



INSIGHTS SUMMARY

WHAT SHOULD DEFINE THE NEXT DECADE OF BUSINESS AND SOCIAL IMPACT?

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Speakers:

Stephanie Daniels, Senior Programme Director, **Sustainable Food Lab**

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Blanca Cívít Sardà, Public Relations Lead, **WageIndicator Foundation**

Zannatul Ferdous, Principal Consultant, **Agora Global**

Lorraine Charles, Founder & Executive Director, **Na'amal**

Samuel Williams, Head of Fund, Resilient Futures Fund, **Christian Aid**

Rachel Seftel, Head of Research & Impact, **Cherie Blair Foundation for Women**

Aaron Binder, Director, **Better Way Alliance**

THE NEXT DECADE MUST MOVE BEYOND PERFORMATIVE IMPACT AND DELIVER DURABLE CHANGE. THIS COMMUNITY CLINIC EXPLORED WHAT THAT REQUIRES ACROSS LIVELIHOODS, WAGES, LOCAL ENTERPRISE, RESILIENT VALUE CHAINS AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES. PARTICIPANTS QUESTIONED MEASURES THAT REWARD ACTIVITY WITHOUT SHOWING WHETHER PEOPLE SECURE DECENT WORK, ECONOMIC RESILIENCE OR GREATER AGENCY. THEY ALSO EXAMINED WHY CAPITAL AND DECISION-MAKING REMAIN CONCENTRATED FAR FROM AFFECTED COMMUNITIES.

FIVE PRIORITIES EMERGED: MEASURE OUTCOMES THAT MATTER TO PEOPLE; BUILD FAIRER LABOUR MARKETS; STRENGTHEN VALUE CHAINS THROUGH RESPONSIBLE PROCUREMENT; SHIFT CAPITAL, POWER AND RISK LOCALLY; AND MAKE COLLABORATION MORE CANDID, PRACTICAL AND ACCOUNTABLE.

INSIGHT 1: **MEASURE WHETHER INTERVENTIONS CREATE DIGNIFIED LIVELIHOODS, NOT SIMPLY ACTIVITY**

Training completions, certificates and participation figures can demonstrate reach, but they do not show whether an intervention has changed someone's

economic prospects. Skills programmes should measure whether participants move into work, sustain and increase their earnings, and gain greater agency. Employers need to shape curricula earlier, provide experience through real projects and create routes into apprenticeships, contracts and jobs.

Impact measurement must also accommodate complexity. Standardised headline figures can obscure additional impact and lived experience, yet evidence must remain clear enough to influence finance and investment decisions. The task is not to abandon measurement, but to connect credible data with outcomes that people themselves value.

Before anybody implements a new initiative, please start with: why isn't it happening already? Let's not assume we are coming with some magic bullet. If things are not working, there is a reason. Let's unpack that before we design whatever solution." - Zannatul Ferdous, Principal Consultant, Agora Global

"The question cannot simply be: did someone gain a skill? It needs to be: did that skill lead to meaningful economic participation? Did it create income progression and greater agency?" Lorraine Charles, Founder & Executive Director, Na'amal

INSIGHT 2: MAKE FAIR WAGES AND TRANSPARENT LABOUR MARKETS PART OF BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Living wages are both a social outcome and a business concern, linked to worker wellbeing, retention, productivity and perceptions of job quality. Progress towards living wages must sit alongside enforcement of existing minimum wage protections, particularly where businesses struggle to identify and address gaps across their supply chains.

Workers also need reliable information about wages, conditions and rights. Greater transparency can help people compare opportunities, make informed choices and negotiate more fairly. Businesses should be open about the challenges they face rather than retreating from public discussion. Such openness can support practical collaboration among employers, suppliers, workers, trade unions, policymakers and civil society.

"What a lot of businesses need to do is to be more open, to be more transparent, to share the challenges that they are facing themselves as well within their supply chains and perhaps within their own operations." Fiona Dragstra, Director, WageIndicator

Foundation

INSIGHT 3: BUILD RESILIENT VALUE CHAINS THROUGH RESPONSIBLE PROCUREMENT

Climate and economic resilience cannot be treated as separate agendas. Farmers and workers need fair prices, transparent terms, appropriate technical support and financial incentives that enable them to invest, adapt and withstand shocks. In food and agriculture, where production remains heavily dependent on people, responsible procurement is the starting point.

Businesses should examine not only operational risks, but also how their purchasing practices affect suppliers and communities. Local partners can bring knowledge that conventional risk assessments miss, including cultural context and practical insight into how farmers respond. Resilience grows when procurement, finance and technical support reinforce one another rather than pulling in different directions.

"Businesses must connect their climate-resilient work with economic resilience work. We cannot disentangle them or think of them in silos." Stephanie Daniels, Senior Programme Director, Sustainable Food Lab

INSIGHT 4: SHIFT CAPITAL, POWER AND RISK TOWARDS LOCAL ENTERPRISES

Local organisations and enterprises often understand their markets and communities best, yet remain excluded from consequential decisions. Investors and larger organisations should move beyond asking whether local businesses are ready for established funding models. They must also ask whether their due diligence, investment horizons and risk frameworks reflect local realities.

