

**Argidius Foundation/The SEEP Network**  
**Meeting Minutes: Roundtable discussion on Business Service for Small Enterprises**  
**November 8, 2004, Washington, DC**

**Executive Summary**

The roundtable brought together 28 representatives from private foundations, government and multi-lateral donors and agencies implementing business service support programs. The day featured short presentations on different business service strategies used to strengthen rural-based MSE capacities and linkages to manage their businesses for growth.

The day was structured around answering two main questions.

1. How do different approaches to business services successfully address the challenges of impact on business growth, outreach to large numbers of MSEs and sustainable access to business services MSEs require for their growth?
2. How can private foundations play a strategic role in support of business services for MSE growth in partnership with bilateral and multi-lateral agencies?

## **Welcome and launching of the day's agenda**

Jim Shelter, Argidius Foundation, opened the session with a brief sketch of the work that Argidius does and their approach to this work. Mr. Shelter noted the strong emphasis on entrepreneurship within the Foundation, and the strong influence that this has had on their own history of supporting both microfinance and BDS work. Mr. Shelter noted the Foundation's own drive to understand more clearly how they can help the industry and how they can become most effective.

Mr. Shelter also highlighted the diversity of attendees at today's meeting and the wealth of experience in the room. Generally, Argidius' approach to Microfinance and BDS revolves around their core belief in a market oriented, business approach that highly values self sustaining institutions and invites like minded programs to discuss their common interests.

Dana de Kanter, Executive Director of the SEEP Network followed Mr. Shelter to give her opening remarks. She briefly described the work that SEEP does, focusing on its unique role as an institution that brings diverse viewpoints to the table in both the microfinance and BDS industries. Ms. de Kanter emphasized public private partnerships as an area of huge potential for the microenterprise development field—facilitating this partnership will continue to be a prime responsibility of the Network.

Marshall Bear, the meeting facilitator, framed today's meeting with some introductory remarks of his own. Of utmost importance is the continual learning microenterprise development field—today is meant to contribute to this goal by looking at perspectives that think differently about the poor than has been done in the past.

Mr. Bear proceeded to give a short presentation of 'Why BDS?' and in particular what aspects of BDS work need to be discussed most. The Micro-entrepreneur, who we're all familiar with by now, needs no introduction. In an effort to more effectively target this population a close look at where and how they operate, with a firm grasp on the fact that their needs are constantly changing, is necessary.

Mr. Bear discussed how the three common goals for business development—impact, outreach and sustainability are often treated without regard to the other. The challenge for development practitioners is deciding how to balance these three goals. Can we even bring them together? The answer is that we're still looking for replicable models that do better than models used in the past. This search for improved practice has led us to move from conventional—and failed projects—to ones using market principles.

Providing commercially viable business solutions is not easy. Lessons from past experience with facilitators as well as providers will be the topic of much discussion today. Likewise, distinguishing between cross sector and sub sector approaches will frame the way meeting progresses.

Challenges that were identified and which will hopefully be discussed today: How do we turn our vision of bringing impact, outreach and sustainability together into a reality? What are the specific challenges to different approaches? Replication is key! What ingredients of our work do we focus on to make this possible? The strategic role of private foundations in partnership with other donors and their continued support of BDS for small enterprises. Mr. Bear opened the

discussion up for questions and comments pertaining to people's specific expectations and hopes for the day:

1. Is there a trade off between outreach and impact?
2. Will the suggested approach work if there is not a properly functioning market?
3. Where, at the margin, is donor money best spent?

Mr. Shetler mentioned that Argidius specifically looks to commercially produce a triple bottom line

### **Cross Sector Services: Building Training Markets for MSE's**

Diego Guzman presented ACCION's experience with supporting the training of microentrepreneurs and their efforts to make this a commercially viable approach. With a lengthy career in both microfinance and BDS Mr. Guzman is well placed to discuss training schemes within the BDS framework.

