STREAMLINING SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING IN THE COFFEE SECTOR

Project duration: March 2018 to February 2019

From farmers to retailers, the coffee supply chain produces a large volume of data that could be useful for monitoring sustainability progress across the whole sector. That is, if only we could somehow combine it. A new initiative led by the Global Coffee Platform (GCP) aims to build consensus around a data standard that would help the sector do just that. The project is also focused on making the data that farmers collect beneficial to them in, for example, accessing financial services. We caught up with Lars Kahner, Program Manager at GCP, to get more information on this project, which is co-funded by the ISEAL Innovations Fund.

What does this project aim to achieve?

We aim to unleash the power of data in the coffee sector. Stakeholders in this sector collect data for a variety of purposes: sustainability standards compliance, customer information, public reporting, etc. The problem is that they report this data to the various frameworks using different templates, at different times and in different formats. The data ends up in different places and disconnected. With this project, we want to push for harmonization in data collection in the coffee sector, bringing it a step closer to being able to demonstrate its collective impact. The project also aims to add value to the data that is collected. By working with the same metrics we could help the sector, for example, identify sustainability hotspots and take action around areas of improvement. We can also look at developing financial products that use this data and are therefore more attractive and accessible to coffee farmers.

How will you get there?

Well, we will essentially develop an extendable data standard that allows for data exchange between different technical systems. We are inviting sustainability standards, businesses and other organisations to share the
indicators and metrics they use for data collection at farm level. We will then collate and cluster these indicators and individual data points, identifying common denominators and overlaps.

We recognise that there are important questions around data sharing, ownership and privacy. For various different reasons, people are not always willing to share information on impact or sustainability performance. We think it’s important to raise awareness and build understanding about those sensitivities, and we plan to do so by mapping and showcasing successful business cases and best practices.

With respect to financial services for farmers, we will be engaging with financial service providers to include indicators in the mapping exercise that support loan decisions for farmers. This can reap added value for coffee farmers to increase their access to finance.

**How is the ISEAL Innovations Fund helping?**

There are various initiatives to harmonize indicators for sustainability performance globally and across sectors, and through our project COSA has done extensive groundwork on this. But given the diversity of both the data collected and the different technical solutions in the coffee supply chain, it’s important to drive alignment for collective reporting also from within the sector. The fund gives us the opportunity to facilitate this effort, with the added value of benefitting from the other data innovations it supports. Innovations around data occur at a really fast pace, and it is important for ISEAL members to keep up. We couldn’t undertake a project of this scale without the fund, and without teaming up with other ISEAL members.

**Any advice for other ISEAL members thinking of applying to the fund?**

A major challenge with these kinds of ‘technical’ endeavours is to communicate the objectives and benefits in a simple and understandable way. A lot of effort goes into making the project clear to other people and getting them excited. Our advice would be to first help your communications team understand the project, and then get their help in producing visually appealing and easily digestible material for internal and external use. Make sure to allocate enough time to prepare and co-develop your concept with other ISEAL members and other partners.

“Our intention is to align the global coffee sector’s efforts to strive for sustainability through collective action, and to achieve far greater impact on the livelihoods of coffee farming families and their communities than by doing it alone.”

Lars Kahnert, Program Manager, GCP

If you are an ISEAL member, find out how you can apply to the **ISEAL Innovations Fund**.

The ISEAL Innovations Fund is supported by the following partners: