Australian Microfinance Network
Review and questions for discussion

November 2007
1 Summary
In the August 2007 meeting of the Australian Microfinance Network, the group decided to review achievements and develop a strategy for the future. A survey was conducted, minutes were reviewed and structures of other microfinance networks were considered. Members saw the main achievements of the network as being an increased profile of microfinance, sharing lessons and networking. A meeting is to be held in November 2007 to discuss the networks strategy and operations.

2 Background to the Australian Microfinance Network

The United Nations International Year of Microcredit, 2005
The United Nations General Assembly declared 2005 the International Year of Microcredit to enhance recognition of its role in the eradication of poverty. The United Nations Australian office established a national committee to examine the hurdles that prevent low-income households from accessing quality savings, credit, insurance, remittances, and other financial services. The United Nations global headquarters suggested national committees adopt the following goals:

- To fill in information gaps (such as research about access to financial services for the country’s poor)
- To raise public awareness (such as developing and implementing a communication campaign; engaging national figures as spokespeople for the International Year of Microcredit; organizing conferences about microfinance and the importance of promoting inclusive financial systems; celebrating the achievements of clients)
- To build commitment (from government: to ensure that their legal, fiscal and regulatory systems encourage rather than stunt microfinance; and from the private sector, commercial banks, microfinance networks, civil society, and NGOs: to provide financial services to the poor and low-income people primarily as a business concern not as a charitable act).

Committee members are detailed in appendix 1.

The Australian Microfinance Network
At the end of the International Year of Microcredit committee members were keen to continue to work together. In March 2006, members of the International Year of Microcredit committee met and decided to create the Australian Microfinance Network. The group decided on the following vision: ‘To contribute towards poverty reduction by building inclusive financial services both in Australia and overseas.’ The following goals were developed:

- advocacy and raising awareness
- networking and information sharing
- training and education
- research, identify and promote best practices.

A broad range of organisations were invited to join the network. Members are detailed in appendix 1.
3 Achievements

The National Committee for the International Year of Microcredit

Based on minutes, the following were measurable achievements of the national committee for the International Year of Microcredit.

- Eleven meetings were held from January to November 2005 at the United Nations Information Centre in Sydney.
- A dinner was held with Coalition MPs and senators in Parliament house, Canberra. The theme of the dinner was the Millennium Development goals, incorporating microcredit. It was hosted by Senator Guy Barnett and sponsored by the NAB. Speakers included Tim Costello (CEO World Vision), Bruce Billson (Liberal MP), David Bussau (founder of Opportunity International) and Tim O’Leary (NAB, corporate affairs).
- International NGOs organised a briefing to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade, attended by 18 (out of 32) MPs and Senators.
- RESULTS Australia obtained sponsorship from Australia Post to create a pre-stamped envelope to commemorate the International Year of Microcredit. Phillip Ruddock (Liberal MP) and Tim Costello (CEO World Vision) launched the envelope. Fifteen journalists attended and there was a variety of press and radio coverage.
- The United Nations Association of Australia (Victoria branch) and Good Shepherd both organised conferences to celebrate the year.
- Macquarie Bank hosted a lunch in Melbourne to raise awareness of microcredit to senior executives in the corporate sector. Tim Costello (CEO World Vision) and John Thwaites (Deputy Premier of Victoria) spoke at the lunch.
- An event was held to celebrate the close of the International Year of Microcredit, hosted by Westpac. Speakers included David Morgan (CEO Westpac) and Gerhardt Pearson (CEO Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation). The achievements of Indigenous entrepreneurs were celebrated, with several Opportunity International and Hillsong Emerge clients selling their products and one client speaking about obtaining a loan and training to develop his business.
- The United Nations Information Centre organised a variety of education sessions on microfinance to schools.
- Joint submissions to government inquiries were made by local NGOs for the Consumer Credit Code Review and by international NGOs for the White paper on aid.
- Communications plans were developed detailing key messages about microcredit on an international and domestic basis for government and the corporate sector audiences.
- The following people agreed to be patrons for the International Year of Microcredit: David Bussau (founder of Opportunity International), Bruce Baird (Liberal MP), Bernie Fraser (former Reserve Bank governor), Noel Pearson (Cape York Partnerships), Tim Costello (World Vision), Simon McKeon (Macquarie Bank) and Tanya Plibersek (Labor MP).
- An internet site for the Australian committee of the International Year of Microcredit was created. This included a list of patrons, case studies, articles about microfinance in Australia and links to each member organisation.

