

Strategic planning: Integrating SPM into microfinance capacity building¹

Guidance Note

Introduction

Many MFIs are looking for ways to balance their social and financial performance as social investors, regulators and policy makers are trying to understand, improve, and demonstrate the social bottom line of microfinance. However, for most MFIs, the strategic planning process remains exclusively financially focused, as donors and facilitators perceive social performance as a separate area of operations.

In the process of translating the MFI's social aspirations into its strategy and operations, there are three common challenges: clarifying long-term social goals, specifying short-term social objectives, and underpinning its social intentions with appropriate measurement systems.

This briefing, while not attempting to provide a comprehensive guide to the process, does offer some guidance on how to ensure that social performance is included in strategic planning processes, as well as how to address these three key challenges. It is intended as a resource for MFI managers to support them through the strategic planning process, as well as for consultants who are facilitating the process. A list of resources addressing specific areas of social performance and social performance management is provided.

Before you start: applying a social lens at the preparation stage

Reflecting on the following key questions while reviewing the MFI's internal documents will help the management team to understand where they are in relation to social performance and what the MFI's social goals are:

- Mission, vision, values – *How are social aspects defined?*
- Statutes and founding documents, legal set-up and status – *What is the stated social purpose of the organisation?*
- Current strategic and business plans – *Is social performance reflected in these, and if so, how? How does the range of products and delivery channels address exclusion and outreach to low-income groups?*
- Internal and external reports – *What socially relevant information is currently used internally and reported externally?*

Challenge: Where are the social goals?

Deconstructing the mission

Working with the management team to review and discuss the MFI's mission, vision and values will help **set the level of social goals**, depending on the nature of the mission (see **Box one**).

Box one: Sample mission statement

The Mission of the SocFinance Company is to contribute to the improved well-being of the rural population of Izmiria through the provision of access to high-quality financial services.

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The institutional discussion about the mission – its review or ‘deconstruction’ – should focus the management team on addressing the three main ‘goals’ of social performance:

Reaching target clients: Which social groups does the organisation want to serve? How are they defined? What are their characteristics?

Meeting the needs of target clients: Which needs (business, family, housing, personal) does the institution intend to satisfy, and how? What products and services need to be offered to meet them: financial and non-financial?

Defining the positive changes the organisation wants to bring about in target clients’ lives. What positive changes would the organisation like to see in its chosen target clients’ lives? Improvement in their economic situation and general well-being? Business growth? Improvement in their living conditions? Decrease in vulnerability to shocks? More reliable employment? Social empowerment? The list could go on. But unless

an MFI is specific about the changes it wants to deliver for clients, it will be difficult to achieve its goals. For example: ‘improved well-being’ translated into ‘improved quality of life’ will not be helpful for the organisation to manage this area of social performance; however, if the MFI defines ‘improved well-being’ as ‘increased business income and assets’, such a definition becomes a practical starting point in managing the achievement of this goal.

In conjunction with the MFI’s social goals, *what are the financial goals, and how will they support the achievement of its social goals??*

It is critical at this point to define and break down the organisation’s broad, long-term social goals in each of the dimensions, based on the letter and spirit of the mission (see **Figure one**). Often, the difficulty is that the mission does not explicitly refer to each dimension; however, good facilitation and discussion of the mission, vision and values should lead to a consensus in each of the three areas.

Figure one: Defining broad organisational goals – deconstructing the mission

Sustainability of institution
building loyalty among clients

Provide long-term,

accessible financial and non-financial services

to micro and small entrepreneurs and vulnerable families

to improve their well-being.

Fast service, affordable price, proximity, low requirements, wide range of services (loans, savings, leasing, BDS etc)

Business clients:
hiring 1–50 employees

Vulnerable families:
up to US\$4 per day per capita

Well-being = meets wide variety of needs: basic needs (covered food, clothing, education, health expenses), improved housing/living conditions, leisure, social life needs satisfied, stable future, through sustainable business that provides income to cover those expenses and dedicated services that satisfy those needs

Source: *Imp-Act Consortium/MFC SPM Guidelines*

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Box two: Corporate social responsibility and client protection

Among the key elements of social performance are issues of corporate social responsibility and client protection. Incorporating these into strategic planning is important, even for those financial institutions that do not have an explicit social component in their mission.

