

SOCAP Session Summary – Igniting a Global Community of Impact Investors

Conference: SOCAP11, September 6-9, 2011

Panel Topic: Igniting a Global Community of Impact Investors

Panel Description: How can we ignite a movement that will bring impact investment to the masses? With new retail- and consumer-driven platforms for impact investing such as MicroPlace growing year after year, it's time to explore the behavior and mindsets that will drive success in this marketplace and the keys to building a movement of invested communities.

Moderator & Panelists:

- Jo-Ann Tan, Acumen Chapter Architect / Business Development Manager Acumen Fund – www.acumenfund.org
- Natalia Oberti Noguera, Founder & CEO Pipeline Fellowship - <http://pipelinefund.tumblr.com/>
- Giles Cassels, MicroPlace - <https://www.microplace.com/>
- Megan Fielding, Business Development, Microplace [moderator] - <https://www.microplace.com/>
- Scott Anderson, Chair, First Unitarian Society Micro Finance Fund Committee
- Patrick Donohue, CEO, The Hoop Fund - <http://hoopfund.com/index.webui>

Design, Methodology, Approach Reports and expert opinions from panelists.

Main Panel Discussion Points: The panel began with the moderator asking the audience the question, “What does it mean to be part of the impact investing community?” to which people provided answers ranging from “people before profits,” and “investing in a world I want to live in.”

On the panel, Donohue from The Hoop Fund raised the issue of language in regard to creating this global community of impact investors, noting that his organization was about enabling everyday people to connect to everyday things. Simpler language and using stories, he noted, are key in mobilizing communities to embrace these causes. Noguera echoed the need to simplify the language surrounding impact investing, advocating the use of terms and analogies that are inclusive and make people want to join an impact investing community. Microplace’s Cassels further noted how developing an “invested” community was far more than just financial – it’s about people supporting one another. He said, “[Developing] An ecosystem is about an invested movement rather than one-time conferences or events.” In that sense, Microplace strives to be more than just a platform; it aims to create an experience for the user.

Tan from Acumen Fund, who works with volunteer chapters around the world, discussed the difference in fostering communities online and offline. Obviously, you need to do the work, she said, but the online space can help amplify the stories from the ground, which can in turn further mobilize a community of supporters.

Outcomes & Analysis: The panelists discussed the need for story-telling, the importance of language, and the use of terms that can make impact investing seem “inclusive” rather than intimidating and couched in buzz words. This is an important conversation, but from a branding perspective, story-telling is important in capturing people’s attention; there needs to be further statistics, numbers, and metrics that help bolster the substance behind those stories. Impact investment has largely been a Western phenomenon, but as we look at fostering more local communities, we need to think about how to adapt the terminology and its application for the nuances of those societies. More inclusive and less-technical semantics can be key in achieving this.

Keywords: Microfinance, Impact Investing, Community-building, Crowdfunding

Paper type: Review of conference panel.

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