Introduction

ISEAL and its partners have done considerable work on measuring household income among small producers within commodity supply chains and certification systems. The Living Income Community of Practice (LICoP)\(^1\), for example, has produced dozens of guidance documents and important lessons on income measurement among smallholder farmers. However, as organizations increasingly align their efforts, they are moving beyond specific producers to supporting income earning among diverse populations within larger landscapes. As such, several organizations have expressed the need for additional guidance on income measurement within this broader context.

The following primer is intended to help organizations that want to understand income earning across a landscape. This includes discussion on the important determinants of income among diverse populations groups, and how to organize income information in a meaningful way for landscape-level or jurisdictional area programs. Specifically, this primer will discuss three ways to gather income information:

1. **Limited set of landscape-level Indicators**: Provide a high-level view for monitoring landscape-scale changes.

2. **Income profiles**: Illustrate the composition of household incomes and how they are affected by seasonal changes and external events, which can be monitored over time, and also inform program design and sampling frames for collecting individual household data. (the landscape-level indicators are also included in profiles).

3. **Individual household data**: Provide a more detailed view of individual households’ wealth status and/or incomes, which can be used for monitoring the impact of specific landscape-level programs.

Each section discusses different ways of viewing income information to gain different types of insight, and each approach builds on the one before it. Individual household data, for example, uses income profiles for sampling and longitudinal understanding, and can generate data for landscape-level indicators as part of the analysis. The use case (examples can be found in annex 4) will ultimately determine which option(s) for gathering income information are most appropriate for any given context.
Landscape-level Indicators

While detailed household income studies may be necessary in order to attribute income changes to specific interventions, they are not required to simply monitor changes within landscapes. International bodies such as the World Bank and International Labour Organization (ILO) use macro-indicators to measure the economic wellbeing of nations. We can draw from this experience to identify indicators of income changes across smaller landscapes. Below are three such indicators, which are explained in the following subsections.

1. Reliance on informal economy
2. Reliance on remittances
3. Economic opportunity

These indicators can be used on their own, or as part of more detailed income profiles. Data can be collected through key informant interviews and focus group discussions, or it can be analyzed using comprehensive household income data. Landscape-level indicators tend to be lagging indicators, meaning that changes may not be detectable annually, which is a consideration for monitoring. Annex 1 provides brief guidance on structuring the interviews and discussions.

Because participants in the informal economy often do not want to be accounted for, national census data cannot be relied on in many countries. Likewise, minimum wages and other labor legislation do not support informal earners.

Informal economy

Reliance on the informal economy is correlated with poverty, low productivity, unemployment and slow economic growth. More than sixty percent of the world’s employed population – 2 billion people – are part of the informal economy, and the majority are in emerging and developing economies. Informal employment is estimated to be 90% in agriculture alone.

Figure 1 shows the ILO’s estimated share of informal employment to total employment, by country. Organizations can collect similar data for smaller landscape units through key informant interviews or household interviews.

Over 60% of the world’s employed population work informally. Informal employment in agriculture alone is estimated to be 90%.

Data collection on local remittances helps organizations understand whether local incomes alone can enable poverty reduction or a decent standard of living for families.

Economic opportunity

Several multi-lateral institutions and international organizations measure economic diversification, or complexity, of national economies with indexes that use large economic data sets. While these precise indexes would be difficult to replicate in smaller landscapes, local information on economic diversification as it pertains to income opportunity can still provide useful insight. Landscapes with limited economic diversification, and thus limited income-earning opportunities, tend to be poorer, while those with diverse economies provide more opportunity for economic mobility and greater bargaining power (with some exceptions). Monitoring income-earning opportunities within the landscape can also help organizations assess their contribution to job creation and local economic growth. The methods for gathering and categorizing data will vary depending on the economic complexity of the landscape and availability of secondary data.

Steps for understanding income in the landscape

**STEP 1**
Collect secondary data
- Find out if data on the indicators exists for your landscape

**STEP 2**
2-3 Key informant interviews
- Local industries and income-earning options
- Estimate of % informal economy
- Contribution of remittances to local economy

**STEP 3**
3-5 Household focus groups (for comparison/cross-check)
- Remittances as a % of household incomes
- Informal economy as a % of household incomes
Income Profiles

Incomes are neither static nor homogenous across populations. Income profiles include and expand upon the three landscape-level indicators above, by providing additional information about the factors that determine income earning for different groups of people, and at different points in time. Income profiles can be used to monitor indicators of income change across landscapes, in addition to monitoring changes to income composition, risks and productive assets. The income profiles can also be used for program design, assumptions, and planning.

Income profile steps 1 and 2 (below) also inform the sampling frame designs when used in conjunction with household-level questionnaires. Income profiles can be created through key informant interviews and focus group discussions. In some cases, it may be possible to find existing profiles from international organization to use as a starting point. Ideally, they should include the categories below. Annex 2 provides more information on structuring data collection, along with some templates.

Create income profiles to inform program design and planning, and to create an appropriate sampling frame for household studies.