The Australian Microfinance Network

Based on minutes, the following were measurable achievements of the network since its inception in March 2006.

- Seven meetings of the network have been held in each of Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney and Brisbane.
A session was held to bring together Australian researchers with an interest in microcredit and financial inclusion. This was attended by researchers from universities including Deakin, RMIT, Monash, Melbourne, Griffith; NGO researchers from Foresters ANA Mutual Society, Brotherhood of St Laurence and Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service. ANZ, NAB, RESULTS Australia and Consumer Affairs Victoria spoke of their research interests. A follow up session is to be held in late November 2007.

Five meetings were held to raise awareness of financial exclusion and insurance. These were attended by major insurance companies, the peak body for insurers, the insurance ombudsman and banks. Meetings were also held with Centrelink and the Office of Housing to raise awareness of the links between non-insurance and government services for people on low incomes.

Six meetings were held for the international sub-committee; activities included a presentation at an Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) member information forum; development of an ACFID microcredit working group and advocacy to federal MPs about funding and policy around microcredit.

Information shared about a range of conferences and seminars about microfinance and financial inclusion.

The following case studies were presented to share information about microfinance in Australia:

- World Vision’s microfinance activities in Cambodia
- Reconciliation Australia’s Indigenous Banking Reference Group
- micro-enterprise development research undertaken by Boston Consulting Group for NAB
- research project on ANZ’s savings program in Fiji
- Make Poverty History project
- summary of the Microcredit Summit in Halifax
- Foundation for Development Corporation’s current priorities and programs
- Foresters ANA’s mutual aid model
- Maleny Credit Union’s student savings plans
- brief on the work of the Insurance Council of Australia
- background from World Education on microinsurance in developing countries

A paper on the financial and social impact of microcredit on women was developed for the network.

The group agreed to adopt the CGAP key principles of microfinance (see appendix 2)

A paper on interest rates and microfinance was developed.

4 Analysis of network functions

Network functions were analysed based on the following:

- Fifteen surveys were completed which detailed member opinions on benefits, achievements, collaboration, governance and vision of the network.
- An article by the SEEP network, *Building Strong Networks: An Institutional Strengthening Guide for Microfinance Networks*
- Achievements based on the meeting minutes (as detailed above.)

Vision of the network

When the Australian Microfinance Network was created in 2006, members agreed on a vision of: ‘to contribute towards poverty reduction by building inclusive financial services both in Australia and overseas.’ The majority of survey respondents were still satisfied with this vision.
External relations and advocacy

Members felt activities in the International Year of Microcredit had been a major highlight. Key messages were also developed for external communications (see appendix 3) and resulted in an increased profile of microfinance.

When the network was established in 2006, advocacy was one of four goals set. However, surveys revealed broadly different views of its role within the network. Some organisations were interested in joint advocacy:

The AMFN’s role is to broaden the general knowledge of microfinance and the appreciation of its role in poverty reduction and achieving other Millennium Development Goals… Anything that relates to promoting the sector in general is much better done as a group.

We need to get governments at all levels on board - advocate for the sort of support for Community Development Financial Institutions and community organizations currently existing in the UK. I think that this can be most effectively done as a network.

The AMFN should have an advocacy role … more effective as many agencies speaking with one voice. Also more efficient as less duplication.

