyone was so excited and it was an amazing experience.

What do you consider the most important element of sustainable construction? Sustainable societies are more important than sustainable construction. Sustainable humans can stand on their own two feet, and provide for themselves. The “Grameen House” low-cost housing initiative is one program that is making important steps – which of course considers elements of sustainable construction such as affordability, durability and ecological impact.

Where do you see a role for the Holcim Foundation? I think the importance of the Holcim Foundation is that it introduces a broader scope of issues for the development of the built environment. By promoting buildings and structures that consider the long-term sustainability of their construction methods, life-cycle and the lives of the people who use them, the Holcim Foundation makes a valuable contribution to the debate.

Peace through development Muhammad Yunus has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize several times. The prize has been awarded since 1901, and has gone to such important people as Red Cross founder Henry Dunant, Albert Schweitzer, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, Mikhail Gorbachev and Nelson Mandela. This year, among a field of 190 nominees, Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank received the award, which carries prize money of 1.4 million dollars. This decision by the Norwegian Nobel Committee underscores the connection between economic development and peace: “Lasting peace cannot be achieved unless large population groups find ways in which to break out of poverty,” stressed the committee in its laudation. The Holcim Foundation is elated that the Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to Muhammad Yunus and congratulates him on receiving this well-earned acknowledgment.

Full report on our website More about Muhammad Yunus, Grameen Bank, and microcredit is available at: www.holcimfoundation.org. The article “The power of small changes” can be downloaded as a PDF. Based on the keynote speech by Professor Yunus at the Holcim Forum 2004, it was originally published in the book First forum.
Muhammad Yunus

The Holcim Foundation was greatly honored 3 years ago when Muhammad Yunus agreed to become a member of its Advisory Board. The economics professor, today 66, has impressively shown in his home country Bangladesh how the principles of sustainable development can be applied in the world today.

Over 3 decades ago Yunus established the Grameen Bank, the “village bank” that gives so-called microcredits to the poorest of the poor in Bangladesh. Since then, 6.5 million people – 97 percent of them women – have received microcredits to establish an existence or build a simple house. The borrowers have no collateral to offer, and they pay back their loans in tiny installments. The clever microcredit system works because of solidarity – the bank gives loans only to groups of borrowers; the members are jointly responsible for making the repayments.

In Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, Holcim is collaborating closely with the Grameen Bank founded by Yunus on construction projects for disadvantaged people – an expression of CSR.

Messages of congratulations in newspapers in Bangladesh, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

Initiative for affordable houses

The Grameen Bank has helped countless people escape bitter poverty, setting an example worldwide. The bank makes a modest profit which enables it to invest in further projects, for example the “Grameen House,” a low-cost housing initiative. This program has sustainably improved the living conditions of millions of people. Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank make sustainable construction possible at a large scale.