

Voices that Count

Inclusive Business Scan

Powered by SenseMaker®



A better
deal for
farmers

Using self-signified micro-narratives to provide systematic and real-time feedback on inclusive business in smallholder supply chains

VECO has developed a new method that aims to reveal crucial insights on the inclusion of smallholders in agricultural value chains complementing conventional data collection methods. By capturing the voice of producers, producer organisations and companies, the Inclusive Business Scan generates real-time data on key issues in the trading relationships. It provides valuable information for outcome and impact measurement and assists chain actors and supporters to gain insights in people's perceptions, to understand dominant and deviant patterns and to guide future interventions. The method is based on the principles and practice of SenseMaker®.

Key features

Collection of micro-narratives that are self-interpreted by the respondents

The Inclusive Business Scan is based on the collection of hundreds (or even thousands) of stories (mostly producers but any stakeholder involved in a particular value chain can share a story). Triggered by a prompting question, respondents share real-life experiences (positive or negative) related to the value chain in which they are involved. Tablets, smartphones or paper are used to capture the stories. The Inclusive Business Scan provides respondents with a set of guiding questions (the signification framework) to make a primary assessment of their own stories, thereby adding a deeper layer of meaning to the stories and removing the potential bias of a third party interpreting the stories. Tailor-made apps for tablets and smartphones are used to capture the stories and the self-signification.

Generic framework, contextualized configuration

The Inclusive Business Scan consists of a generic set of questions framed around the principles of inclusive business that have been tested in different smallholder supply chains. It allows for minimal customisation in function of the context and realities of the value chain, for example adding lists of districts, commodities, names of co-operatives, companies, etc. The framework can be applied in any intervention or programme focusing on inclusive business in a particular value chain.

Visualisation of main patterns with direct access to stories

A pattern-detection software analyses the micro-narratives and turns the original qualitative data into aggregated visual patterns and basic statistical data, offering insight into real-time issues and emerging changes. Standard patterns are presented through pre-defined dashboards including a basic set of filters. Further tailor-made pattern analysis can be carried out based on the specific information needs or interesting emerging trends. Story packs related to interesting patterns can be easily accessed and read to gain further insights about particular issues.

Fast feedback loops

If organised well, data can be collected, analysed, fed back and used in a time span of approximately 3 to 4 weeks, thereby facilitating real-time feedback. The analysis phase is normally followed by or embedded in a participatory feedback workshop with respondents and main users to add a layer of human sense-making stimulating dialogue, discussing emerging patterns, creating a common understanding on changes, challenges and opportunities with the purpose of informing future practice and actions.



“I worry about the lack of fertilizer causing the quality of cocoa bean to decrease. We are worried that we still need more capital to be able to work with Amanah to meet their standards. I hope that more companies will work Amanah because they need to be supported to increase their capacity in buying cocoa beans from farmers.”

Male producer (31-45) from Indonesia.

From micro-narratives to emerging patterns

The Inclusive Business Scan is a **participatory tool** to gain **new insights into the nature of trading relations** between smallholders, farmer organisations and buyers. The collection of large amounts of micro-narratives that are interpreted by the storyteller provide a powerful, natural and intuitive way to gain multiple perspectives on inclusive business.

The stories and the self-signification as well as the further interpretation of the patterns by chain actors provide a combination of qualitative and quantitative data that **make stakeholders’ voices count on a strategic learning level**, involving them in the implementation and improvement of inclusive smallholder supply chains.

Organisations can use the scan to generate ad-hoc or systematic feedback loops to feed programme management and, over time, to **track the programme’s impact** on key areas of sustainable and inclusive business in smallholder supply chains. The tool also provides tangible and powerful outcomes for **reporting and communication purposes**.

So far, VECO has implemented the Inclusive Business Scan in four different value chains capturing the voice of more than 2000 farmers in Nicaragua (cacao), Senegal (Rice), Congo (Coffee) and Indonesia (Cacao). Further applications on a regional and global level will lead to a **rich database of quantifiable real-life experiences** of farmers and chain actors with opportunities for aggregation and comparison across countries, commodities, etc. Meanwhile the tool is also used by a Belgian social impact investment company.



Focus of the Inclusive Business Scan

The set of questions that are used to self-signify the stories are grounded in existing theory and models on Inclusive Business and are aligned with New Business Model principles used in the LINK methodology (developed by CIAT). The Inclusive Business Scan reveals real-time feedback on how producers and chain actors perceive issues such as

- Shared decision-making
- Benefits of the collaboration between smallholders & buyers
- Capacity of smallholders & buyers to engage in business
- Dependency / loyalty issues between smallholders, their organisations and the buyers
- Knowledge of the origins of the product and ownership of the end product
- Fair and transparent prices, payment schedules and of prices
- Benefits, clarity and consistency of quality standards
- Business commitments and respecting formal/informal agreements
- Risk arrangement for low market prices, production loss and transport/storage
- Access to and need of services



Putting it into practice

Different steps to implement the Inclusive Business Scan:

1. **Define purpose and use.** Why and how do you want to use the scan? What will be done with the results? Who are the main users? How does it complement or overlap with other existing data collection methods? Are we clear on the type of data that the scan will (not) generate?
2. **Identify scope and focus.** In which value chain(s) will the scan be implied? Who are the main respondents? Be clear on the boundaries of the study: geography, commodities, farmer groups, companies, etc.
3. **Contextualise the signification framework.** Formulate the right prompting questions. Contextualize generic questions if necessary and identify the demographic questions.
4. **Develop a collection strategy.** Define the type of respondents and develop a sampling strategy. What is the most efficient way to collect as many stories as possible? Who will collect the data? Which collection tools will be applied (tablets, smartphones, pen and paper)? Is translation required?
5. **Train the collectors.** Training the enumerators is crucial. SenseMaker-based tools have distinct features compared to a traditional survey questionnaire. Collectors need to understand the particularities of a SenseMaker collection process and be familiar with the SenseMaker Collector® application. They also need to fully understand the signification framework of the Inclusive Business Scan.
6. **Collect the micro-narratives.** Implement the collection strategy with the goal of capturing as many stories as possible – 500 micro-narratives will generate stronger patterns compared to 200 or 50. One story collector can capture an average of 10 stories per day (in rural settings). Stories and their significations can be collected digitally (offline or online) and will be automatically uploaded to a server. Collections through pen and paper will require an additional online data entry step.

7. **Detect and analyse the patterns.** Once the data has been uploaded, the general nature of the stories as well as the basic patterns for all signifiers will be automatically visualised through a dashboard application. A basic set of filters allows for a first general analysis which – in most cases – will be sufficient for drawing over-all conclusions. Further analysis can be carried out, requiring a more in-depth, tailor made and manual analysis approach.
8. **Identify interesting story packs.** Based on the visual patterns, interesting story packs are identified, read and analysed to gather additional qualitative insights related to the patterns. Topical story packs (e.g. positive stories about quality) can also be selected and used for further Sensemaking.
9. **Engage in collective sense-making.** Organise feedback workshops with representatives of farmers, the farmer organisation, buyers, service providers, ... to discuss the perspectives and insights that emerge from the pattern and story analysis.
10. **Foster action-oriented learning.** The human sense-making process leads to a better collective understanding of the actual situation, future emerging trends and weak signals. This ideally leads to proposed actions to stimulate desired patterns or to shift undesirable patterns. Suggestions are captured in a collective action plan.

Who can use it?

Direct chain actors such as farmer organisations, buyers/companies, service providers and NGOs involved in sustainable value chain development and inclusion in smallholder supply chains.