[I would like to see the network] lifting the profile of microfinance not only with the government but also with the general public. Some clear unambiguous key messages about microfinance could be developed and used to communicate to the general public.

In contrast, other members were cautious about the network having an advocacy role:

We prefer to work with partners to achieve goals and rarely become involved in advocacy activities.

As I work for Government it is not proper for me to belong to an advocacy group. If the group choose to ramp up its advocacy role then the membership may need to be reviewed.

On an organizational level I think advocating for specific ideals is best left to individual organisations. I think it becomes too difficult to do this as a network where we need a consensus from diverse organisations that have (sometimes) competing forces at play.

The network should focus on issues where collaboration is possible and beneficial and the network shouldn’t become business members vs. not-for profit members but how we can all work together on important issues.

Overall, there is a lack of clarity about the network’s role in terms of advocacy. For international NGOs, the primary advocacy audience seemed to be AusAid and there was consistency in advocacy goals. However, local NGOs, corporate representatives and government departments seemed to have a broader range of key messages and audiences.

Part of the issue may relate to the word ‘advocacy’, which was used in surveys and was one of the key goals. For some people, advocacy implies an adversarial relationship. Instead, perhaps the network could consider a role in terms of educating policy makers and otherkey stakeholders about the role of microfinance in poverty alleviation. The SEEP article emphasises that a key objective of most networks is to influence government policies about microfinance, including funding and regulations. This influencing role can take a variety of forms, and does not necessarily need to be adversarial. The SEEP article explains that for some networks, relationships with governments are limited to facilitating policy workshops every two years. Some networks host forums for top policy
makers to exchange ideas and practices about improving the enabling environment for microfinance.

The SEEP article also suggests that networks must have a sufficiently public profile to be recognized by other stakeholders in the sector. The article suggests that networks should be seen as the source for information on the industry by, at a minimum, collecting and consolidating general institutional information from all members. Even if network members do not want to advocate as a group there may still be a need to manage external relations for the sector.

Questions for discussion
- Do members feel it is important for the network to build a public reputation?
- Do members feel the network should have a role in influencing government policies about microfinance or educating government regarding financial inclusion?
- Is it a priority for the network to be seen as the source of information about the sector?

Knowledge management
Most members nominated knowledge management as a primary benefit of the Australian Microfinance Network. According to the SEEP paper, knowledge management ‘refers to activities that capture, organize and disseminate information to microfinance institutions to promote learning and improve their performance.’ (SEEP, pg 55) Members appeared to have appreciated the educative aspect of the network:

[The AMFN] has facilitated industry contacts and links. [It has] enabled us to understand the scope of microfinance in Australia and overseas, along with an understanding of some of the challenges faced by microfinance organisations.

It has provided a great opportunity for people to meet and exchange ideas about microfinance.

Learning and networking who else is working in the microfinance field enriches work by participating agencies. Sharing lessons learned, reports, trends, materials, tools and resources in the microfinance field helps participating agencies in their own effectiveness.

[I am now] better informed of who is doing what and where gaps are that can be contributed to or supported.

Almost all survey respondents expressed an interest in the Australian Microfinance Network developing a website to act as a clearing house about events, research and programs about microfinance in Australia. Many were also interested in regular conferences and seminars:

As the network becomes more established, I would also like to see the network hold a yearly conference. This will benefit in the following ways: building a greater links with other organisations and relevant industries; raising the profile of the network, both within Australia and internationally; increasing collaboration; generating relevant research in the area; sharing of knowledge and expertise.

AMFN to transform into Australian Microfinance Practitioners Association, similar to other professional services associations, that is independent, member-driven and inclusive, inviting membership from the public, private, non-for profit and academic spheres. The functions of the transformed AMFN to include: Maintenance of a member owned and driven online space, encompassing networking, information sharing and documentation functions; an annual conference, featuring both peer and externally sourced learning opportunities; evidence-based research on the impact of microfinance on poverty.
[Over the next year, I am interested in] education domestically on Microfinance and its expression within Australia.

