

**AN ASSESSMENT
Of The
SMALL ENTERPRISE EDUCATION AND
PROMOTION NETWORK**

**Survey Results Based on Interviews
With Thirteen
NGOs Receiving Matching Grants**

By

Jeffrey Ashe and Julie Kelly Detwiler

**Prepared for the
Office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation
Bureau for Humanitarian Response
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, D.C. 20523**

**Through AMA Technologies Inc.
Arlington, Virginia**

March 2000

SEEP's MISSION:

Founded in 1985 when the microenterprise movement was just gaining prominence, the Small Enterprise Education and Promotion Network (SEEP) has served as a center for best practice learning and information dissemination to the microenterprise community in four areas:

- Facilitating collaborative research and lateral learning
- Developing practitioner-oriented materials including computer tools, training manuals and working papers;
- Developing training design and delivery systems emphasizing hands-on and participatory methods; and
- Creating a model lateral learning network that can be replicated in developing countries.

SEEP builds the capacity of its 49 North American based PVO members and extends its capacity building services in developing countries through new partnerships with field-based microenterprise networks.

THE STUDY OF THE SEEP NETWORK:

The study focused on these areas:

- The level of participation in SEEP activities;
- The purchase and use of SEEP publications and tools;
- The specific improvements in member's institutional or technical capacity due to SEEP innovations in the four areas noted above;
- The importance of SEEP's role in sensitizing the PVO community about microenterprise development;
- The assessment of SEEP by its members.

The report concludes with a proposal of how SEEP can build on this study to clarify its mission and better serve its members, and the emerging networks of NGO practitioners.

The survey form used for the study was developed in close collaboration with the current SEEP Executive Director and the Previous Executive Director and her deputy. Once reviewed and approved, the surveys were sent to current matching grant recipients. Thirteen of the grantees responded.¹

¹ Freedom from Hunger; Project Hope, ADRA, World Relief; World Vision, Food for the Hungry; MEDA, OICI, Technoserve, ACCION International; Plan International; Katalysis and Catholic Relief Services

The answers to the survey reflect a generally favorable view of SEEP. However, the sample set was restricted to Matching Grant recipients and as such the responses do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the SEEP membership overall. A more representative study requires sending the survey form to a sample of the entire membership.

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS:

Participation in SEEP:

All the PVOs surveyed have been SEEP members for at least four years, including three founding members who joined SEEP fifteen years ago; another four who had been active between eight and eleven years, and five who joined between four and six years ago. One NGO was “not sure” when they joined.

As noted in the table below, more of these PVOs increased their participation (46% and 51% over the two time periods, 1998/99, and 1997 and before) than decreased their participation (15% and 25% respectively). This reflects the high value that members place on their affiliation with the organization.

The decline in participation reflects the gradual distancing of some of the more sophisticated PVO practitioners from SEEP. They have reached the point where they are large enough to develop their own tools, and the issues of large-scale expansion are markedly different from those of the practitioners just entering the field and in the earlier stages of building their programs. SEEP is more oriented to needs of this group.

**CHANGES IN PARTICIPATION IN SEEP
Sample 13 NGOs Currently Receiving Matching Grants
who are SEEP Members**

LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION	Changes in Participation 1998/2000 N = 13	Changes in Participation 1995/2000 N = 8 *
Increased a lot	15%	13%
Increased a little	31%	38%
About the same	38%	25%
Decreased some	15%	25%
Decreased a lot	0%	%0

* Three were not members five years ago and two did not respond

The reasons for the generally upward trend in participation noted in the surveys tell much about how the members perceive SEEP's importance:

Increased:

- ***World Vision:*** "SEEP provides World Vision the opportunity to learn from other organizations. It broadens our frame of reference. SEEP is a very useful organization to develop our skill sets."
- ***Plan:*** "Five years ago PLAN's microfinance program was brand new. Now it is mature and there are more reasons and opportunities to participate."
- ***Katalysis:*** "Our participation increased a lot with the focus on microcredit in the institution."

