

### **Opening speech, Pascal Marino, BWTP Network Program Coordinator**

First I would like to thank all participants for attending this important workshop, especially people coming from overseas, Laos and Vietnam, but also Indonesia, with a representative from Bank Rakyat Indonesia, a BWTP member. Also, thank you to Cambodian participants for accepting to share your experience with others in the region.

We here today to expand and contribute to the Asia Resource Centre for Microfinance (ARCM), based on dialogue and information exchange at national and regional levels in South and Southeast Asia. The ARCM constitutes a one-stop learning and information hub for Banking with the Poor Network (BWTP) members and other microfinance organisations internationally.

The ARCM promotes increased outreach and efficiency of financial services for the poor in South and Southeast Asia, and has two main objectives:

- To encourage partnerships and cooperation in Asia
- To build a knowledge management platform accessible to all microfinance actors in the Asia region

The ARCM, was established as a virtual knowledge center in microfinance in early 2004 with activities in Pakistan and Nepal, and was extended to Indonesia in August 2004. In each location, a stakeholder workshop was organised with local partners, following a comprehensive review of the microfinance sector through individual consultations with key microfinance organisations.

In this second phase of expansion of the ARCM to Southeast Asia, BWTP was able to organise individual meetings with key microfinance stakeholders in Cambodia and Vietnam. While the visit to Laos had to be cancelled, due to unexpected circumstances, I was able to meet with representatives from Laos during my visit to Vietnam, and also in Cambodia.

This workshop is an opportunity for participants from the Mekong region to share experiences in specific domains: practices and standards, innovations, linkages with the banking sector, regulations and regional cooperation. In addition, a link with Indonesia is also established, with a BRI representative speaking today.

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Finally, I would like to thank CARE Cambodia for co-organising this event, and CARE Vietnam for supporting the research activities in Vietnam.