



*WAM International Policy Forum
Gender and Microfinance: Harnessing the Power of our Connections
October 22, 2007
Washington DC*

Opening Plenary – 9:00 – 10:15

Welcome and introductions

Kate McKee and Amy Davis-Kruize, (Forum co-chairs)

Forum objectives and overview of the day.

There will be plenary panel discussions in the morning, lunch, and evening, with concurrent theme-focused breakout sessions in the morning and afternoon. The four main themes each offer in-depth discussion of the current knowledge, state of practice, gaps, and concrete actions and recommendations to improve gender dimensions of microfinance and microenterprise's impact and operations.

Panel presentations on four dimensions of gender and microfinance: 1) engendered analysis of microfinance impacts, 2) innovative approaches to increasing women's participation and benefits, 3) limitations of finance-only solutions, and 4) developing women's leadership at all levels of the microfinance industry. Speakers include Linda Mayoux (Gender Expert/Consultant), Linda Jones (MEDA), and Susan Davis (BRAC-USA).

Concurrent morning Theme-focused breakout sessions -- 10:15 – 12:00
(including a self-scheduled tea break)

Theme 1 - Gender and Benefits for Microfinance Clients:
Facilitators - Dr. Linda Mayoux (Gender Expert/Consultant)

Presenters – Celina Kawas, Women's World Banking (WWB)
Syed Hashemi (CGAP)

The overall goals of the "Gender and Benefits for Microfinance Clients" session are to explore: 1. how gender impacts clients' access to micro finance; 2. to what extent access to micro finance benefits women clients; and 3. how gender influences the demand for services.

The morning and afternoon discussions will build upon each other. The morning discussion, facilitated by Dr. Linda Mayoux, a gender expert consultant, will examine the current issues and challenges surrounding gender issues in microfinance. Ms. Celina Kawas, Women's World Banking (WWB), will present key findings of a WWB study conducted to determine major socio-economic constraints faced by women in micro finance. An interactive discussion of these findings will follow.

Theme 2 - Innovative Approaches to Gender and Microfinance:

Facilitators: – Kelly McCann (USB)
Dana De Kanter

Presenters: -

Inez Murray (WWB)
Monique Cohen (Microfinance Opportunities)

This session will draw on practitioner's personal experiences and insights gained from the plenary panel. The group will be led through a structured discussion that will be documented by the facilitator.

Goals:

- To share experience on how MFIs can maximize outreach (access), retention (satisfaction) and impact (benefit) on low income women through the provision of three product categories—loans, savings and microinsurance. Each group will be asked for their product category to:
 - Identify what works and what does not work for women by product and service delivery mechanism attribute.
 - Identify modifications by attribute that have or could be made to improve low income women's access, satisfaction and benefits from these products
 - Suggested modifications should take into account low income women's strategic as opposed to practical gender needs.

Group 1 will focus on credit products (working capital loans, housing loans, emergency loans); Group 2, on savings products (passbook accounts, commitment savings accounts and certificates of deposit); and Group 3 on microinsurance (credit life, health, property, death of spouse).

Theme 3 - Limitations of Finance-Only Solutions

Facilitators:

Jennifer Hansel, RTI International (formerly SEEP Network)
Kabir Kumar, CGAP (formerly World Bank Gender Department)

Presenters:

Banyan Global Development - Meghan Smith
BRAC - Susan Davis
Freedom from Hunger - Beth Porter
Microfinance Opportunities - Monique Cohen

Pro Mujer - Lara Storm-Swire
Plan International – Delores McLaughlin

Women often face particular challenges to be able to move out of poverty and take advantage of market opportunities. There are structural and cultural issues that limit a woman at the household and community levels. As microentrepreneurs, women often have to juggle obligations such as childcare and food production.

The key objectives of this session are to use evidence-based research and participants' experience to 1. Debate why and how non-financial services are offered, are successful (or unsuccessful), and do (or do not) complement gender-aware microfinance services and microenterprise development; and 2. Prove which programs ultimately improve clients' quality of life and how this positively or negatively affects MFIs' portfolios or businesses' success rates.

The morning session focuses on social-related gender challenges including health, education, gender roles, household power distribution, religion, and culture. During the sessions, key presenters will provide evidence-based case studies that will open into an engaging interactive dialogue to achieve our key objectives and answer the following questions: How do gender issues change the ways in which we conceptualize microfinance? What characteristics do the services that complement microfinance have? What kinds of challenges do women face as microentrepreneurs and how can we deliver services that best serve them? What industry trends should be considered (movement from group to individual lending, use of technology, lower –touch microfinance delivery, commercialization) when looking at microfinance and microenterprise development through a gender-aware lens?

Theme 4 – Looking at Why Women's Leadership Matters (and what organizations are doing to make it happen): Diverse Models from the Workplace

Facilitator:
Karla Brom (Independent Consultant/WAM NY)

Speakers:
Elizabeth Lynch (Women's World Banking),
Debra Hewitt (Best Buy)
Susy Cheston (Opportunity International)

The microfinance industry has grown rapidly in recent years and competition has stiffened due to an increasingly sophisticated clientele and a broader set of microfinance providers entering the market, including mainstream banks. During this time of expansion and growth, the industry has witnessed a decreasing trend in the percentages of women in senior and middle-management positions in many leading microfinance institutions around the world.

This module will address the following questions regarding this decreasing trend:

1. What is the importance of women's leadership in microfinance?

2. Why is catering to women professionals and clients good business?
3. What are some of the winning strategies that microfinance institutions and networks have employed to ensure current and future representation of women in leadership positions?
4. What can the microfinance industry learn from models employed in other industries to promote women's leadership and ensure diversity at all levels of staff?