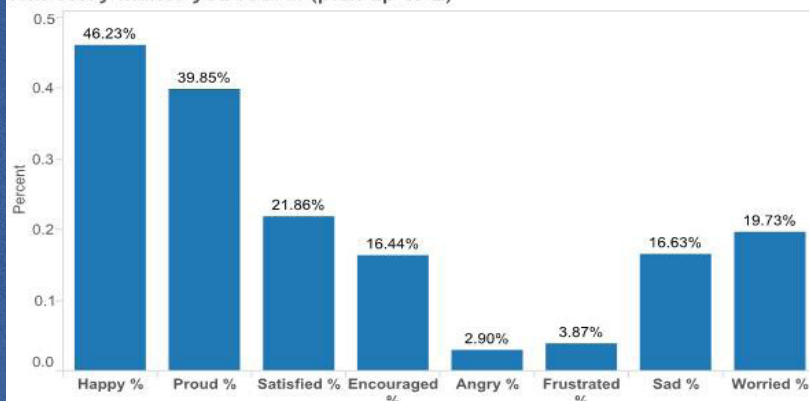
Value chain supporters such as research institutes, (micro) financial institutions, impact investors, sector-wide organisations, certification bodies, donor organisations and other drivers of sustainable and inclusive businesses.



Type of information generated by the Inclusive Business Scan

- Quick insights in **the general nature of the stories** such as feelings associated with the stories, the main topics of the experiences shared, type of people appearing in the stories, how common people's experiences are, ... as well demographic data of respondents, such as gender, age-groups, role in the value chain, geographical producer area's and affiliation to farmer organisations / cooperatives.

This story makes you feel ... (pick up to 2)

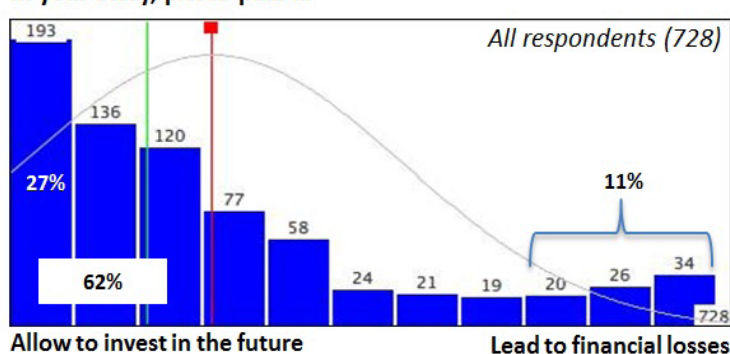


In the cocoa value chain in Indonesia, where farmer organisation Amanah collaborates with Mars Inc., farmers and other stakeholders in that value chain have shared experiences that make them predominantly feel positive (happy, proud, satisfied). There is also a non-negligible part of respondents who have shared stories that make them feel worried, indifferent or sad. A close-up of those stories reveals that the main concerns are pests and diseases, lower yield and price instability.

“During the last harvest season the prices for our cherries were promising, but then they went down again. We didn’t understand why this happened. Maybe because of fluctuating market prices. With Kawa Kabuya we are producing quality coffee beans, which will give us high prices.” Male producer (21-30) from Vukumba (DR Congo)