Specifically, ACCION uses a licensing scheme with providers of training in order to establish franchises that will operate successfully independent of ACCION. To date, through ACCION affiliates, the training program has served more than 32,000 clients. Each provider of training is responsible for its own marketing. Licenses are structured such that they last 3 years, are non exclusive and cost the providers \$10,000 per license. The providers must have had a relationship with ACCION in the past, a background in training and capacity to work with the informal sector in order to partner with ACCION in their training program. ACCION attempts to ensure quality and consistency of training provision by providing each institution 80 hours of training in the ACCION methodology before actually beginning their services. Sustainability, coverage and marketing capacity were mentioned as essential components to the success of each provider. In order to help ensure success, ACCION's methodology provides for assistance in the formulation of business plans in addition to access to other support services provided by each training institution.

The ACCION program operates across Latin America—including the Andean region, Paraguay and Chile. The training program is financed through a system of royalties—structured such that for each client training packet that the institution sells 50 percent of that payment goes to ACCION. Using this structure ACCION's training program operates at a 70 percent level of financial sustainability.

Mr. Guzman highlighted a few of the lessons learned from ACCION's experience. While in the past subsidizing suppliers was the norm, institutionalizing a commercially viable training approach is something that is needed in order to maximize outreach and much could be learned from the microfinance industry in this regard. Second, having a marketing vision for the program is essential to its success. Third, Mr. Guzman pointed out that it is a mistake to have exclusive licensing arrangements in specific countries as this limits the scope and flexibility of the program to a large extent.

Programmatic impact evaluation of the ACCION program is institutionalized from the outset of each program. But it is too soon to judge the impact that the program has had thus far, according to Mr. Guzman.

Comments from the audience challenging ACCION's approach also surfaced. Martin Fisher (Approtech) raised the point that assuming positive impact by simply observing clients' willingness to pay may lead to misleading conclusions of actual program impact. He also

discussed the view that getting out of crowded markets is an important step in increasing returns to microenterprises. Another participant also raised the concern that the ACCION methodology is still supply driven and therefore less likely to be sustainable in the long run. Another participant suggested starting with working with larger companies in order to enhance linkages and improve the program's capacity to scale up.

Steve Wiseman presented OICI's experience in Business Development Services. OICI operate in over twenty countries around the world, focusing specifically on Africa and Central Europe. Mr. Wiseman opened by discussing OICI's mission, which is to improve the quality of life of low-income disadvantaged individuals. OICI strives to do this through the provision of sustainable human resource development services with an emphasis on promoting and developing self-reliant individuals, households and institutions. Specifically, OICI focuses on three areas of intervention, education/training, food security and entrepreneurship/business development.

While in the past job placement services, personal preparation and vocational skills were the emphasis of their program, services specifically designed to assist micro enterprises have been added to the current program. OICI focuses on Entrepreneurship and Business Development in such a way that they can assist existing and aspiring entrepreneurs to increase their earnings through access to capital. They specifically look to adapt market-driven business development and microfinance service products that assist resource-poor entrepreneurs in self-employment and in improving their profits and productivity. Their clientele consists of current small and microbusiness owners with growth potential, aspiring entrepreneurs in expanding economic sectors, unemployed at-risk youths with marketable vocational skills, farmers and poor women in rural areas and adults with potential self-employment capacity in post-conflict or conflict-prone countries. They facilitate the provision of these services through local NGOs; local government agencies; private, public and nongovernmental training institutions, including OICI affiliates. The way in which they structure their fees and contracts is essential to the life of each program.

Following the presentation by Mr. Wiseman, Kate McKee (USAID) commented that it is unclear where subsidies end and commercialization starts in terms of finding the appropriate model in individual contexts. She also emphasized the importance of recognizing that markets cannot and will not solve all of our problems.

Rene Bronsil from Fundes also spoke to Fundes's experience of more than 20 years supporting SME's in Spanish speaking Latin America. Mr. Bronsil discussed Fundes's comprehensive offering for SME's and entrepreneurs—what he called the “Access to knowledge approach” and their goal of moving towards an integrated offering for SME's. Fundes looks to provide solutions to problems by identifying real needs and working with people to create solutions that realistically fit those needs. He stressed the importance of access to know how in empowering SMEs. While Fundes currently offers 45 different courses, Mr. Bronsil expressed that this is still not sufficient. He stressed that in particular the skills transfer for student between courses is not adequate.

One of the motivating aspects of Fundes work has become addressing the digital divide. Mr. Bronsil spoke to the importance of understanding the clients' needs in order to achieve success. Additionally, Mr. Bronsil expressed his belief in focusing on the concentration between SME's and larger enterprises in order to most enable SMEs. Likewise, Mr. Bronsil attributed much of the success of his programs to the impact analysis that they do, which helps them concentrate their resources and energy on the most effective programs.

Within ‘a few years’ Mr. Bronsil believes that Fundes will have a financially sustainable training program stemming from their concentration on the following attributes: Fee for services provided, a results based payment structure, having the ‘critical mass’ number of clients, an ability to sell as well as a capacity and willingness to take advantage of local subsidies. Most importantly for Fundes, according to Mr. Bronsil, is demonstrating the value of the services they provide. This is effective demand stimulation.

Dr. Kenneth Hoadley from Zamarano followed the presentation by Fundes’s Mr. Bronsil. He gave a broad overview of work that Zamarano has done with micro and small enterprises. The underlying concerns that motivate Zamarano’s approaches are rural poverty, environmental sustainability and global competition. Dr. Hoadley discussed how the guiding principles of Zamarano, academic excellence, learning by doing, leadership and Pan-Americanism each contribute to the goal of helping micro and small enterprises successfully compete with regard to the above mentioned concerns. Zamarano specifically provides training in organization and administration, technical and entrepreneurial assistance as well as marketing assistance. Zamarano’s Opportunity and Entrepreneurial center is an innovative approach to engaging students’ skills and leveraging them into business ideas. The Center uses technical experts, most of whom focus on startups. In each case the assistance provided by the experts is specific to the context of the participants. In contrast to some of the other programs presented today, the Zamarano program charges a fee for service after people realize the benefits of the training and support. But are these programs scaleable? According to Dr. Hoadley, theoretically yes. This is something that needs further investigation and analysis. While the program itself is not necessarily financially self sustainable, the point of their trainings is to make the businesses wholly sustainable.

In the end, the Zamarano program hopes to spark knowledge into action. The main challenge of this approach in an academic setting is learning how teachers translate lessons into entrepreneurial opportunities. Zamarano is starting to provide seed money—and looking to find partners to help in this respect.

\*\*\*\*\*LUNCH BREAK\*\*\*\*\*

Marshall Bear opened up the second half of the day long meeting touching on some of the most crosscutting topics from the morning session. While framing the challenges of each participant’s own experience, Mr. Bear reflected on the common goal of maximizing impact at the bottom of the pyramid while trying to make the program both sustainable and scaleable. He succinctly states the bottom line: At the end of the day do we believe that we’re having the economic and social impact that we desire? And in answering this question we will inevitable have to answer if the market by itself is the market the best means of achieving our goal? Inevitably there are different approaches to achieving the same end.

The first presentation of the afternoon session was by Rechinda Van Leeuwen of Trickle Up (TU). With twenty five years experience around the world, TU operates through broad networks and through partner organizations (Africa/L.A/Asia). They specifically focus on the lowest levels of the economic pyramid, who tend to be the poorest of the productive poor. Ms. Van Leeuwen mentioned the challenge in talking about market approaches when your clients are the poorest. One reflection of this challenge is this group’s frequent reluctance to use credit as they are often too risk averse to even take microloans.

T.U.'s Mali Program has thirteen national partner agencies and specifically target the vulnerable poor, or those earning less than 50 cents/day. TU acts as a wholesaler of training services in Mali, working with other providers who are new to ME training. This is one area in which Trickle Up adds value. Thus far, of the 2100 businesses that they have worked with, all but two are still working.

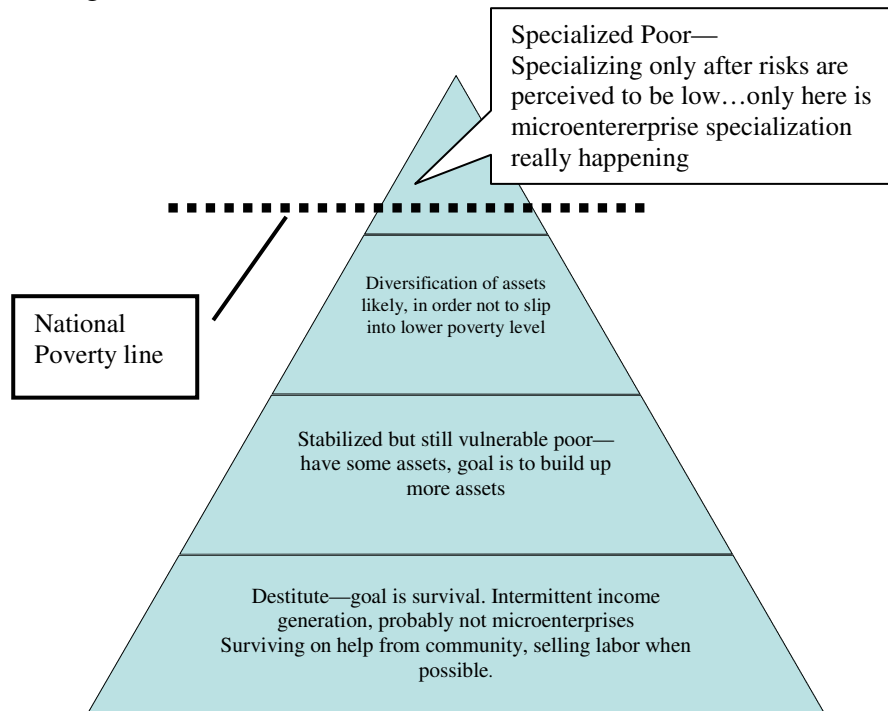
T.U. program address basic business skills training, explaining basic things such as seasonality and diversification, which are often new concepts for many of the program participants. The TU team identifies and attempts to address supply chain issues, access to local markets and new market potential. One thing is for sure in their programs, and that is one size never fits all. Currently TU is very subsidy dependent.

Building Trickle Up's endowment and capacity building of their partners, while not the usual approach to sustainability, clearly reflects T.U.'s belief that dealing with the poverty level that they deal with requires more than just the forces of the free market. When Trickle Up talks about sustainability they are really talking about NGO sustainability.

While the commercial model is not necessarily the goal for TU, they do emphasize the commercial practicality of cost efficiencies. TU constantly faces the challenge of balancing their desire to reach further down market, improving sustainability of all programs and simultaneously increasing efficiency of their programs. While they currently have 160 partners that they work with, they are trying to reduce that number and never have more than 20 partners in a given country.

**Changing Roles of Donors in Support of Business Services for MSE's**

Kate McKee (USAID—Microenterprise Development Team) followed the Trickle Up presentation with a short discussion on the economic pyramid of households and household strategy. What roles can microfinance and BDS play? And how do we mainstream MSEs—linking MSE's to markets with more favorable conditions?



Ten key lessons and questions posed by the USAID-MED team:

1. Opportunities exist for backward linkages that don't detract from corporate strategies but might enhance their strategies. Linking formal to informal sector using a market based approach is a goal in and of itself.
2. We need to relate to colleagues in agribusiness and competitiveness programs to think differently about what they are doing. Challenges here are convincing others of the viability of microenterprises as business partners.
3. Opportunities to work with old BDS partners in new ways, Working with firms like Fintrac to facilitate rather than provide services in certain markets in order to benefit both microenterprises as well as facilitators, but in different ways. A donor such as AID might be willing to 'bribe' facilitators to step out of certain markets for this exchange to occur.
4. MED needs to work with new partners particularly private sector oriented groups. MED needs to know how to do things commercially and leverage some of their creativity.
5. Facilitating Service markets to accelerate market development is as a donor difficult because it takes more flexibility and less money than is AID's comparative advantage. This may be a role for Argidius while MED contract instruments are not nimble enough.
6. What do we mean by sustainability? MFI definitions in terms of institutions, but other definitions could exist: Looking for sustainability of services in the market, but we shouldn't care who the provider is now, or in the future; The key is, Is the service sustainably placed in the market?
7. What is the causal model for the impact evaluation? Is the market actually deepening? What is our theory of impact? Are we looking for a replicable model to focus on? Are we looking to improve linkages within value chains to increase bargaining power?
8. BDS providers recognize that finance is a legitimate constraint on businesses. While MFIs are beginning to realize that finance is not the only missing link.
9. Working with startups, rural areas and youth in particular remain serious challenges for the industry.
10. How can Argidius use business history to improve returns to MSEs? BDS may be a more powerful leveraging tool than microfinance at connecting to the poorest/poor

Following Ms. McKee's presentation a question was asked by an Argidius representative: Is there such a lack of professionals in the field of BDS that its necessary to pull providers out only to have them facilitate the market?

Ms. McKee responded that facilitators may be both facilitators and providers, in the first place. Second, convincing firms such as Fintrac to facilitate the provision of services is more challenging than provision of services in many countries. It takes a lot of credibility to convince private firms in other countries to create linkages, which gives reason to switch provision for facilitation. Continuity of providers/facilitators important lesson to keep in mind that above lesson doesn't acknowledge. Mr. Verhagen of Argidius noted that facilitators themselves are not necessarily sustainable, but the markets that they provide should be.

Javier Chapparo (JJ) of World Vision Canada followed a lively debate about the role of facilitation versus the role of providers in markets that are as yet not very mature. Mr.

Chapparo's discussion is aimed at giving the audience an idea of what World Vision is doing and has done in BDS.

Specifically, World Vision's (WV) Economic development programming takes place in the context of long term, transformative development programming, with a variety of partners around the world. To ensure the poor have sustainable access to economic resources they need to transform their lives and communities, to systematically remove the obstacles for the poor to fully participate in the market, to look for ways to use the market to benefit the poor and to do this on a sustainable basis is what drives WV. World Vision particularly emphasizes the need to access markets and technology to supplement the provision of microfinance, which include loans, savings and insurance products.

An example of World Vision work is illustrative of their approach. A business training program for entrepreneurs in Bucaramanga, Colombia sought to reach poor entrepreneurs with no formal business education and in many cases with only minimal schooling. Since 2000 a total of 1,162 microentrepreneurs from Bucaramanga have participated in these business training courses. From this total, 68% are women. The sustainability of the program depends on the provision of funds as well as the replication of the project in other areas of the country where WV's partner is currently working. Across all projects hands on training and a willingness to reach down-market helps to define the WV projects. Paying attention to the Relief--Development continuum is common in WV work and can be instructive for other groups with similarly broad mandates.

Claire Starkey of Fintrac followed Mr. Chapparo's presentation. Ms. Starkey was clear from the outset that Fintrac sticks to five key principles: that the work they do is market-based, value-chain focused, technology-driven, impact oriented and sustainably delivered. Using an example from Honduras, Ms. Starkey described the work of her firm. They provided direct TA, demonstrated need for BDS and worked to jumpstart economic growth. This work then led to farmers purchasing the BDS with their increased profits. And the increased demand from their work is impetus for the establishment and or expansion of local providers. Fintrac's role was then to transition out of direct TA in areas that local BDS now fills while continuing to identify new areas for facilitation and BDS. According to Ms. Starkey, the fact that they don't solely focus on the agricultural sector but rather focus on both BDS and agricultural business consulting work helps them to achieve their goals. She attributed their successes and sustainability to a value chain focus, the fact that they are market based, technology driven and impact oriented. Importantly, as soon as the local MSEs stepped into the niche that Fintrac created, they got out.

Ms. Starket made some recommendations for agribusiness providers.

1. Recognize that models differ based on country conditions.
2. The end goal of any agribusiness development project must be increased sales and incomes, starting with farmers.
3. The technical capacity of BDS providers needs to be improved, while that of facilitators needs to be expanded to respond to training needs and client gaps.
4. More agronomists, postharvest and processing technologists are required; not business generalists without specific agribusiness skills.
5. Impact monitoring needs to incorporate tracking of farmer sales and incomes; increased "access to BDS" is useless without direct results.

And why focus on agriculture in developing countries?

1. Stronger multiplier effect (2 to 3 times) on national incomes and employment than other business sectors.
2. Essential engine of growth required by rural non-farm enterprises.

And why focus on BDS in Agribusiness?

1. Expand outreach of donor interventions.
2. Increase support services accessible to small farmers.
3. Ensure sustainability of a dynamic sector all along the farm-to-market value chain.

Koenraad Verhagen from the Argidius Foundation followed up on Ms. Starkey's presentation by asking "How important are small producer organization groups?" Ms. Starkey responded that while cooperatives are generally too political for Fintrac to work with, farmer groups bring scale and are very helpful to deal with. Smallholder farmers will themselves respond to market signals if they have the foundations in their field

Following the Ms. Starkey's presentation Martin Fisher of Approtech-USA presented their approach. It is a subsector approach with a vision to enable the poor to escape poverty forever by developing and selling low cost capital equipment to very poor entrepreneurs who use it to start profitable businesses. Specifically, he highlighted the work they have done with the "Super Money Maker" irrigation pump. Observed income increases have been substantial for those who have purchased the Approtech pumps. Impacts from the use of these pumps amounts to .5 percent of Kenyan GDP.