About the Same:

- ***Catholic Relief Services:*** "SEEP has not offered anything new to want us to increase our participation."

Decreased:

- ***Freedom from Hunger:*** "Our participation has decreased some. In the early years, SEEP served as a mechanism for learning, providing support to individuals engaged in developing our institutions' microfinance strategy. Now, with increased expertise, we find ourselves to be as much (or more) a contributor than a beneficiary in our SEEP activities."
- ***Technoserve:*** "Our participation has decreased a little due to workload pressures and the small perceived value of participation."

Participation in SEEP Sponsored Activities:

The thirteen PVOs included in this sample were also asked to categorize their current level of participation in the SEEP network. As can be seen in the following table "Level of Participation in SEEP Sponsored Activities," of the twelve categories listed in the survey, the average rate of participation for all twelve in 1998/1999 is 71%. The average rate of participation in 1997 and before is virtually identical, 74%, showing that this generally high level of participation has been sustained over the years.

SEEP activities cluster in two types. The first relates to the participation of the PVO's headquarters in SEEP, for example, attending and presenting at the annual meeting, or authoring a publication. The second type of activity involves the PVO's involvement in working with local NGO networks. Examples of this type of activity includes membership in local "SEEP like" networks, or the development of a network of NGO practitioners. Although participation in both categories is quite high, participation in the

The respondents made these comments on the importance of SEEP in helping the PVO to strengthen its capacity:

Learning about best practices in ME development:

- **World Relief:** “Our first exposure to monitoring and evaluation, methodology and sustainability was through SEEP.”
- **Food for the Hungry:** “The publications and annual meetings have really helped.”
- **MEDA:** “SEEP is has become a leader in disseminating information, especially on best practices.”

Encouraging sharing and collaboration between other SEEP members and PVO:

- **Freedom from Hunger:** “The Poverty Lenders’ Working group has undertaken a variety of valuable projects.”
- **World Relief:** “This is one of the most unique and important roles of SEEP!”

Building organization’s commitment to ME field:

- **World Vision:** “Having eight World Vision staff attend the 1999 Annual meeting opened staff up to new ways of thinking.”

Improving organization’s training design capacity:

- **ACCION** “We have improved ACCION’s training design capacity through our involvement in technical assistance working group.”

Improving organization’s monitoring/evaluation capacity:

- **World Relief:** “We had no system 10 years ago. Today our monitoring and evaluation capacity is quite developed.”

How SEEP is Important to the PVOs surveyed and Suggestions for How SEEP Could be More Useful

This next section of the survey asked the respondents to list the two ways that SEEP is important to their organization and two ways that SEEP could be more useful. The most representative quotes are included below.

Two ways SEEP is Useful to your Organization:

- **All:** “SEEP provides an opportunity for information exchange with others and sharing of lessons learned.”
- **Freedom from Hunger:** “Advancing the state of the practice of village banking.”

- **Project Hope:** “Keeping track of developments in the industry.”
- **World Relief:** “Provides a forum to continually push an organization towards best practices.”
- **World Vision:** “The model of SEEP as a lateral learning network is applicable to local MFIs. For those MFIs in our partnership that are active in local MFI networks, I see a higher level of expertise than for those who go it alone.”
- **MEDA:** “It has been the key entity which disseminates learning in our field.”
- **Technoserve:** “SEEP keeps us in touch with mainstream thinking of the PVO community and AID on microenterprise.”

Two ways that SEEP could be more useful to your organization:

- **Freedom from Hunger:** “Clarify the differences in needs and mechanisms for serving different “market niches” of members according to whether they are field-based, networks, or PVO technical service providers.”
- **Project Hope:** “Be more broad based and reflective of the diversity of interest of its members.”
- **ADRA:** The availability of resources in other languages. The organization of regional networks to make SEEP services available to local partners.”
- **World Vision:** “More one day seminars in DC on institutional assessment and institutional accreditation.”
- **OICI:** Organize virtual on-line information and experience exchange and distribute more studies, such as Managing the Double Bottom Line by Kim Alter of Save the Children
- **Technoserve:** “By expanding its focus beyond poverty to issues of economic growth.”
- **KATALYSIS:** “Help forge a regional Central American network. Create an instrument for measuring field based TA/training.”
- **Catholic Relief Services:** “Smaller working groups. They are way too big.”

