

Peer to Peer Visit Report



on 23-24 May 2016

Background of the meeting and the visiting delegation: (max. 1 page)

MACS Consultoría Social has just launched Fundación Oportunitas – a new MFI which aims at strengthening the microfinance sector in Spain and creating opportunities to access credit and training to people at risk of social and/or financial exclusion. Fundación Oportunitas was extremely interested in learning more about microStart not only because of the impressive growth and success of their activity throughout Belgium, but also because of some similarities in their respective organisational models, although the two organisations are at different stages of development.

The delegations were composed of:

microStart:

Patrick Sapy – Director
Denis Hees – Operations Director
Ludo Moyersoer – Coordinator
Mathieu Godfroid - Administrative & Financial Director
Laurence Bounameaux – Project Manager
Aude Massé - stagiare

Fundación Oportunitas IMF (MACS):

Marcel Abbad Sort – Managing Director
Ingrid Piqué Almirall – Management Control
Francesca Malizia – Operations Control

The **objectives** of the visit for Fundación Oportunitas were to:

- Learn about microStart's management, funding and partnership strategies, credit and risk policies, growth path;
- Familiarise with microStart training, coaching and volunteering scheme;
- Illustrate Fundación Oportunitas model to receive feedback and advice from microStart. microStart has already completed its start-up phase and was therefore in an ideal position to give an honest and conscious opinion about Fundación Oportunitas planning.

Agenda:

- ✓ Meeting with the executive committee;
- ✓ Presentation of training, coaching and support;
- ✓ Presentation of a small business owner;
- ✓ Presentation of a volunteer.

Lessons learnt during the visit:

- Training and coaching. microStart offers in-house training and coaching (pre- and post-business creation), which allows to define courses' content on the basis of the actual needs of the users. The availability of training rooms in their premises as well as of volunteer trainers allows microStart not to externalize these services while granting high-quality business development training and coaching (see volunteer profile below);
- Volunteer profile. The vast majority of microStart volunteers (150 people) are professionals coming from the banking or business sector. This is crucial for the effectiveness of the training services, because they are highly prepared to support microStart clients and to offer them well designed business development services;
- Identification of potential users. microStart finds its clients mainly thanks to its communication campaigns, contact points set up across the country and word of mouth;
- Risk management. microStart asks for a guarantee: usually, it is a member of the family or a friend of the client who acts as a guarantor, or rather as a vector of social pressure. It is in fact very rare to ask that the guarantor repay the loan;
- Consumption loans. microStart does not grant consumption loans;
- Advocacy. microStart is advocating some changes in the Belgian regulatory framework to make it easier and less expensive for people who want to set up a business to start the process.

The visiting organisation's plans to adapt some key lessons to its own organisation:

- Structure costs and growth path. Given its different funding strategy, Fundación Oportunitas needs to keep the structure costs down in order to be able to expand the loan portfolio and reach as many beneficiaries as possible. Only after this first phase and once a good level of loans and investors/donors is achieved, Fundación Oportunitas

will start a second phase in which the opening of new branches and the internalisation of some processes will be considered.

- **Volunteers:** the visit confirmed Fundación Oportunitas' effort to find volunteers with a professional background linked to crucial aspect of the business development. The plan is to find volunteers coming not only from the business, legal and banking sector, but also with experience in communication and marketing, as they would be crucial to help the users develop their businesses in terms of client volume, brand awareness, etc.;
- **Partnership with banks.** Following microStart's model, Fundación Oportunitas will strengthen its links with the banking sector (especially with Bankia, which is the first donor of the Foundation) with a double objective: promote its volunteering scheme among the employees and reach new users thanks to the referral of clients;
- **Identification of potential users.** Fundación Oportunitas currently relies on the social entities belonging to its network for the identification of users, but it needs to consider the opportunity to independently look for new users when those entities do not provide enough cases and/or the potential public is not properly reached and/or the Foundation itself is in a better position to create a direct link with potential users. To do so, it could implement a similar strategy to that adopted by microStart (described above);
- **Communication.** In order to reach an increasing number of potential users, improve its visibility and credibility and inform new potential volunteers, donors and/or investors about our activities, Fundación Oportunitas has to strengthen its communication and marketing strategies, making the most of the expertise of both its staff and people belonging to its network of collaborators, volunteers, promoters and users;
- **Institutional support.** Following microStart's example, Fundación Oportunitas will reinforce its governing body (Board of Trustees) inviting representatives of key-institutions to become members.