

Women's Empowerment & Microfinance in the Asia Pacific (WEMAP) Workshop



The WEMAP Workshop was held on 13-14 November 2017 at Monash University's Caulfield Campus. The workshop provided an opportunity for academics and practitioners to engage in policy-relevant debate about the efficacy of microfinance programs in achieving poverty alleviation and supporting women's multi-dimensional empowerment. The Oxfam-Monash Partnership supported [study](#) on the Gender Analysis of Oxfam Savings and Loans Groups in Timor-Leste in 2015

was also highlighted to provide a frame of reference on this topic.

The Oxfam-Monash Partnership (OMP) facilitated the participation of Linda Mayoux, a leading world expert on microfinance and women's empowerment, Sophie Romano, Director of Community Finance, Oxfam America, who has led the introduction of the 'Savings for Change' model, and Cheth Phay, development practitioner, who manages the Savings for Change Program at Oxfam Cambodia. The contribution of the Research for Development Impact (RDI) Network, a part of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) allowed the participation of development practitioners - Su Sander Koh from Myanmar and Enif Pestabiko from the Solomon Islands. While, Monash University supported the participation of Philip Mader, Research Fellow, from the University of Sussex, Institute for Development Studies.

The workshop aimed to explore the different perspectives on the agency of individuals and communities engaged in microfinance activities, and whether participation contributed to results in various dimensions of empowerment. The breadth of knowledge and experiences of the participants allowed for a rich discussion and debate on the intended and unintended effects of microfinance with some consensus but also contention. Seminar participants concluded that while few positive benefits have been found and many negative ones described, microfinance programs persist and flourish as a key global development strategy. It represented a great opportunity to engage in a coherent intellectual debate with the leading academics as well as development experts on this significant and current global issue. It was concluded that further ethnographic investigation at this intersection of theory and practice was required and most urgent in the Asia-Pacific where programs are multiplying in new 'markets.'

The workshop funded by the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA), Oxfam Australia, the Research Development Impact (RDI) Network, and hosted by Monash University, brought together Australian academics from the disciplines of anthropology, development studies and economics with varying perspectives and schools of thought on microfinance, women's empowerment and development. Participants also included several early career researchers, PhD candidates, volunteers, observers, and development practitioners.