Has SEEP Sensitized and Educated the PVO Community Regarding Microenterprise Development:

The perception of the PVOs surveyed is that SEEP has had an important role in sensitizing and educating the PVO community regarding microenterprise development. Of those who responded, over half stated that SEEP had influenced the field “in a major way, and another third thought that SEEP had been a “somewhat important” influence.

	No.	Percent
Not at all	0	0%
To a minor degree	1	9%
Somewhat	4	36%
In a major way	6	55%

The following comments are illustrative of the responses from the survey:

- **Freedom from Hunger: (Major way)** “SEEP has been an influential force for the PVO community because of its ability 1) to bring leading thinkers to talk to PVOs at annual meetings and workshops; 2) to draw upon and share expertise within the PVO community; and 3) to disseminate learning among the community.
- **World Vision: (Major Way):** “SEEP empowers practitioners to write and teach and learn from one another rather than waiting for the universities or consultants to do the thinking for us. This is very refreshing.”
- **ACCION: (Major Way)** “For less mature MFIs and/or practitioner networks, SEEP has played an important role in providing operational tools, and a forum for sharing experiences and disseminating best practices in the field.”
- **KATALYSIS (Major Way):** “It is the only advocacy group for microcredit that includes all the practitioners. It is a strong voice in influencing attitudes and policies.”
- **Project Hope: (Somewhat):** “They have played an important role in promoting microenterprise development to the PVO community, but it has been more focused upon the technical elements. They are less a public relations institution than a member driven one.
- **World Relief (Somewhat):** “To a large extent, SEEP has been “preaching to the choir.” There are many PVOs – outside of SEEP – who know little to nothing of MED. I think this is starting to change and SEEP is relating more to the “outside.” SEEP has always had to work under very constrained circumstances with few resources and depends mainly on volunteers.”
- **Food for the Hungry: (Somewhat):** “There has been some good sensitizing/education. However, most of this is at staff level. More needs to be done at the PVO Board level. Their worldview of development and the role of ME development and sustainability, etc., has much room for progress.”

CONCLUSIONS:

SEEP has proven to be a highly effective forum for advancing the microenterprise development field for over 15 years, not only for United States and Canadian practitioners, but for the partners of these organizations in the developing world, and more generally to the larger NGO community in these countries. The interviews carried out for this study, however, reflect a certain tension among the veteran members and those that are just entering the field, and the PVOs that have a broader focus than the provision of microcredit services as it has been viewed traditionally, and the more mainstream practitioners.

SEEP’s major challenge over the next few years, then, can be stated in these terms:

- Should it reinvent itself to serve the entire PVO community, including the growing number of large-scale PVOs that have to some degree outgrown SEEP as it is now constituted, and the PVOs like Project Hope that want to integrate health with credit, and Technoserve that is concerned with a broader range of business services.

- Or, alternatively, should it keep its focus where it is now on the start-up microenterprise PVOs, and those that are at an early an intermediate stage in their institutional development, and on the networks of fledgling NGOs in the developing world that are just entering this field.

To address this question it is recommended that the study begun here be expanded to other PVO members and to the NGOs that are developing networks in their countries. A more comprehensive analysis of the survey data, supplemented with in-depth interviews, would provide a starting point for a comprehensive discussion of SEEP's future direction. This would be a timely intervention at this stage.

ANNEX ONE

SURVEY

REVIEW OF SEEP ACTIVITIES

REVIEW OF SEEP ACTIVITIES

Name of organization:

Date:

Name of person completing interview:

Are you the SEEP representative? Yes No

Phone number where we can reach you to explain an answer:

Best times to contact you:

E-mail address:

1. Is your organization currently a member of SEEP? Yes No

1a IF NO: Has your organization ever been a member of SEEP? Yes No

1b IF YES: In what year did your organization join SEEP? _____

2. How does/has your organization participate in SEEP?

ACTIVITY	Now – 1998/1999	1997 or before
2a. Member of the SEEP Board	Yes No	Yes No
2b. Member of a SEEP working group	Yes No	Yes No
2c. Authored all or part of a publication	Yes No	Yes No
2d. Served as a SEEP consultant/trainer/facilitator	Yes No	Yes No
2e. Purchased a SEEP publication	Yes No	Yes No
2f. Attended the SEEP annual meeting	Yes No	Yes No
2g. Presented at the SEEP annual meeting	Yes No	Yes No
2h. Attended another SEEP meeting	Yes No	Yes No
2i. Sent staff or partner agency staff to SEEP sponsored field based workshop	Yes No	Yes No
2i. Paid the SEEP annual dues	Yes No	Yes No
2k. Facilitated/encouraged development of network of local NGO practitioners	Yes No	Yes No
2l Organization is a member of local NGO “SEEP like” network	Yes No	Yes No
2m. Participated in any other activity facilitated by SEEP not covered above: Specify:	Yes No	Yes No
2n. Other: Specify:	Yes	Yes

3. Indicate if your organization has purchased on of these SEEP tools and how they have been used: CIRCLE ONE: 0 = did not purchased/does not know about; 1 = purchased; 2 = applied something in a small way; 3 = applied something that is regularly used; 4 = applied something that represents a significant change in strategy or approach for your organization.

TOOL	0	1	2	3	4	How Used? Comment especially if answer "3" or "4". Specify publication or tool. Comment space will expand to fit size of comment.
3a. Evaluation tools and training materials (Step by Step Guide)						
3b Impact assessment tools						
3c Financial Ratios Guide						
3d Financial Ratios Spreadsheet Tool						
3e. Institutional Development Guide						
3f. Internal Account Manual						
3g. Village Bank Working Papers						
3h Scale and Sustainability Working Papers (Moving Forward Set)						
3i. Other:						

4. Have any of these been shared/utilized by your organization with your partners?
YES NO

5. IF YES: Which publications/tools:

6. Compared to you organization's participation from 1998 to 2000 has participation in SEEP: CIRCLE ONE Increased a lot / increased a little / about the same / decreased some / decreased a lot

Why?

7. IF A MEMBER 5 YEARS OR MORE: Compared to five years ago, has your organization's participation in SEEP: CIRCLE ONE Increased a lot / increased a little / about the same / decreased some / decreased a lot

Why?

8. Describe two ways SEEP is important to your organization:

9. Describe the two ways that SEEP could be more useful to your organization:

10. How important has SEEP, and the interaction with the SEEP members encouraged by SEEP, been for your strengthening your organization's commitment, capacity or outreach in the microenterprise field in these areas: KEY 0 = Of no importance; 1 = Minimal importance; 2 = Some importance; 3 = Considerable importance; 4 = Major importance

QUESTION	None⇒some ⇒ major					COMMENT: if answer "3," or "4" considerable or major importance (*)
	0	1	2	3	4	
10a. Learning about best practices in microenterprise development						
10b. Building your organization's commitment to the microenterprise field						
10c. Strengthening organization's commitment to reaching the poor						
10d. Improving organization's monitoring/ evaluation capacity						
10e. Improving organization's training design/capacity						
10f. Improving organization's service delivery capacity						
10g. Encouraging sharing and collaboration between other SEEP members and PVO						
10h. Other. Specify:						

* Comment space will expand to fit the size of the comment.

11. Do you feel SEEP has sensitized/educated the PVO community as a whole regarding microenterprise development? (CIRCLE ONE) Not at all/ to a minor degree / somewhat/ in a major way.

Why do you think so?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME

