

## Microenterprise conference declared a success

By Deanna Devey *NewsNet Staff Writer* - 19 Mar 2003

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From Nicaragua and the Philippines to El Salvador and Benin, approximately 500 people attended BYU's Sixth Annual Microenterprise Conference, which concluded Saturday March 22.

The three-day conference, which took place in the Wilkinson Student Center, brought together local, national and international people and organizations interested in alleviating poverty through micro-enterprise.

The schedule consisted of lectures, workshops and discussions.

"It's the largest conference of its kind held anywhere," said Joseph Ogden, assistant dean of the Marriott School.

"It's been a wonderful success," said Warner Woodworth, a professor of organizational behavior, who helped start and plan the conference. "And many felt a call to action."

People from seven or eight different religious traditions expressed an interest in partnering with BYU in different areas, Woodworth said.

"For me, the conference is a call to action," Woodworth said. "It's a chance to share the best practices and address big challenges and problems."

Several universities from around the country attended and expressed interest in replicating what BYU is doing to address poverty, Woodworth said.

The conference talked about how loans can be used as a tool against poverty.

For example, one woman from India borrowed money to purchase a cell phone, and she sold her minutes to the villagers, Woodworth said. She paid off her loan and now has a business similar to a telephone booth.

"What we're seeing is huge success not only on getting loans out and starting jobs, but they're paying them off, and they're paying with fairly high interest rates," Woodworth said.

However, the big banks won't lend to these people because they don't make money off of small loans, Woodworth said.

As a group, the attendees have donated \$220 million to micro-enterprise, benefiting five

million people, Woodworth said.

Through small loans, jobs are created, economies grow and families have a future, Woodworth said.

Micro-credit has matured and is more understood and accepted as a way to help people build small entrepreneurial businesses, said Todd Manwaring, executive director of BYU's program for economic self-reliance.

One attendee, Gino Rich, converts sewing machines into hand crank machines and donates them. The machines don't need electricity, and people can start their own micro-businesses making shirts and dresses with the machines.

"If you can give a sewing machine to someone, they'll probably pass it on to the next generation or two in the family," Rich said. "It's not like a pump or a tractor, which tend to wear out. A sewing machine well-serviced can last indefinitely."

The conference also gave networking and internship opportunities to BYU students.

"It's opening up lots of avenues for summer experience," Woodworth said. "(It's) a great experience to use their academic training they got in their courses at BYU and apply those principles and concepts in solving real problems around the globe."

The conference began in 1998 when the first micro-credit summit was held in New York with 3,000 non-profit organizations gathering to generate loans for some of the poorest families in the world, Woodworth said.

"Up until then, most conferences talked about the poor, but they didn't do much," Woodworth said.

Afterward, faculty and students at the Marriott School started a group to alleviate poverty and planned the first microenterprise conference, Woodworth said.