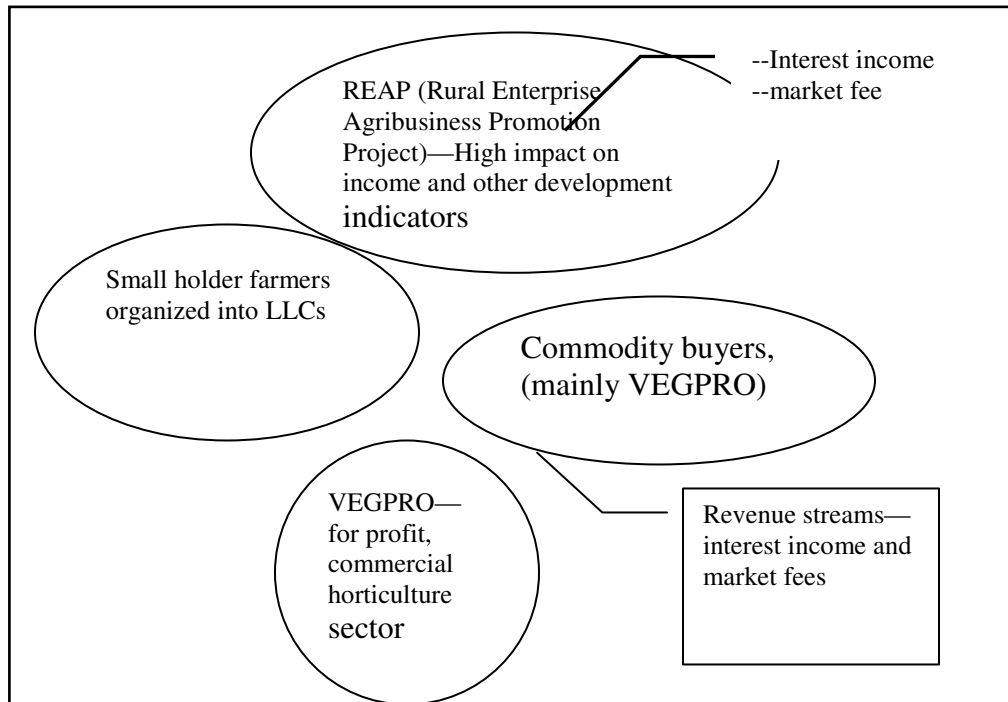
Mr. Fisher emphasized the simplicity of the Approtech approach: to think like a business and not like a charity. In that regard they identify profitable new business opportunities, design the required new capital equipment, establish the supply chain for new equipment, develop the market for new equipment (though brand building, product guarantees, promotions, financing and competition) and leave market subsidies behind.

Taking Approtech to scale, according to Mr. Fisher will occur by lower production costs by switching production to China, increasing marketing efforts in Africa, selling to NGO's around the world, enhancing financing opportunities and using new corporate partnerships. The question becomes at what point does Approtech exit? Currently there is very little competition and large players are still not involved. Once these things change and supply chain control and marketing increase it will be more prime opportunity to exit.

Questions and comments followed the presentation by Mr. Fisher. Dr. Hoadley commented that it was misleading to say that \$200 can necessarily take people out of poverty. He mentioned the complexity of poverty and that many other factors besides productivity. Importantly, he raised the issue that while there is currently space in their subsector for expansion, what happens when market conditions change? Following Dr. Hoadley, Ms. Budinich commented that both the Approtech and Fintrac presentations underestimated the longer term market reaction to increases in productivity. Ms. Starkey expressed a word of caution, in the transfer of technology and empowerment that dependence on one buyer does not become an issue.

Mr. Bear: "BDS a means to an end...and far more complex issues exist in BD than exist in microfinance."

Lucas Black of CARE Canada followed Mr. Fisher’s presentation with based on a case study from Kenya that helped to describe the utility of considering the private sector as a partner and even potential investor in a project. Mr. Black spoke about the relevance of TA simply not being good enough in many instances. In the case the Kenyan project, CARE looked to test a model of integrating small holder farmers in Kenya with commercial horticulture markets. CARE created an NGO-consultancy to provide a bundle of services such as credit, BDS and other products based on a forward contract with VEGPRO. CARE finally reworked the project after a period of failure to successfully integrate the supermarket supplier with the small holder farmers, to everyone’s benefit. While CARE was getting out of their niche in some ways Mr. Black believed that the experience paid off.



“Facilitation is what you haven’t figured out how to do commercially (yet)” (Kate McKee)

### **Strategic role for Private foundations in sustainable service solutions for MSE growth**

At the end of the day long meeting a short discussion was opened up to help Argidius and other donors brainstorm about their strategic role in fostering sustainable service solutions to microenterprises. Ms. Budinich commented that of the many kinds of private foundations; not all are as flexible as Argideus. Often they implement each others agenda. In the end there is very little to no obvious incentive to collaborate. How can foundations work to support collaboration?

The Argidius Foundation tries not to get involved in deciding/determining programs. And they have a strict policy that they will not be on any boards of institutions. But what they do try to do is get to know the business that they are working with. Mr. Shetler commented that maybe they are spread too thin, between 7 varied institutions.

Mr. Hoadley commented that seeing where the linkages between Foundations and other organizations who work with microenterprise are is an asset. This could be valuable enough that formalizing a relationship to facilitate exchange in the future could be a useful exercise.

Mr. Wiseman commented that there is a great deal more that can be done to serve vulnerable populations—and the synergies discussed today offer a chance. As USAID funding acted as a catalyst in the past, jumpstarting OICI and others, this model should be repeated. Translating experiences and lessons to design and develop opportunities is very encouraging.

Three challenges for the donors: youth, new businesses and rural development. Hope for the future is still fundamentally an issue. Encouraging foundations to get the most in need is something that was underscored multiple times.

An action focus is essential if the commitments made today are to be carried through to do something important for following meetings.

Ms. Pikholtz noted that the flexibility to focus on certain regions and issues as well as their openness to new ideas is Argidius' comparative advantage and is appreciated.

Likewise tying funding to results and increased effectiveness is a good idea. Can't work with others without knowing what others are doing; meetings like this helps.

**Argidius Foundation/The SEEP Network**  
**Roundtable Discussion on Business Services for Small Enterprises**  
**November 8, 2004, Washington, DC**  
**SEEP, 1875 Connecticut Ave NW, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor Reception**

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**OVERVIEW**

The Roundtable brings together representatives from private foundations, government and multi-lateral donors and agencies implementing business service support programs for micro and small enterprises (MSEs) in Latin America and Africa. The day will feature succinct presentations on different business service strategies used to strengthen rural-based MSE capacities and linkages to manage their businesses for growth. The presentations will focus a lively and open discussion on the main topics of the day:

- How do different approaches to business services successfully address the challenges of impact on business growth, outreach to large numbers of MSEs and sustainable access to business services MSEs require for their growth?
- How can private foundations play a strategic role in support of business services for MSE growth in partnership with bilateral and multi-lateral agencies?
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**AGENDA**

TIME	TOPIC	PRESENTER
9:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome</li> <li>• Business Services for MSEs: Changing Principles, Emerging Practices</li> </ul>	Jim Shetler, Argidius Dana de Kanter, SEEP  Marshall Bear
9:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross Sector Services: Building Training Markets for MSEs</li> <li>• Discussion</li> </ul>	Diego Guzman, ACCION OICI, Fundes, Zamorano,
11:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing Roles of Donors in Support of Business Services for MSEs</li> <li>• Discussion</li> </ul>	Kate McKee, USAID IFC, IADB, WV/Canada
12:30	Lunch hosted by AF and SEEP	
2:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business Services in Sectors: Building MSE Capacities through Commercial Relationships</li> <li>• Discussion</li> </ul>	Claire Starkey, FINTRAC AFE, Approtech, TechnoServe, CARE-Canada
3:30 to 4:30	The Strategic Role of Private Foundations in Sustainable Service Solutions for MSE Growth	Open Discussion

# **Argidius Foundation/ The SEEP Network Roundtable Discussion on Business Development Services for Small Enterprises**

November 8, 2004

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