The session will include presentations, discussions, and participatory exercises.

Lunch with panel discussion – 12:00-1:30

Personal Journeys and Dreams for the Future of Microfinance

Moderator, Deborah Burand (Board Chair, WAM International)

Panelists: WAM International Scholarship Participants share their paths and dreams for the future of microfinance, and the role of women in it.

1. Essma Ben Hamida
Co-Director
Enda Inter Arabe, Tunisia
2. Beth Mwangi
Director
Ideal Business Link
Nairobi, Kenya
3. Tigist Tesfaye Fufa
Department Head
Association of Ethiopian Microfinance Institutions (AEMFI)
Addis Ababa
4. Ranya Abdel-Baki
Director
Sanabel Network
Dokki Giza, Egypt
5. Zynat T. Toktomambetova
Executive Director
Association of Microfinance Institutions/Kyrgyzstan
Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
6. Julieta Lopez Ballesteros
Finance Coordinator
SOLFI
Mexico City, Mexico

1:15-1:30: Greetings from Bill Tucker, SEEP Executive Director

1:30-1:45: News flashes from the morning theme streams and plan for the afternoon

1:45 – 2:00: Networking break

Afternoon Theme-focused break-out sessions – 2:00 – 3:30

Forum participants can choose to stay with the theme session in which they participated in the morning or select a new theme session to attend. Each afternoon break-out will begin with a brief synthesis of the morning's key points, convergences, controversies and action ideas.

Theme 1 - Gender and Benefits for Microfinance Clients:

Facilitators -

Presenters - Dr. Gaamaa Hishigsuren (MEDA)
Dr. Syed Hashemi (CGAP)

The afternoon discussion, facilitated by Dr. Gaamaa Hishigsuren (MEDA), will outline social performance initiatives and discuss what would be required to render them more responsive to gender concerns, including making changes at the level of institutional commitment and governance and incorporating selective gender indicators into social performance measurement tools. An interactive discussion will follow to expand upon these requirements and participants will then determine how to incorporate, adapt, and promote gender-sensitive social performance measures.

Theme 2 - Innovative approaches to gender and microfinance:

Facilitators – Kelly McCann (USB)
Inez Murray (WWB)

Continued work on issues and actions - This session will address how MFIs can best target, retain and have beneficial impacts on low-income women. Speakers and resource persons will highlight potential innovations along the following dimensions: products, marketing, distribution channels, financial literacy and consumer protection.

Theme 3 - Limitations of Finance-Only Solutions

Facilitators:

Jennifer Hansel, RTI International (formerly SEEP Network)
Malika Anand (CGAP)

Presenters:

CARE - Lauren Hendricks
CHF – Elissa McCarter
MEDA – Linda Jones
Making Cents – Fiona Macaulay
Nancy Barry – Nancy Barry and Ass.

Women tend to work in marginal, labor intensive enterprises, and are less likely to access formal financial services to grow their businesses. The key objectives of this session are to use evidence-based research and participants' experience to 1. Debate why and how non-financial services are offered, are successful (or unsuccessful), and do (or do not) complement gender-aware microfinance services and microenterprise development; and 2. Prove which programs ultimately improve clients' quality of life and how this positively or negatively affects MFIs' portfolios or businesses' success rates.

The afternoon session focuses on enterprise development-related gender challenges including business training, job opportunities, strategic alliances, access to inputs, market linkages, value chain finance, and access to energy. During the sessions, key presenters will provide evidence-based case studies that will open into an engaging interactive dialogue to achieve our key objectives and answer the following questions: How do gender issues change the ways in which we conceptualize microfinance? What characteristics do the services that complement microfinance have? What kinds of challenges do women face as microentrepreneurs and how can we deliver services that best serve them? What industry trends should be considered (movement from group to individual lending, use of technology, lower touch microfinance delivery, commercialization) when looking at microfinance and microenterprise development through a gender-aware lens?

Theme 4. Looking at Why Women's Leadership Matters (and what organizations are doing to make it happen): Diverse Models from the Workplace

Facilitator:

Karla Brom (Independent Consultant)

Speakers:

Elizabeth Lynch (Women's World Banking),

Debra Hewitt (Best Buy)

Susy Cheston (Opportunity International)

Reina DuVal (Raymond James Financial Services)

Continued work on issues and actions - This theme session will analyze existing hard data on women's leadership and its correlation with better products/services and/or client retention for women. Why is catering to women professionals and clients good business? Is it important to promote women's leadership in microfinance? Why? And how has the profile of women's leadership been evolving in the microfinance industry? The discussion will then focus on what works. The afternoon and morning sessions will draw on microfinance and corporate models (financial services and consumer products) to analyze these issues. What are some of the winning strategies for MFIs, NGOs, and corporations? What's working? Who's driving them? What are companies/organizations doing to obtain/retain and promote women's participations at all levels? How are they responding to the demands of women professionals in the 21st century?

Tea break – 3:30 – 4:00

Closing Plenary - Moving forward – 4:00 – 5:30

Panelists- Kate McKee (CGAP, WAM International Board member), Deborah Burand (Grameen Foundation, WAM International Board Chair),

During the closing plenary we will bring together key issues and actions from the morning and afternoon theme session discussions. We will reflect on the knowledge shared and make our commitment towards specific actions to move gender forward through microfinance and microenterprise development.

Evaluations and feedback from participants

Recognitions, Forum closing and Invitation to WAM International annual reception