According to the SEEP article, other ways to promote knowledge management include publishing regular newsletters on the state of the industry, conducting research on challenges facing the industry, facilitating information exchange between members through such means as exchange visits and member working groups or committees. (SEEP, p. 55)

Questions for discussion

- What are the main types of information the Australian Microfinance Network would like to generate and disseminate?
- How can the Australian Microfinance Network market itself and its members? (e.g. through meetings, conferences, newsletters or websites)

Collaboration and networking

Almost all members had collaborated with other organisations outside the formal meetings. There seemed to be a range of benefits from this collaboration:

- Respect established between usually competitive organisations [and] wide range of experts available for consultation.

I have been able to call on different members of the network for opinions on some of the work that the foundation is developing which I value very highly.

There has been range of collaboration, from learning about events that we then attend, to informal sharing of information, to discussions on potential projects with AMFN partner agencies.

For many people, simply attending functions and speaking to other people interested in microfinance was an important aspect of the network. The Australian Microfinance network should ensure that meetings, seminars and other functions have sufficient time available for networking opportunities.

Governance

Membership

At the commencement of the International Year of Microcredit, only NGOs were invited onto the committee. However, the United Nations global headquarters suggested national committees should be made up of diverse constituents representing the government, NGOS, the private sector and academia. As a result, banks were invited to join and when the Australian Microfinance Network commenced in 2006, membership was opened to any organisation with an interest in microfinance.

There were differences in opinions on the issue of limited or restricted membership. Some organisations were interested in a broad membership base:

Encourage others to join by phone (NT, WA) – it seems a little exclusive – there’s a lot we can learn.

The UN detailed that the focus of the International Year of Microcredit would be on accessing quality savings, credit, insurance and remittances. However, the network has primarily focussed on credit which has possibly limited participation from insurers and organisations operating savings schemes. This has also perhaps limited the networks’ capacity to contribute to promoting all aspects of microfinance in Australia.
When the Australian Microfinance Network was developed, members decided that there were lessons, contacts and resources that could be shared between international and local organisations and that the network would not split in two. However, some members commented that the membership of the network was too broad:

I think it is hard for such a diverse group of organizations to gain similar benefits.

The work I do has no impact on issues overseas. I sense that there are almost two groups involved in this network – Australian focus and overseas (developing Country) focus. At times I am not sure that the agendas of the two groups are very similar. I wonder if there is a need to have two groups that come together to exchange ideas less frequently.

The SEEP article comments on the benefits of limited and open membership:

Networks that are primarily concerned with influencing governments to change policy are usually best served by a large membership base. In contrast, networks that are primarily concerned with providing services to their members are best served by limited membership, which facilitates general agreement on what network services should be. Limited membership networks may apply more restrictive criteria, such as legal registration, a minimum number of clients served or financial performance. A limitation of networks with such restrictive criteria is that they tend not to include the majority of microfinance service providers in the country. (SEEP, pg 17)

### Question for discussion
- What are the membership criteria for the network?

### Attendance

The following provides a snapshot of attendance at the four meetings held over the past year:

- Members attended an average of 1.6 meetings.
- Once members that did not attend any meetings are excluded and representatives sent in place of absent members are included, the average rises to 2.2 meetings attended over the past year.
- There were 16 people that attended two or more meetings over the past year out of a total of 54 people on the network database.
- Each meeting had an average of 19 people attending, including guest speakers.
- Meetings were held in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

### Questions for discussion
- How do members feel about the average level of attendance?
- Do changes need to be made to the meeting structures?