Affordable, appropriately structured finance matters, but so do authority and ownership. Local leaders need the power to shape priorities rather than having to adapt their work to externally imposed agendas. This is particularly important for women-owned businesses, which may be smaller, less formal and constrained by unequal access to accounts, property and collateral. Participation must lead to genuine decision-making power.

"We are mortgaging the future for the present. The market tends not to reward complacency, especially in tech. Businesses that don't make the effort to

understand these markets early, or build for them properly, are going to miss out on a huge potential source of growth.” - Rachel Seftel, Cherie Blair Foundation for Women

“We mitigate risk through truly getting to understand and know the enterprises, the businesses, the communities that we’re working in.” - Samuel Williams, Resilient Futures Fund, Christian Aid

INSIGHT 5: BUILD A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT THROUGH ACCOUNTABLE COLLABORATION

Small businesses need stable, fair operating conditions to create decent jobs and keep wealth circulating locally. Rising fixed costs, limited access to affordable capital and policies designed around larger firms can weaken otherwise viable enterprises. Business owners should use their collective voice to show policymakers how these pressures affect workers, neighbourhoods and local services.

Collaboration, however, cannot mean large institutions speaking only to one another. It should begin with affected communities, assign clear roles and establish accountability. Sometimes the most useful starting point is a small group working on one concrete local issue. Trust develops through shared work, not declarations of partnership.

Collaboration is possible; we’ve seen it, but every situation poses a different challenge. It requires dialogue between companies, suppliers, workers, policymakers, nonprofits and worker representatives.” - Blanca Civit Sardà, Public Relations Lead, WageIndicator Foundation

“Main streets need a new social contract. That’s fair costs and affordable capital, so businesses can build good jobs and communities.” - Aaron Binder, Better Way Alliance

CONCLUSION

The discussion pointed to three shifts: from counting activity to assessing durable livelihoods; from consulting local actors to sharing capital and authority with them; and from broad commitments to collaboration built on clear incentives, roles and accountability. Across employment, agriculture, finance and technology,

the unresolved barrier is structural. Existing procurement practices, investment criteria and institutional incentives often reproduce the inequalities that impact programmes claim to address.

Before launching another initiative, organisations should ask harder questions. Why is change not already happening? Whose interests shape the current system? Who has the power to redesign it? Affected communities must help answer those questions from the outset.

RESOURCES

- Living Income Community of Practice: A global community focused on advancing the concept and practice of living income, particularly in agricultural supply chains, by sharing evidence, tools and approaches that can help improve producer livelihoods
<https://www.living-income.com/>
- Refugee Employment Pathways: Why Digital Skills Training Must Lead to Jobs, Business Fights Poverty / Na'amal: An article exploring the gap between digital skills training and actual employment for refugees, arguing that programmes should focus not only on training completion but on creating credible pathways into paid work and sustainable livelihoods
<https://businessfightspoverty.org/refugee-employment-pathways-digital-skills-jobs/>
- Mental Health, Income and the Living Wage: Evidence from 91 Countries, WageIndicator Foundation: A research-focused event examining the relationship between income, living wages and mental health across 91 countries, highlighting the wider wellbeing implications of wage adequacy
<https://wageindicator.org/what-we-do/events/mental-health-income-and-the-living-wage-evidence-from-91-countries-2026/>
- Fixed Cost Crunch 2025, Better Way Alliance / Commercial Rent: Research examining how rising fixed business costs, including commercial rent and other operating expenses, affect small businesses, job quality and their ability to invest in workers and communities
<https://commercialrent.ca/fixed-cost-crunch-2025/>
- Anker Research Institute, Living Wage and Living Income Research: A research institute specialising in living wage and living income benchmarks, methodologies and studies designed to support better wages and livelihoods across countries and supply chains
<https://www.ankerresearchinstitute.org/>
- Gender Pay Gaps in Supply Chains, Anker Research Institute: A working paper examining gender pay gaps within supply chains and the structural factors that can contribute to unequal earnings between women and men
<https://www.ankerresearchinstitute.org/working-papers/gender-pay-gaps-feb-24>
- Resilience, Regenerative Agriculture and Farmer Income: A Reinforcing Cycle, Business Fights Poverty / Sustainable Food Lab: An article exploring the connections between regenerative agriculture, climate resilience and farmer incomes, showing why environmental and economic resilience need

to be strengthened together

<https://businessfightspoverty.org/regenerative-agriculture-farmer-income/>

- World Economic Forum Remarks, President of the Government of Spain: Remarks delivered at the World Economic Forum discussing economic transformation, technological change and the importance of ensuring that growth and innovation contribute to broader social progress
https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/lang/en/presidente/news/paginas/2024/20240117_world-economic-forum.aspx
- Economic Nutrition for the Places We Live, Shorefast: A framework for understanding how money flows through local economies, designed to make the local economic impact of businesses and purchasing decisions more visible and encourage more community-rooted economic models
<https://shorefast.org/news-stories/economic-nutrition-for-the-places-we-live/>
- The Case for Living Wages, Business Fights Poverty, CISL & Shift: A report setting out the business and social case for living wages, examining how adequate wages can contribute to worker wellbeing, productivity, retention and more resilient businesses and supply chains
<https://businessfightspoverty.org/report/the-case-for-living-wages/>