

The San Diego Microfinance Alliance has member organizations that share funds, experience and learnings to provide the best we can for our clients. They meet throughout the year to plan for a Microfinance Summit where borrowing groups from different organizations come together to learn the latest in the field and hear about best practices. In the process of putting the Summit together, different organizations look for sponsors and take different responsibilities for the event. One will arrange speakers, another will organize vendors... different things. I believe they meet once a month to plan. It's inspirational. We get motivated.

Microfinance is not just about money. It's about training in how to manage a business to be successful. If our clients aren't successful, we're not...and the purpose of alleviating poverty is lost. Mentors are key to all the organizations. We need mentors to help the women in the borrowing groups who are micro entrepreneurs. We need people with experience who are willing to share.

We volunteer across groups. We are all friends here - partners, not competitors. I train the women in my Foundation For Women groups to go to Accion for bigger loans. We share information with the International Rescue Committee and others. That's the way it is...the way I like it. I think the more we share the greater, more visible the impact.

It's the mission that we all have that makes it work. The wording may be different, but it's all about poverty alleviation, social justice. There's more power in sharing than in hoarding. We meet with happiness as friends, and come together as equals. Not in an organized way, it comes naturally.

If borrowers see us not as competitive, they don't compete among themselves. The group that organized the marketplace was just helping each other. We say a pledge "women helping women".

Sharing the experience of our women - how they overcame obstacles - is a powerful motivator. I tell everyone that obstacles are opportunities. It has helped my kids. It's important to tell the women not to back up. They look forward to the meetings. They get empowered when they come.

The core is the vision that we are here to help. There is a common purpose, common values. The practices may be different, but the purpose is the same - eliminate poverty through businesses. It's all about creativity - about making it bigger for everyone else. That's what I bring to microfinance. I believe that education is the basis of development. How do we create wealth?

People can create their own jobs and erase poverty. We can reinforce that just by practicing, showing it. Be a role model. When they see us sharing, they're more open to sharing.

We can get more resources by sharing. The power is stronger than if we do it on our own. We can achieve more, have a stronger voice, be heard further away. We would be a real force!