### Governance

In the International Year of Microcredit, there was a chair and a secretary for the committee. When the Australian Microfinance Network was created, members decided to rotate the role of the chair and minute taker and the United Nations offered to take the secretariat role. Feedback from surveys indicated that many members felt consistency in the chair role was important. Members felt both the chair and secretary need to ensure some institutional memory of aims, issues, successes and challenges. Members suggested the following functions of the chair and secretary.
Chair:
• to drive meetings, keep meeting flowing but tight to allocated timings
• to co-ordinate the setting and achievement of specific goals
• to represent the network when necessary
• to entice all members to maximise the contribution they make, and the benefits they receive, from membership, including delegating workload.

Secretariat:
• to organise, convene and minute meetings
• to set the agenda for meetings and the group more broadly
• to ensure that the chair achieves their role
• to ensure follow-up of tasks agreed
• to coordinate information management – ensure dissemination of all resources submitted by network members
• to assist with other aspects of the AMFN, eg functions, website and materials.

The SEEP article details the organisational structure of most networks involves:
• General Assembly (comprised of all member institutions)
• Board of Directors (comprised of member representatives)

Key aspects of this structure include:
• All network members belong to the General Assembly and generally have the same voting rights, regardless of their size, type of end-client or portfolio value.
• The General Assembly elects a Board of Directors, which guides and supervises the network.
• The Board of Directions ensure that member needs and satisfaction drive the institution’s goals and objectives, which are clearly articulated and well understood by stakeholders.
• Many networks fund travel expenses for the Board of Directors, but do not usually fund their time.

Given the Australian Microfinance Network has a diverse membership including international NGOs, local NGOs, banks, insurers, researchers, a board could possibly have a representative from each of the above categories. Alternatively, a board could have representatives along functional lines, such as knowledge management and external relations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question for discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What governance structure do members feel is appropriate for the group?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contributions
In the survey, members were asked to consider their past and future contributions to the network. Some members had made significant contributions such as organising events; sponsorship of activities in the International Year of microcredit; developing materials surrounding guiding principles and providing speakers for forums. Those that had contributed the most also detailed the most benefits of being involved in the network.

In future, some suggested that they could continue to assist to organise events. Most organisations detailed that they could contribute by participating in meetings and sharing lessons in microfinance.

Some suggested that funding would be required for the network to reach its potential:
If we are serious about putting some grunt into the role of the network then we need to fund it.

[We are] willing to pay fee if this was generally felt necessary.

We need more resources – human and financial – to be able to continue our involvement.

The goals of the network need to be aligned to members’ capacity to contribute, or funding needs to be obtained. The SEEP article suggests that networks should plan to become financially self-sufficient, even if this goal is not fully attainable. At present, the Australian Microfinance Network is funded primarily through in-kind member contributions of time and expertise. In the International Year of Microcredit, corporate sponsorship was also obtained. These costs would be difficult to quantify but are still important for member organisations to consider.

**Questions for discussion**

- What resources are needed for the network to achieve its goals?
- How can members become more engaged with the network and make greater contributions?
- Is funding an issue for some members in this regard?
- What other obstacles prevent members from contributing to the extent they would like?

**Summary of questions for discussion**

**External relations**

- Do members feel it is important for the network to build a public reputation?
- Do members feel the network should have a role in influencing government policies about microfinance or educating government regarding financial inclusion?
- Is it a priority for the network to be seen as the source of information about the sector?

**Knowledge management**

- What are the main types of information the Australian Microfinance Network would like to generate and disseminate?
- How can the Australian Microfinance Network market itself and its members? (e.g. through meetings, conferences, newsletters or websites)

**Attendance**

- How do members feel about the average level of attendance?
- Do changes need to be made to the meeting structures?

**Governance**

- What governance structure do members feel is appropriate for the group?

**Contributions**

- What resources are needed for the network to achieve its goals?
- How can members become more engaged with the network and make greater contributions?
- Is funding an issue for some members in this regard?
- What other obstacles prevent members from contributing to the extent they would like?
Appendix 1: members of the national committee for the International Year of Microcredit and the Australian Microfinance Network

The original members of the Australian national committee were:
Brotherhood of St Laurence
Foundation for Development Cooperation
Grameen Foundation Australia
Hillsong Emerge
Opportunity International
Results Australia
United Nations Information Centre
World Vision
World Education Australia

The following groups joined later:
Credit Union Foundation Australia (from May)
Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service (from April)
National Australia Bank (from May)
Westpac (from April)
United Nations Fund for Women (from May)

The following groups joined when the Australian Microfinance Network was developed:
ANZ
Australian Bankers Association
First Nations Foundation
Fitzroy and Carlton Community Credit Co-operative
Foresters ANA Mutual Society
Government of SA, Department of the Premier and Cabinet
Griffith University
Indigenous Business Australia
Insurance Australia Group
Insurance Council of Australia
Insurance Ombudsman Service
International Women's Development Agency Inc
Maleny Credit Union
RMIT
Rotary International
South Australian Council of Social Service Inc
Appendix 2: The Consultative Group to Assist the Poor: Key Principles of Microfinance

1. **Poor people need a variety of financial services, not just loans.** Like everyone else, the poor need a range of financial services that are convenient, flexible, and affordable. Depending on circumstances, they want not only loans, but also savings, insurance, and cash transfer services.

2. **Microfinance is a powerful tool to fight poverty.** When poor people have access to financial services, they can earn more, build their assets, and cushion themselves against external shocks. Poor households use microfinance to move from everyday survival to planning for the future: they invest in better nutrition, housing, health, and education.

3. **Microfinance means building financial systems that serve the poor.** In most developing countries, poor people are the majority of the population, yet they are the least likely to be served by banks. Microfinance is often seen as a marginal sector—a “development” activity that donors, governments, or social investors might care about, but not as part of the country’s mainstream financial system. However, microfinance will reach the maximum number of poor clients only when it is integrated into the financial sector.

4. **Microfinance can pay for itself, and must do so if it is to reach very large numbers of poor people.** Most poor people cannot get good financial services that meet their needs because there are not enough strong institutions that provide such services. Strong institutions need to charge enough to cover their costs. Cost recovery is not an end in itself. Rather, it is the only way to reach scale and impact beyond the limited levels that donors can fund. A financially sustainable institution can continue and expand its services over the long term. Achieving sustainability means lowering transaction costs, offering services that are more useful to the clients, and finding new ways to reach more of the unbanked poor.

5. **Microfinance is about building permanent local financial institutions.** Finance for the poor requires sound domestic financial institutions that provide services on a permanent basis. These institutions need to attract domestic savings, recycle those savings into loans, and provide other services. As local institutions and capital markets mature, there will be less dependence on funding from donors and governments, including government development banks.

6. **Microcredit is not always the answer. Microcredit is not the best tool for everyone or every situation.** Destitute and hungry people with no income or means of repayment need other kinds of support before they can make good use of loans. In many cases, other tools will alleviate poverty better—for instance, small grants, employment and training programs, or infrastructure improvements. Where possible, such services should be coupled with building savings.

7. **Interest rate ceilings hurt poor people by making it harder for them to get credit.** It costs much more to make many small loans than a few large loans. Unless microlenders can charge interest rates that are well above average bank loan rates, they cannot cover their costs. Their growth will be limited by the scarce and uncertain supply of funds from donors or governments. When governments regulate interest rates, they usually set them at levels so low that microcredit cannot cover its costs, so such regulation should be avoided. At the same time, a microlender should not use high interest rates to make borrowers cover the cost of its own inefficiency.

8. **The role of government is to enable financial services, not to provide them directly.** National governments should set policies that stimulate financial services for poor people at the same time as protecting deposits. Governments need to maintain macroeconomic stability, avoid interest rate caps, and refrain from distorting markets with subsidized, high-default loan programs that cannot be sustained. They should also clamp down on corruption and improve the environment for micro-businesses, including access to markets and infrastructure. In special cases where other funds are unavailable, government funding may be warranted for sound and independent microfinance institutions.
9. **Donor funds should complement private capital, not compete with it.** Donors provide grants, loans, and equity for microfinance. Such support should be temporary. It should be used to build the capacity of microfinance providers; to develop supporting infrastructure like rating agencies, credit bureaus, and audit capacity; and to support experimentation. In some cases, serving sparse or difficult-to-reach populations can require longer-term donor support. Donors should try to integrate microfinance with the rest of the financial system. They should use experts with a track record of success when designing and implementing projects. They should set clear performance targets that must be met before funding is continued. Every project should have a realistic plan for reaching a point where the donor’s support is no longer needed.

10. **The key bottleneck is the shortage of strong institutions and managers.** Microfinance is a specialized field that combines banking with social goals. Skills and systems need to be built at all levels: managers and information systems of microfinance institutions, central banks that regulate microfinance, other government agencies, and donors. Public and private investments in microfinance should focus on building this capacity, not just moving money.

11. **Microfinance works best when it measures—and discloses—its performance.** Accurate, standardized performance information is imperative, both financial information (e.g., interest rates, loan repayment, and cost recovery) and social information (e.g., number of clients reached and their poverty level). Donors, investors, banking supervisors, and customers need this information to judge their cost, risk, and return.

Source: [http://www.cgap.org/keyprinciples.html](http://www.cgap.org/keyprinciples.html)
Appendix 3: audiences and messages developed for International Year of Microcredit

In the International Year of Microcredit, marketing plans were developed for raising awareness to the government sector. Many of the messages and strategies developed may still be relevant for the network’s role.

Objectives

- To increase the awareness of the benefits of microfinance within government and engage government actors in the promotion of the IYM and its objectives;
- To achieve an increase in government funding for microfinance activities;
- To achieve a more conducive environment for international and domestic microfinance activities.

Target Audience

The strategy targeted those actors that are considered best able to influence the achievement of the objectives set out above.

Specific government actors that are common to both international and domestic objectives include:

- Prime Minister (including the Prime Ministers’ community-business partnership program)
- Parliamentarians
- Treasurer and Treasury
- Regulators (including RBA, APRA, ASIC, Consumer Affairs / Office of Fair Trading)

Government actors to be targeted in relation to international objectives are:

- Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and Parliamentary Secretary
- AusAID – Director-General and senior staff
- Parliamentary members of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
- Opposition leader and Shadow Minster for Foreign Affairs

Government actors to be targeted in relation to domestic objectives are:

- Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
- Transport and Regional Development
- Department of Employment and Workplace relations
- Grow Employment Consultative Committee
- Family and Community Services

Key messages and activities

Key messages for international objectives were as follows:

- An estimated 400-500 million people worldwide lack access to financial services
- Microcredit provides the poor and marginalized with the means to alleviate their poverty and improve their well-being and economic security.
Microcredit is an effective and sustainable means of pursuing Australia’s responsibility as a signatory to the Millennium Development Goals, which aim to halve the number of people living in poverty by 2015.

Activities to promote a more conducive environment for international microfinance will focus upon the following key messages:

- There is need for Australia to support microfinance and promote the creation of enabling environments for microfinance in the Asia-Pacific region.

Key messages relating to domestic objectives were as follows:

- Poverty is a problem in Australia with an estimated 1.5 million people affected. One of the barriers faced by many of these people is that they are unable to access a wide range of financial services which can significantly impact the way they interact socially.
- Microfinance initiatives have successfully helped many Australians for over 25 years

Activities to promote the ongoing support of domestic microfinance initiatives:

- There is a need to explore the creation of government incentives to encourage the finance sector to promote microfinance in Australia.
- There is a need to explore the possibility of a distinct set of regulations for the provision of credit to people on a low income and the self-employed.