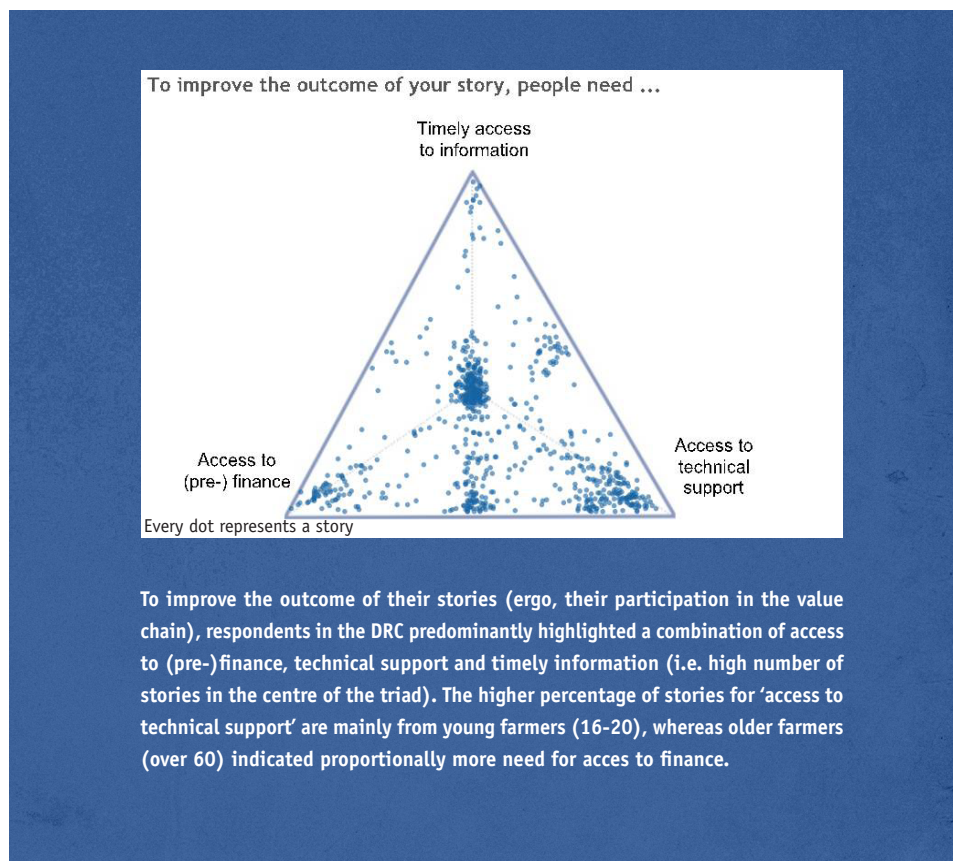
- Visual patterns** presenting how respondents perceive key elements of inclusive business within a particular value chain. The patterns provide insights on issues related to chain-wide collaboration, market linkages, fair and transparent governance, equitable access to services and inclusive innovation. Patterns, trends and weak spots across the stories can be easily detected.

In your story, prices paid ...

