



Editorial: 'From the editor'

Jason Donovan

This January will mark my fourth anniversary as editor-in-chief of *Enterprise Development and Microfinance* (EDM). Before joining EDM as editor, I had had prior engagement with the journal, having co-authored an article, published in 2012, on impact assessment for value chain development interventions. Also, in the early 2000s I had followed closely the discussion led by EDM on building viable markets for business development services. The decision to take on the editor role still required some thought; after all, I already had a full-time job to contend with, in addition to other responsibilities. Ultimately, the decision to accept reflected my long-standing appreciation for the journal's unique focus: to promote better development by facilitating exchange of ideas and debate by academics (for the benefit of practice) and by practitioners (to inform research and policy). In the nearly 30 years since EDM launched its first edition, a few other journals have emerged that address business development in a developing country context; however, none of these aims to advance development programming as clearly and unapologetically as EDM.

So, over these past four years, how has EDM performed in terms of getting useful research, whether by academics or practitioners, into print and into the hands of development practitioners? In terms of research, the results have been mixed. On the positive side, the journal added a new category of articles, 'Perspectives from the field', in an effort to free practitioners from the rigours of academic style writing. We published several special editions which attracted inputs from those in the field. The 2017 double-length special edition on value chain development brought together contributions from representatives of World Vision, CRS, Rainforest Alliance, and various CGIAR Centers (CIAT, ICRAF, CIP, Bioversity), among others. Similarly, the 2018 special edition on finance for the ultra-poor included participation from well-known representatives of MFIs and NGOs in South Asia and Latin America. The upcoming edition of EDM will feature a collection of articles from experienced practitioners on their achievements, as well as disappointments, with implementation of the Making Markets Work for the Poor (M4P) approach to business development.

This edition offers some interesting and practical insights across a variety of topics by researchers and practitioners alike:

- Shrabanti Maity contributes to the long-running discussion in EDM on the relevance of links between self-helps groups and MFIs for poor households in India. Her results show altogether positive results for households in terms of income, financial inclusion, and overall wellbeing.
- Dani Aoun and colleagues tackled the question of why the microfinance sector in Lebanon has experienced limited growth over recent decades. Their results highlight various constraints related to the regulatory framework, as well as a chronic lack of capital by MFIs.

- Martha Cruz Zuniga, Monty Lynn, and representatives from World Vision and CARE reflect on the need for food security programming to better address the nutrition needs of the most vulnerable. They examined various interventions from the perspective of market systems and offer practical insights into leveraging these systems for improved nutritional outcomes.
- Verena Bitzer and colleagues discuss how to promote demand-driven advisory services by agribusinesses for smallholders. Evidence was generated from 29 cases on service provision by agribusinesses. Findings suggested a need for deeper thinking on how to design feedback loops between farmers and businesses with options to reduce costs and increase relevance of services.

That said, the EDM team continues to seek out options to encourage more engagement from development practitioners. Over the past four years, more often than not, it's been academics writing for EDM who have had the final word on development practice and the changes needed in policies and programming. As a result, discussions may miss the larger strategic and operational issues at play, with researchers tending to prioritize narrower questions or focusing more on the analytics than on the complexities of programme implementation. This is especially true for the discussion on microfinance, perhaps reflecting the relatively easy access to large, third-party data sets, combined with an overall decline in donor funding for MFIs. How to encourage more human-oriented, context-rich discussion related to microfinance remains a challenge.

Looking ahead to the next four years, we also need to do a much better job of ensuring that EDM gets into the hands of practitioners, donors, businesses, and others. Different open-access models are being explored by the Practical Action team in Rugby, UK. We will keep you updated on any changes to publication and access modalities in future editorials. If you, our readers, have ideas, please don't hesitate to send them to me.

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