



## INSIGHTS SUMMARY

# HOW CAN COMPANIES STRENGTHEN LIVELIHOODS THROUGH THEIR VALUE CHAINS?

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### *Speakers:*

Myriam Ballot, Inclusive Sourcing Global Manager, **L'Oréal**

Bilal Bawany, Global Sustainable Sourcing Lead, **Mars Incorporated**

Frances Goodwin, Living Wage Lead, Primark Cares, **Primark**

Sandra Fontano, Senior Global Social Sustainability Manager, **Unilever**

THIS WORKSHOP EXPLORED WHAT IT TAKES TO STRENGTHEN LIVELIHOODS THROUGH VALUE CHAINS IN WAYS THAT ARE PRACTICAL, CREDIBLE AND CAPABLE OF LASTING. DRAWING ON EXPERIENCE FROM SOURCING, LIVING WAGE AND INCLUSIVE SOURCING WORK, THE DISCUSSION MOVED QUICKLY BEYOND BROAD COMMITMENTS TO THE HARDER QUESTIONS OF IMPLEMENTATION. PARTICIPANTS EXAMINED HOW TO MAKE LIVELIHOODS RELEVANT TO BUSINESS PERFORMANCE, HOW TO BUILD TRUST WITH SUPPLIERS AND COMMUNITIES, AND HOW TO USE PROCUREMENT, DATA AND PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT PROGRESS. A CONSISTENT THEME RAN THROUGH THE SESSION: THIS WORK CANNOT SIT AT THE MARGINS. IF COMPANIES WANT STRONGER LIVELIHOODS, THEY NEED TO EMBED THEM INTO CORE SYSTEMS AND STAY WITH THE WORK OVER TIME.

## **INSIGHT 1: MAKE LIVELIHOODS PART OF CORE BUSINESS PERFORMANCE, NOT A SIDE INITIATIVE**

The discussion made clear that livelihood efforts gain traction when they are framed in terms that businesses already understand. Participants heard that stronger wages and incomes can support worker satisfaction, productivity, lower turnover and more resilient supply chains. That matters because initiatives that sit outside commercial priorities are often vulnerable when pressures rise. Several contributions also pointed to the need to connect livelihood goals to the systems that shape day-to-day decisions, especially procurement and buyer incentives. If buyers are rewarded for cost alone, progress will stall. Embedding livelihoods into shared metrics, purchasing processes and internal accountability helps turn a values-led ambition into something the business can actually deliver.

***“Creating positive social impact cannot be confined to a small team of experts. To be truly transformative, it must be driven by an approach connecting a global vision with local execution.”***

***Myriam Ballot, Inclusive Sourcing Global Manager, L’Oréal***

## **INSIGHT 2: BUILD TRUST BY DELIVERING EARLY VALUE AND LEADING BY EXAMPLE**

Trust came through as a practical condition for progress, not a soft add-on. Suppliers, farmers and communities are more likely to engage when they can see tangible benefits early, whether that means improved productivity, lower risk or clearer commercial value. The session also highlighted the importance of companies acting within their own operations first. That creates credibility when asking suppliers to move. Leading by example does not remove the difficulty of the journey, but it makes engagement more grounded and less abstract. Participants also noted that trust depends on language and framing. Strong intentions can still miss the mark if companies use terms or messages that do not land in local contexts.

***“Real impact on farmer livelihoods comes when businesses can demonstrate immediate impact to the daily lives of farming families, leverage commercial relationships for a more equitable distribution of risk and reward, and partner for long-term, systemic change across the value supply chain.”***

***Bilal Bawany, Global Sustainable Sourcing Lead, Mars, Incorporated***

## **INSIGHT 3: USE DATA AND TRANSPARENCY TO MOVE FROM INTENTION TO ACTION**

Reliable data was presented as a foundation for action, especially where companies and suppliers are trying to understand wage or income gaps. Participants heard that accessible benchmarks and consistent measurement frameworks help move the conversation from uncertainty to action. The point is not to wait for perfect information. It is to make the gap visible enough to begin addressing it. The discussion also widened the lens beyond headline figures. Existing company data can reveal more when viewed differently, including through a gender lens. That matters because weak analysis can hide uneven outcomes and blunt decision-making. Better use of data supports more honest conversations, clearer priorities and stronger action plans.

***“Businesses already hold a wealth of data. The real opportunity is looking at it differently, especially through a gender lens, so it becomes a tool for insight, reflection, and better decision-making.”***

**Frances Goodwin**, Living Wage Lead, Primark Cares, **Primark**

#### **INSIGHT 4: SUPPORT SUPPLIERS THROUGH PARTNERSHIP, TOOLS AND PROCUREMENT ALIGNMENT**

A strong message from the workshop was that livelihoods cannot be improved through mandates alone. Suppliers need practical support if progress is to feel achievable rather than imposed. Participants discussed the value of capacity building, shared tools, action plans and close engagement with procurement teams so that supplier expectations match commercial realities. Breakout discussions reinforced this wider partnership point. Progress increasingly depends on more creative coalitions that include business, civil society and local actors, rather than relying on older models alone. There was also a clear recognition that procurement can be a force for good, but only if it is aligned with the ambition. Otherwise, companies risk asking suppliers to deliver outcomes that their purchasing practices make difficult.

#### **INSIGHT 5: TREAT LIVELIHOODS AS A LONG-TERM JOURNEY SHAPED BY WIDER SYSTEM CONSTRAINTS**

The session did not present livelihoods as a quick win. Participants repeatedly returned to the structural barriers that slow progress, including pricing pressures, policy gaps and financing constraints. That makes realistic milestones important. Companies need to be transparent about what can be achieved now, what will take longer, and where collaboration is essential. The discussion also connected livelihoods to wider resilience. One reflection that resonated strongly was that community resilience sits at the heart of supply chain resilience. That shifts the focus from isolated interventions to the wider conditions that allow people, suppliers and businesses to withstand disruption. Long-term commitment matters because livelihoods are shaped by systems, not only by individual projects or supplier requirements.

***“Living wage is a long-term journey; it is not going to happen overnight. Trying to make something like this happen across global supply chains is not going to be done quickly, and we need to do it in collaboration.”***

**Sandra Fontano**, Senior Global Social Sustainability Manager, **Unilever**

## CONCLUSION

Three shifts stood out from this workshop. First, livelihood action is more likely to stick when it is tied to business performance and embedded in procurement and management systems. Second, trust and transparency matter as much as ambition, because suppliers and communities engage when they can see early value and a credible path forward. Third, progress depends on partnership, not compliance. The biggest opportunity now is structural. Companies are already advancing efforts to improve livelihoods, and the next phase of progress will depend on better aligning value chains with that ambition by tackling cost pressures, uneven incentives, and wider policy gaps. The next step is not another round of commitments. It is a more disciplined alignment between commercial practice, supplier support, data and collaboration.

## RESOURCES

- **Unilever Living Wage Supplier Programme:** A programme encouraging suppliers to assess wage gaps and take action to ensure workers in their supply chains receive a living wage.  
<https://www.unilever.com/suppliers/living-wage-supplier-programme/>
- **Mars Supply Chain & Sourcing:** An overview of Mars' efforts to build a more sustainable supply chain by tackling deforestation, improving traceability, supporting farmers, and strengthening responsible sourcing across key raw materials such as cocoa and palm oil.  
<https://www.mars.com/en-es/sustainability-plan/supply-chain-and-sourcing/>
- **Embedding a Commitment to Responsible Purchasing Practices:** A case study exploring how Primark is embedding responsible purchasing practices through cross-functional training, itemised costing and collaboration with suppliers to support living wages and better working conditions in its supply chain.  
<https://businessfightspoverty.org/embedding-a-commitment-to-responsible-purchasing-practices/>
- **L'Oréal Inclusive Sourcing Programme:** A programme that uses the purchasing power of L'Oréal to work with suppliers who create employment and sustainable incomes for people from economically or socially vulnerable communities.  
<https://www.loreal.com/en/articles/audiences/inclusive-sourcing-program/>
- **Living Wages Action Brief 2025:** An action brief exploring how living wages can reduce working poverty, strengthen business resilience, and support progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, drawing on research and expert insights.  
<https://businessfightspoverty.org/report/living-wages-action-brief-2025/>