The strategic planning process needs to help the organisation improve the impact of its activities on:

- social responsibility towards clients (client protection), staff, communities, and the environment²
- gender equality.

Addressing these issues in the strategic plan will ensure the minimum requirements for the organisation to become a socially responsible. The following questions should be addressed:

- What are the organisation's aspirations in each of these areas? Why?
- What are the priorities? What are the key gaps the organisation would like to address?

The process of developing strategic goals should cover all three areas of social performance so that they are integrated and reinforce rather than contradict each other. For example, a focus on targeting lower-income groups in rural areas (social goal – outreach) will prompt specific decisions in relation to customer value proposition (bringing a service to the client's doorstep), and financial goals (improve affordability of services while maintaining sound financial results). If the organisation is targeting small entrepreneurs (reaching target clients), then it should probably set a goal of contributing to job creation (client change), and ensuring fast and efficient service (client value proposition).

Setting social goals

While setting strategic social goals, the following issues should be considered:

Outreach to target clients:

- Deciding on the most efficient ways to reach the target clients: new outlets? Mobile banking? Innovative delivery mechanisms – local representatives?
- Deciding on appropriate targeting strategy: direct or indirect?
- Agreeing the financial strategy – mass outreach? Cross-subsidies? 'Cash cows' (highly profitable products for non-target clients)?
- Deciding which target client needs will be addressed: business, housing, consumer?
- Distinguishing between general market and target market size.

Meeting target clients' needs:

- Distinguishing between the wants and needs of target clients
- Looking for ways to support the social goals through offering both financial and non-financial services (in an integrated manner or in partnership with other organisations).

Positive change in target clients' lives:

- Focusing on the positive change in clients' lives that the organisation is most likely to contribute to
- Looking for ways to that social and financial goals can support, rather than undermine, each other.

² For further information on social responsibility principles, see 'Sustainable and Responsible Business: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)', http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sustainable-business/corporate-social-responsibility/index_en.htm

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Box three sets out some examples of strategic social goals.

Box three: Sample strategic social goals	
Social results	To increase access to credit for low-income micro entrepreneurs
	To increase micro business clients' incomes
	To improve the well-being of low-income cooperative members as measured by poverty level movement (Progress out of Poverty Index (PPI))
	To improve low-income members' ability to manage risks and crises through the use of micro insurance and deposits
Financial results	To improve financial results through more efficient credit delivery
	To increase affordable source of expansion funding by generating more savings and capital
	To improve liquidity through better management of internal resources and obtaining access to external stand-by funds
Customer value proposition	To expand insurance products to include health insurance to improve members' ability to deal with health risks
	To support more complicated financial services (micro insurance and savings) and clients' ability to manage their businesses through specialised training
	To optimise (repackage) the loan product offer to make it more understandable and increase its positive influence on clients while retaining aspects which currently address client needs
Stakeholders value proposition	To work with local credit bureaus to improve the quality of information
	To maintain credibility with local government sources of financing through maintenance of high-quality reporting

Source: *Strategic Management Toolkit*, Microfinance Centre (MFC) for Central & Eastern Europe and the New Independent States

Challenge: Defining a strategy to achieve social goals

A social lens can also be applied to defining adequate inputs and resources, describing how the institution intends to change internally in order to achieve its stated goals and objectives.

While setting strategic goals, the following questions should be considered:

How will the intended changes in operations support both social and financial goals?

For example, introducing a pro-poor focus into

staff recruitment, induction, and incentive schemes at an MFI targeting low-income clients will support the social goals (outreach to the poor, providing a good-quality service), and the financial goal (good quality of portfolio could be expected since staff will know and understand their clients better).

Are planned changes in customer management appropriate for the chosen target clients?

For example, is developing an extended, costly "VIP" package the right choice for an MFI that is focusing on serving the urban poor?

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Does the institution support its social and financial goals through being innovative and finding cost-effective ways to serve its target clients?

For example, developing fast, low-cost service delivery channels for clients in rural areas will definitely contribute to increasing the number of target clients for an MFI focusing on serving small-scale farmers.

Are the organisation's human resources, skills and functions aligned with its social and financial goals?

For example, for an MFI that strives to build an image of being mission-driven, specialised training for loan officers on appropriate debt collection procedures or other client protection principles³ would be appropriate.

Does the staff incentive scheme encourage fulfilment of social as well as financial goals?

For example, does it balance both outreach and portfolio quality targets to address the issue of client over-indebtedness?

What changes need to be introduced in the internal capacity to support the intended outputs/results?

For example, building internal capacity to conduct good-quality market research (used for client needs assessments and monitoring) will ensure that the MFI has appropriate information with which to adapt its products and services in order to maximise their fit with target clients' needs (see **Box four**).

SWOT adjusted for social performance

SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) developed as part of the strategic planning process should inform the organisation's strategic goals. However, in order to make this a meaningful exercise in terms of social performance, it needs to be closely related to the organisation's previously defined social and financial goals. In other words, when determining the organisation's strengths and weaknesses and identifying external threats and opportunities, the management team should bear in mind whether and how they are relevant to what the organisation wants to achieve – i.e., to mission-defined anchors.⁴

Box four: Sample strategic goals related to institutional strengthening

Operations management processes:

- Provide fast cash disbursement
- Develop large office network

Client management processes:

- Standardise customer service
- Improve targeting
- Cross-sell products
- Build strong pro-poor brand

Regulatory and social processes:

- Increase social and financial transparency

Information capital:

- Integrate poverty measurement

Source: *Strategic Management Toolkit*, MFC

Innovation processes:

- Develop new products through partnerships
- Integrate in-depth analysis of clients' needs into product development process
- Introduce new technology for risk management to reduce risk of client over-indebtedness

Human capital:

- Ensure pro-poor competency profile of MFI staff
- Foster innovation culture

³ For further information on the Smart Campaign's six 'Client Protection Principles', see: www.smartcampaign.org

⁴ The quality of SWOT could be enhanced should the organisation undergo the process of carrying out a social assessment, applying for a social rating, compiling a MIX social performance report, or conducting client surveys prior to the strategic planning process. See relevant links in the Additional resources section.

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Box five: Sample SWOT analysis – PAGLAUM Co-operative, the Philippines

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Image of pro-social cooperative focused on poor areas • High-quality, non-credit financial services – deposits with low threshold • Innovative culture: new products and service delivery channels • Client loyalty due to co-ownership and dividend payments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information systems: no information map, delayed client information, delayed production of reports, low quality of data entry • Internal information download (top to bottom information flows) • No performance-based remuneration for staff – people get equal pay for different volume and quality of work • Lack of understanding of clients' needs with negative impact on new product development/modification
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of untapped geographical markets • Access to financing opportunities through linkages • Access to training/capacity building through linkages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client over-indebtedness, 'credit pollution' • Increasing competition from NGOs and MFIs tapping same client segments • Local crime – security of staff, security of assets (hold-ups and robberies) • Inflation (leading to increase in household expenses and possible problems in clients meeting repayments) • Damage to fishermen's businesses due to climate change

Source: PAGLAUM strategic planning outputs based on *Strategic Management Toolkit* by MFC

The following considerations need to be included in the SWOT analysis to ensure that social performance issues are addressed through the strategic planning process:

Strengths/weaknesses

- How clear is the organisation about what it wants to achieve in terms of social performance?
- What support does social performance receive from the organisation's governance structures?
- How do the current product range and delivery processes compare with the needs of target clients?
- Does the organisation have enough reliable information about its target clients and their needs?
- How does the information system support social performance monitoring (is there regular, timely, and accurate data?)

- How does the human resources (HR) system, including staff composition, the processes of hiring, training and remuneration, incorporate social performance considerations?
- What information is provided by internal control systems, including internal audit, in the context of the organisation's social performance?
- Does the organisation have a mission-driven image and culture?

Opportunities/threats

- What are the risks at the client level? (Client risks = risks to the organisation.) How do external factors influence clients' businesses and lives?
- What are the opportunities and threats in the organisation's external

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environment, and how do they influence its ability to perform against the broad social goals?

- Are economic, political, regulatory, and social trends analysed from the viewpoint of their impact on the organisation's ability to reach its target clients and meet their needs?
- What are the opportunities and threats to social performance coming from key external stakeholders: competitors, commercial and social investors, regulators and law-makers, etc?

Operationalising the strategic social goals

In some cases, MFIs may have broad strategic social goals, and yet face difficulties in achieving them because they have not operationalised them (in contrast to financial goals, which are broken down into a series of SMART objectives); they remain simply as good intentions. The MFI's social goals should also be translated into SMART social objectives.⁵

Unlike the challenge of setting social goals, where an MFI needs to address the content of its mission, specifying its social goals through SMART objectives is actually a 'technical' issue.⁶

MFIs are used to setting very specific and comprehensive objectives for financial performance; they could consider using some examples and analogies to help them develop high-quality SMART objectives for social goals (see **Box six** for some examples). Often, some financial measures could be useful as proxies for social performance – e.g., portfolio quality and client retention rate as proxies for meeting clients' needs, and productivity indicators and efficiency ratios as proxies for the quality of services (fast service).

Challenge: Developing a measurement system

MFIs often lack a set of appropriate indicators and targets for social objectives. This is a result of the same, often observed attitudes towards social

Box six: Examples of SMART objectives

Strategic social goal	SMART objectives (to be achieved within a year)
Improve outreach to poor clients in rural areas ⁷	Increase outreach to poor clients in rural areas by XX% annually country-wide
Satisfy core financial needs of target clients	Maintain poor client satisfaction in rural areas at XX% Expand product offer beyond microenterprise loans as measured by X new products introduced and XX% portfolio in new products
Improve well-being of clients' families	Increase the well-being of poor rural clients staying with the programme for more than three years, as measured by their movement along poverty lines
Maintain fast cash disbursement	Increase by XX% budget allocations for improving mobile lending Shorten loan processing time by XX%
Develop new competencies in customer service and marketing	Improve the budgeting structure to increase competencies in these areas, as measured by % of development budget used to build competencies in strategic areas Improve training needs assessment, as measured by % of staff delegated to training

Source: *Strategic Management Toolkit*, MFC

⁵ SMART stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

⁶ For further information on developing smart objectives, see the MFC's *Strategic Management Toolkit*

⁷ Instead of 'poor clients living in rural areas', one can define target clients as poor people living in unbanked areas, or under-penetrated areas, or low-income population, or entrepreneurial poor – it depends on the mission of the organisation and how the target clients are defined.

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performance – which hold that once the organisation has agreed on some ‘worthy’ social goals, they will be achieved automatically, and an impact study every five years will prove this to be the case. However, unless the MFI has a robust set of indicators to measure social performance (relating to both processes and results), it will be impossible to monitor whether it is on the right track towards reaching its defined social objectives.

It should be noted that during the process of selecting indicators, a review of the current information system may be useful. Most MFIs have sophisticated information systems (for data collection, storage and analysis), and more often than not, information required to monitor social objectives is already available within the institution. The issue is to assess how information

– predominantly financial – that is already available can be used for the purpose of monitoring social performance. For example, most MFIs have detailed and timely information on delinquency. Once the data are segregated for target clients, it becomes a good proxy indicator for understanding how well their needs are being met. The employee turnover ratio, for instance, can be used to monitor the level of social responsibility toward staff.

In most cases, introducing social performance into the strategic planning process does not place significant additional pressure on the information system. It is often the case that available information is adequate to support the set of indicators required to monitor implementation of the strategy (see **Box seven**).

Box seven: Monitoring strategy implementation – SMART objectives underpinned by indicators and targets

Strategic social goal	SMART objectives (to be achieved within a year)	Process-related indicators	Result-related indicators
Improve outreach to target clients in rural areas	Increase target client penetration in rural areas by XX% annually country-wide	Number of new service points in rural areas Target client retention rate in rural areas Number of new target clients in rural areas	% increase of penetration for target clients in rural areas % increase of number of target clients in rural areas
Satisfy core financial needs of target clients	Maintain target client satisfaction in rural areas at XX% Expand product offer beyond microenterprise loans as measured by X new products introduced and XX% portfolio in new products	Delinquency rate among target clients in rural areas Target client retention rate in rural areas Number of market and client needs assessment research projects	Target client satisfaction rate in rural areas % portfolio in new products in rural areas Number of new/modified products introduced
Improve well-being of clients’ families	Increase the well-being of poor rural clients staying with the programme for more than 3 years, as measured by their movement along poverty lines	Delinquency rate among target clients in rural areas Target client retention rate in rural areas	% target clients after 3 years with the programme moving one level up along poverty lines

Source: *Strategic Management Toolkit*, MFC

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Common difficulties encountered at this stage arise from the fact that the organisation may have no baseline for some social performance indicators, hence the question: where to set the target? It may also lack historic data, hence the question: how to set a timeline for achieving the target? This mainly refers to the area of changes in clients' lives (only a few organisations will have information relevant for this area, such as changes in income levels, assets, improved housing, etc.) and, less frequently, to outreach (no segmentation to evaluate target client outreach; no information on target client satisfaction levels). One solution could be to perform some additional quick research and collect necessary information from a smaller sample of clients, or to apply existing

data to monitor an objective (e.g. delinquency levels among target clients and retention rates could be used as good proxies to monitor objectives related to meeting the needs of target clients – a good process-related indicator).

Challenge: Addressing gaps in strategic planning capacity

Consultants and trainers face specific challenges when building capacity for social performance-linked strategic planning. This section briefly discusses these challenges and possible strategies to address them.

Box eight: Integrating SPM into capacity building for strategic business planning – MicroSave

MicroSave is collaborating with the *Imp-Act* Consortium on integrating SPM into its 'Strategic Business Planning for MFIs' toolkit by including a social performance perspective throughout the training material. This includes highlighting the importance of addressing the achievement of the MFI's social mission at the strategic planning phase. The toolkit recommends that MFIs should not hesitate to review their mission statement if they feel it does not fit their social ambitions and brings forward the importance of having a strong vision and goals that staff at all levels of the MFI understand and commit to, along with the mission. The toolkit also places greater emphasis on developing comprehensive implementation, communication and reporting plans that will guide the translation of the MFI's social mission into practice, and supports monitoring the achievement of social as well as financial goals. *MicroSave* has also organised in-house SPM training sessions to ensure that its own staff and consultants can integrate these aspects during their work with partner MFIs.

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Box nine: Capacity building: Challenges and strategies

Challenges and/or gaps	Strategies for addressing the challenges or gaps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior management team members are often preoccupied by and focus purely on financial performance. CEOs or founders may be convinced about the need to address social performance and promote this agenda; however, they may not ensure proper buy-in from the rest of the senior management team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlight the benefits of being recognised by clients' communities as being a socially responsible MFI with a good reputation, and the benefits of positive word-of-mouth promotion – increased client growth, depth of outreach and client retention
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic planning is often performed by senior management without involving key middle management staff, board members, field staff and clients, who can add value, especially by bringing field-level experiences and realities to the discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain the importance of involving all stakeholders in the strategic business planning exercises, not only at the preparatory stages where they can bring valuable information, but also at different stages of the strategic business planning workshop. Insist on the crucial value of a clearly communicated mission and social goals to ensure buy-in Highlight the importance of clear understanding of the implementation plan by middle management and the subsequent transparent communication of activities, responsibilities and targets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants in training sessions that involve staff from other MFIs might not want to discuss their organisation's mission statement or how it is achieving (or not achieving) its stated social objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide cases and hypothetical examples to participants to avoid discussing confidential or sensitive issues Use introspective exercises for individuals or same-MFI groups to emphasise to participants that what they share and feel is of value to the rest of the larger training group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trainers may view social performance management as a separate topic, not integrated with the capacity building aspects that they address. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social performance aspects should be integrated in training slides, exercises, toolkits and trainer's guides to ensure that they are addressed alongside the core focus of the training

Conclusion

This briefing has provided guidance to help MFIs translate their broad social goals into specific, measurable objectives that can be integrated into the organisation's daily operations. To avoid a situation where social goals are merely good intentions, the MFI has to engage in the process of deconstructing its mission and setting clear social goals with SMART objectives, which require an effective performance monitoring system. Management need to involve key staff members,

and insist on effective communication, implementation and monitoring of the MFI's social and financial objectives, in order to successfully meet the double bottom line. Experience shows that MFIs usually have the information they need to set up and implement a balanced strategy, without needing additional investment and workload burden.

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Additional resources

Preparation

- MFC Quality Audit Tool Overview, www.mfc.org.pl/images/pliki/223_fma_qat_overview_eng.pdf
- CERISE Social Performance Indicators, www.cerise-microfinance.org/-impact-and-social-performance-
- Social Ratings
 - Planet Rating – www.planetrating.com/EN/rating_performance.php
 - Microfinanza Rating – www.microfinanzarating.com/index.php?pg=cms&ext=p&cms_codsec=5&cms_codcms=36
 - M-Cril – www.m-cril.com/SocialRating.aspx
- MIX Social Performance Indicators – www.themix.org/standards/sp-reports
- MicroSave (2007) *Strategic Business Planning for Market-Led Financial Institutions*, www.microsave.net/toolkit/strategic-business-planning-toolkit
- MicroSave (2010) *Social Performance Management Toolkit*, www.microsave.net/newsletter/e-bulletin-on-social-performance-management-november-2010

Strategy development and implementation

- MFC *Strategic Management Toolkit*, www.mfc.org.pl/images/pliki/221_fma_smt_overview_eng.pdf
- MicroSave (2007) *Strategic Business Planning for Market-Led Financial Institutions*, www.microsave.net/toolkit/strategic-business-planning-toolkit
- *Imp-Act/MFC Social Performance Guidelines*
- Champion, A. and Linder, C. with Knotts, K.E. (2008) *Putting the 'Social' into Performance Management: A Practice-Based Guide for Microfinance*, Brighton, *Imp-Act Consortium/Institute of Development Studies/MFC* www.mfc.org.pl/images/pliki/spm_practice_guide.pdf
- MicroSave (2009) SPM Toolkit, <http://india.microsave.org/toolkit/social-performance-management>

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About this series

This series of Guidance Notes emerges from a collaboration between the *Imp-Act Consortium* and *MicroSave*. Recognising that the ongoing support to MFIs from funders and support organisations is critical to ensuring a balanced approach to performance management, series aims to help them integrate the missing “social lens” into existing MFI training materials. The notes provide targeted guidance on critical issues, as well as details on further resources available.

Development process

The Integrating social performance management into mainstream capacity building initiative, led by the *Imp-Act Consortium*, involves a three-part strategy:

Linking SPM experts with experts in key technical areas: Consortium members and associates join forces with industry experts to apply a social lens to key technical areas.

Reviewing existing mainstream training materials: Through online workshops between project partners, gaps in training currently provided to MFIs are identified and prioritised.

Facilitating online knowledge sharing discussions: Each technical area is addressed in a facilitated discussion on the **SPM Network** in order to add to the rich experience base of these Guidance Notes.

Learn more about SPM

A range of online resources are available to help you improve your SPM practice:

The **SPM Resource Centre** offers step-by-step guidance on integrating a social lens into MFI performance management systems, including an interactive SPM self-assessment tool. Head to: www.spmresourcecentre.net

The **SPM Network** connects individuals and organisations who are committed to managing and achieving social performance in microfinance. The Network is a virtual space for practitioners to share experiences and information, and debate new ideas in SPM. Join in today! www.spmnetwork.net

The **SPM Practice Guide** offers step-by-step guidance on integrating SPM into your MFI alongside real MFI case studies. Download in English, French, Spanish or Arabic.

Fulfilling the Promise is a new film by the *Imp-Act Consortium* that captures the SPM experience of two mission-driven MFIs, SEF (South Africa) and AMK (Cambodia). Short and long versions are available in English, French, Spanish and Arabic.

Learn more about the *Imp-Act Consortium* and its work by visiting www.Imp-Act.org

Learn more about *MicroSave* and its work, including its new SPM Toolkit, by visiting www.microsave.org