

## Interview with Leslie Barcus, President of the MFMI

*Q: How would you characterize the year just past, 2007?*

Answer: For us, 2007 was a year for recruiting and expanding the network of trainers and academics.

The best thing for me in 2007 was the enthusiasm expressed in our workshops by these trainers and academics for the idea of this network, as well as just their appreciation for the opportunity to meet with professionals and peers.



*Q: How do you see 2008 as being different?*

A: In 2008 we turn much more to skills building, knowledge management and cementing relationships within the network. We're creating closer relationships where network members collaborate with one another, making the world a smaller place for these people working on similar things who, until now, were not able to easily reach out and exchange with one another. We're excited by the new Resource Center on the internet, as well as expanded communities of practice, which OSI's KARL Web2.0 platform allows us to create, offering confidential discussion and wiki spaces for cross-continent dialogue and fertilization of ideas. We anticipate a lot of news this year being generated by our members, and we look forward to circulating and sharing it with our network.

***Q: Why are you hopeful about the prospects of this organization?***

A: The MFMI network facilitates learning and exchange at an international level. It enables partnerships as well as sharing of things beyond just experience, including academic materials, industry knowledge and case-writing tools.



When a network expands, the potential for this sharing increases much more than the sum of the individual members. For this global network, we have the potential to reduce time in the typical timeframes needed in capacity building.

One unexpected outcome, and now a goal, is that people don't feel so alone, out there in their own region, working on their own. In effect, we provide partnerships and a support base to each other.

***Q: Can you give any examples of sharing that has been stimulated by this network?***

A: One example of how network development can fuel collaboration is the co-offer of RFR (Red Financiera Rural) in Ecuador and INCAE Business School in Costa Rica on a new, executive education course for microfinance practitioners in 2008, drawing from regional experiences. We also like that network development brings field practice into academia and vice versa.

***Q: Does the MFMI get a lot of requests from outside the network?***

A: Yes, we are asked to provide advice by people all the time, on a range of different issues. For instance, microfinance professionals request assistance for access to training materials, the

processes of how to create an academic center, and about training of trainers. We get many requests for all sorts of information and tools.

***Q: Besides its role as a convener of conferences, workshops and online forums, does the MFMI add value in any technical areas?***

A: We try to put the “management” into capacity building. There’s a lot more material out there for teaching microfinance economics, models for giving micro-credit, and the like. There’s a lot less, far too little, about how to properly govern, plan for, manage, and grow a microfinance institution. So we prod and prompt these poorly understood elements, which so many people point out are the weakest links right now in the microfinance industry. We see a synergy as well between our focus on local capacities and our efforts to inform donor agencies about the absorptive capacities and growth potentials of the MFIs in different locales.

We’re hopeful to soon launch a mentored growth program to promote the expansion of young microfinance institutions.

Even apart from our network, we see an opportunity for us to consolidate the rapidly growing knowledge base around microfinance, so that scholars and educators anywhere can use and transmit these tools to their clientele. In other words, a large part of our work is in mapping, knowledge management, and making information globally available. We establish taxonomies of knowledge in microfinance and support the development of knowledge into teaching tools, case studies and the like.