

THE EUROPEAN MICROFINANCE PROGRAMME: e-MFP MEMBERS ARE JOINING FORCES THROUGH A MASTERS IN MICROFINANCE

WORKING
TOGETHER
AND LESSONS
LEARNT

The European Microfinance Programme (EMP), launched in September 2005, offers in Brussels a one-year international Masters program. Given fully in English, it is aimed at students who want to complete an academic specialisation in microfinance and acquire field expertise by doing an internship in a developing country. It provides a multidisciplinary approach to the challenges facing the microfinance sector today.

COLLABORATION

In 2005, the Belgian Université Libre de Bruxelles, the French Université de Paris-Dauphine and the Dutch Wageningen Universiteit created EMP in collaboration with the NGO PlaNet Finance Belgium. This year, the Belgian Université de Mons-Hainaut as well as three additional NGOs joined the venture: ADA (Luxembourg), CERISE (France) and SOS Faim (Belgium). At the same time, the Centre for European Research in Microfinance (CERMi) was created. PlaNet Finance, ADA, CERISE, SOS Faim and CERMi are all members of e-MFP.

During the first period of the academic year, all courses are taught in the buildings of the Université Libre de Bruxelles. Students of the Université de Paris-Dauphine and Wageningen University can take the programme in the frame of an Erasmus exchange. In the second period, students have the option to follow a specialisation on rural Microfinance at Wageningen Universiteit. Professors from all four universities teach courses in the EMP.



EMP-class of 2005-2006

SYNERGIES

Each academic partner provides classes in a specific area of expertise. The finance and management courses are designed and delivered by the Belgian academics. The social science courses are led by Université Paris-Dauphine. Topics in development economics and microfinance in rural areas are provided by the academic staff from Wageningen. Additionally, regular seminars and workshops welcome scholars specialised in microfinance from all around the world.

Experts from the four partner NGOs give sessions on specific microfinance issues, thus bringing their field experience to the students, and showing them how to tackle more practical problems. Conversely, by interacting with the academic world, NGOs' members have the opportunity to get acquainted with the latest developments in research in microfinance applicable to their daily work.

The NGOs also play a crucial role by offering direct access to local microfinance institutions where the EMP-students can fulfill their compulsory internships (two to four months). The NGOs provide internships and favour networking between EMP students and alumni, European NGOs and southern microfinance institutions. Indeed, the partner institutions benefit from the help of se-

lected and motivated students who are ready to share their fresh academic knowledge and volunteer for field missions.

EMP is closely linked to the Centre for European Research in Microfinance (CERMi) which provides a perfect structure for those who want to pursue a PhD afterwards. Researchers from the CERMi benefit from a complete doctoral program including microfinance specialised seminars and attendance at international conferences. CERMi also favours field research in collaboration with a large range of partners: academic and governmental institutions, NGOs, microfinance institutions, etc.

EVOLUTION

Currently, EMP is strengthening and continues to expand its partnerships. For the upcoming year, an agreement has been signed with the Centre Universitaire pour le Développement (CUD), from the Belgian Development Cooperation Agency, which will provide each year 12 scholarships for students coming from southern countries. International collaborations have been initiated with the Université Hassan II Aïn Chock (Casablanca, Morocco), the MFI consortium COPEME (Peru), the research centre Institut Français de Pondichéry and the Indian Institute of Management of Ahmedabad (India).

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In the medium-term, EMP wishes to further develop partnerships with entities in developing countries, a task facilitated by the frequent requests it receives. For the moment, it mainly wishes to consolidate its existing network and diversify its offer of specialisations (currently the students may choose between "Rural Microfinance" in Wageningen, and "Financing and Managing Microfinance Institutions" in Brussels).

LESSONS LEARNT

Collaborations between universities are known to be fruitful, especially on the grounds of interdisciplinarity and multiculturalism. However, teaching methods and expectations may vary considerably between professors from various disciplines and countries. Linking NGOs to academic teaching represents an even bigger challenge. EMP has been in existence for a short time, but EMP staff members and visitors have shown great flexibility in dealing with the cultural diversity. Most importantly, their mutual respect, their enthusiasm to communicate their expertise to the students and help professionalise the microfinance sector, make the EMP members' experience a very special one. Things have evolved rapidly in the programme, thanks to the students' comments, obstacles have been overcome. Embracing the educational and cultural diversities of EMP, several meetings have been organised to facilitate the exchange of ideas between people with different backgrounds and nationalities. As a result, the EMP committee has become closely united.

For more information:
www.europeanmicrofinanceprogram.org;
www.ceremi.eu

THE COMITATO NAZIONALE ITALIANO PERMANENTE PER IL MICROCREDITO



The Permanent Italian National Committee for Microcredit (hereafter called Permanent Committee) is a natural continuation of the Italian National Committee for "2005 International Year of Microcredit" and it is worth reminding that the Permanent Committee now represents one of few cases of continuity of a national initiative created in the framework of the UN «2005 International Year of Microcredit».

The Permanent Committee's operational plan, in-line with the initiatives and projects carried out by the "2005 National Committee of Microcredit" aims at finding an "Italian way to microcredit" leveraging on the potential, professionalism and patrimony of knowledge that may be found in our country and developing, at the same time, positive synergies with other countries (European and non-European) committed to the same direction.

The Permanent Committee, which met for the first time on July 14th, 2006 under the presidency of the Vice President of the Senate, Sen. Mario Baccini, includes representatives of Public Institutions, local Public Bodies, NGOs, Institutes and Foundations, the banking and entrepreneurial sector (e.g. Directorate General for Development Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, La Sapienza University, Italian Banking Association, Bank of Italy, Poste Italiane, Italian NGOs Association etc.). Moreover, the Committee benefits from the valuable assistance of Ambassador Sergio Vento in his capacity of Vice President.

The extraordinary role of the Permanent Committee has been recognised by the President of the Italian Republic, Mr. Giorgio Napolitano, who granted his Permanent High Patronage and by the President of the U.N. General Assembly, Ambassador Sheikh Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, who suggested to President Baccini a very close collaboration between the U.N. and the Permanent Committee.

Since its creation, the Italian Committee has implemented a number of activities in the following areas:

Networking - very strong links have been promoted, both at national and international levels, with a number of organisations, private and public institutions, governments, the financial sector and universities.

Research - a number of papers have been written on the microfinance sector in Italy, Europe, in countries with economies in transition and in developing countries.

Lobbying - a legislative lobbying activity has been pursued vis-à-vis Italian, European and International institutions to sensitize the debate around the needs of the microfinance sector.

Projects - a number of projects have been implemented, are active or in an evaluation phase, in different parts of the world (mainly in the Balkans, North Africa and Central America).

Finally it is worth mentioning that the Committee became an autonomous public body under the control and supervision of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers following the provisions by the Italian Budget law 2008. This should stimulate a strong, additional drive for the creation of new synergies among all the actors of microfinance and traditional finance to activate professional and financial resources for the promotion of initiatives capable of attaining positive and durable results.

For more information:
<http://www.microcredito-italia.net>