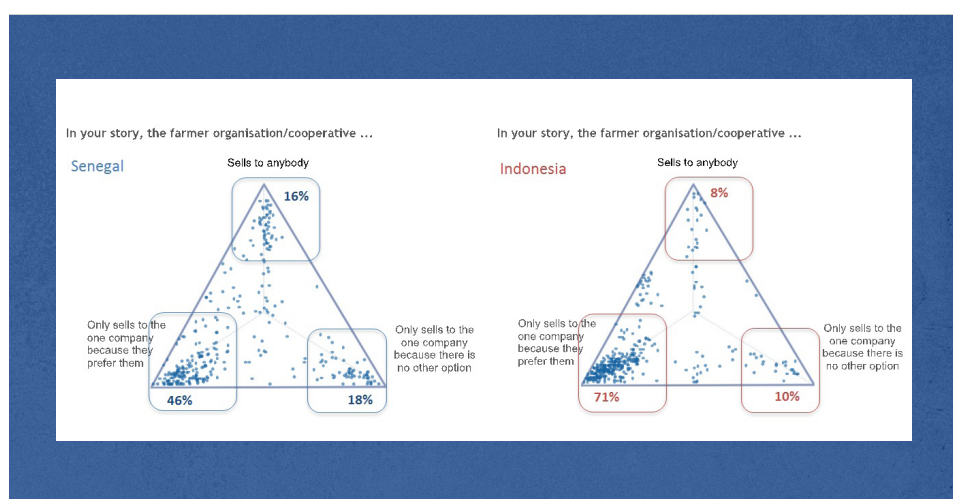


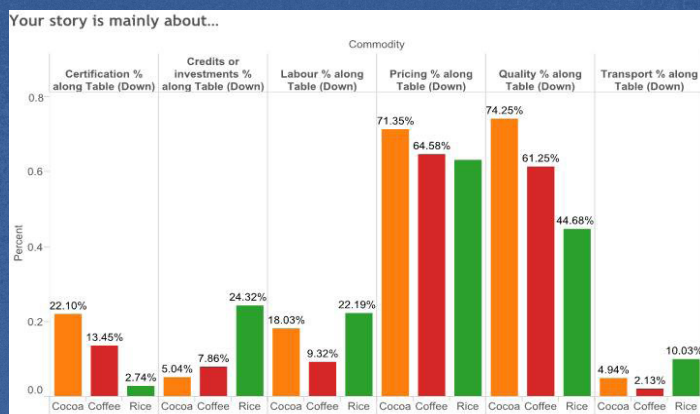
In the DR Congo, a quarter of the coffee producers associated in the farmer organisation Kawa Kabuya consider that the prices paid allow to invest in the future, whereas staff of the FO and the washing stations seem to have a considerable lower opinion in this regard.

“The collaboration between producers and the company is important because we help each other and we gain from it. We receive technical support and information on how to upkeep our cocoa plants for better quality and higher quantities. This helps to improve the lives of the producers and their families.” Female producer (21-30) from La Campesina (Nicaragua)

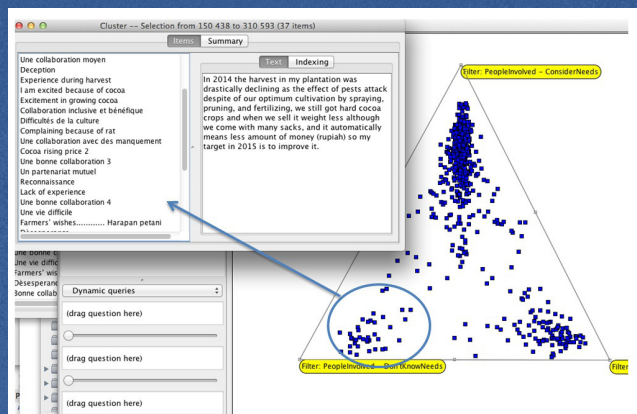


- Patterns can be controlled separately for all filters (questions) available in the signification framework. **Comparisons** can be made between geographical production area's, between common topics across the stories or between different farmer organisations or companies, to name but a few examples. For systematic data collection, **changes over time** can be easily spotted and used to better understand the effects of actions taken or changes in the context.





- **Direct and easy access to the micro-narratives** (real-life experiences of respondents) to include qualitative information in the analysis. Topical and pattern-based story packs can be easily generated to assist in reading (processing) focused and digestible volumes of stories.



- **Actionable insights and key learning points** related to the core aspects of inclusive business, such as fair and transparent pricing, democratic and participatory governance mechanisms, risk arrangements and the provision of services. These insights support the chain actors within their respective roles and improve value chain interventions.

“Based on my experience in the last 6 months in cultivating like pruning until harvesting, all depend on farmer’s capacity. I believe we would like to improve our cultivation but we still have some issues. Marketing was the major issue for farmers because Amanah needs to prepare lots of cash money since farmer would like to get cash payment when selling their product.”

Female farmer leader (46-60) from Luyo (Indonesia)

About VECO

Veco is a Belgium-based, international NGO with 40 years' experience in sustainable agricultural development, renowned for its expertise on sustainable farming practices and efforts to strengthen farmer organisations. We support our partner organisations through 8 regional Veco's in Africa, Central & South America and South-East Asia.

VECO's main focus today is on developing sustainable agricultural chains, from local to international levels. We conduct programs through seven regional offices, in partnership with organized farmer groups, NGOs, research institutes, government agencies and private sector actors (traders, processors, retailers) in 15 different countries.

We play a facilitating role among the relevant stakeholders to develop common strategies, based on close analysis and monitoring of markets and bottlenecks. The aim is to improve functioning and increase benefits to all parties within each chain – especially to improve the livelihoods of farmers – and beyond the chain, to influence a more enabling environment.



Contact

Steff Deprez
steff.deprez@vredeseilanden.be

www.vecο-ngo.org