Figure 2. Categories of income profiles and their key components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income inequality</th>
<th>Income modalities</th>
<th>Income resiliency</th>
<th>Income legislation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Risks, barriers, and opportunities for different population groups</td>
<td>• Economic activity, formal and informal</td>
<td>• Seasonal income fluctuations</td>
<td>• Laws/regulations affect income in the formal economy</td>
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<td>• Forms of income</td>
<td>• Periodic hazards and losses</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Productive assets and savings</td>
<td>• Climate change risks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Income inequality

Income inequality, as an extension of social inequality, is pervasive. It results from common behaviors, cultural constructs, and societal systems that reinforce discrimination (i.e., structural discrimination). Income profiles start with identifying who is in the landscape, and the potential risks and barriers to income earning that different population groups may face. Keep in mind that some populations may be more “hidden” than others, such as migrant workers without official work visas. It is best to assume that these populations exist in every landscape and aim to find them.

Income earning modalities

Households earn income in a variety of ways and often have multiple sources. Income profiles map the economic activities and the various means of income earning across a landscape, both formal and informal. Where possible, it is helpful to illustrate how different income modalities relate to one another, to help anticipate how changes to one might affect another.

Certain types of wages, such as piece rates, are associated with higher risk of low pay and exploitation.

Income profiles should also describe the relative importance of different sources of income, including earned cash income; food income from one’s own production; remittances; in-kind payments; payments for ecosystem services; return on investments; and/or social service transfers, as well as productive assets that support income earning. It is also helpful to understand the prevailing prices for dominant commodities and wages in key industries. Living income benchmarks also provide important context for understanding how much income earners need to earn (within 48 hours or less) to afford a basic but decent standard of living.
Income resiliency
Household incomes fluctuate over time. In certain industries, such as agriculture, fishing and tourism, seasonal fluctuations are common. Seasonal lows can result in lean periods with increased health risks for households living on the margins. Seasonal calendars identify when such lean periods occur, as well as other important events, and can help identify the best timing for certain interventions.

Periodic hazards such as droughts, floods, and disease result in significant income loss for many households. For some, these events cause livelihoods to erode over time, as people sell productive assets to get by. The effects of climate change have resulted in bad years that occur more often and with greater intensity, increasing risks, particularly for the poor. Hazard timelines are used to illustrate the type and frequency of periodic hazards. They describe the effect that previous hazards have had income-earning, and the mechanisms that households used to cope. This type of information helps communities and programs plan for and preempt potential losses, building resiliency for the future.

Legislation
Labor laws, minimum wages, and other income-related legislation provide important information on the formal economy. There may also exist specific legislation and rules for migrant workers on work visas. At the same time, it is important to note that those in the informal economy are unlikely to receive the same benefits, and are at higher risk of earning below minimum wage and working longer-than-legislated working hours.

Steps for income profiling
Data collected during profiling includes data for the landscape-level indicators discussed above, so that two separate processes are not necessary.

**STEP 1**
Collect secondary data
Examples:
- Pertinent legislation
- Populations details
- Climate change data

**STEP 2**
3-5 Key informant interviews
- Identify key populations, barriers and opportunities
- Divide populations further into wealth groups
- Identify key industries and income-earning options
- Get an estimate of % informal economy
- Create seasonal calendar(s)
- Develop Hazard timeline(s)

**STEP 3**
Household focus groups (with each population/wealth group)
- Obtain % contribution of income sources to total income for a typical household in the population/wealth group
- Determine what is formal vs informal
- Document modes of payment for major income earning activities
- Identify productive assets and savings
- Confirm/adjust seasonal calendars
- Document past losses and coping based on the hazard timeline
Individual Household Data

In some cases, a more detailed analysis of households’ wealth status or incomes across landscapes will be necessary. This includes if you want to be able to monitor and make claims about the contribution of specific landscape-level interventions to landscape-level change. Individual household surveys utilize income profiles both to inform research design, including sampling frames, and to provide essential context information for interpretation of the results. Data on landscape-level indicators can continue to be tracked to see how changes in household data compare with landscape-level economic shifts over time.

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**Gather individual household income data, when necessary, together with income profiles. Select data collection methods based on use-case.**

Household-level assessment can be done in different ways, and specific use-cases should determine the research design and methods. Below are two options for collecting data at a household level. The first, while not an income measurement approach, can give an indication of whether income meets a certain benchmark (when paired with income profiles). The second is detailed household income measurement. Keep in mind that poverty indexes are lagging indicators, whereas incomes will change more quickly.

- Poverty indexes combined with income profiles
- Detailed income data

**A Note on Sampling**

No matter the use-case, household data collection should utilize an appropriate sampling frame. From a landscape perspective, this means that a representative sample of households should be selected individually from each key population group that is identified during steps 1 and 2 of income profiles (assuming the study will not be a census). This should include marginalized groups, households that are dependent on the informal economy, and those at risk of income discrimination. A good sampling frame that covers an entire landscape will naturally be very large.

**Poverty indexes with income profiles**

Poverty indexes, such as the Progress out of Poverty Index (PPI), do not measure income and cannot be used as a proxy for income. Rather, these indexes measure relative wealth. Whereas income is transactional and continuous over time, wealth is the total value of one's assets at a given moment in time. Wealth includes savings, inheritance, owned property and other assets. Income often contributes to the accumulation of wealth, but a person can also be wealthy without actively earning income. Poverty is a lack of wealth to such a degree that one is below a poverty threshold.

Even though the PPI is not a proxy for income itself, when combined with relative income and savings data from income profiles, it can provide some indication of whether or not earned-incomes are sufficient to keep populations out of poverty. For example, if 20% of household income comes from remittances and/or government cash transfers, and the PPI indicates that households are at or just above poverty line, it is reasonable to conclude that earned-incomes may be insufficient. On the other hand, if all income is earned with low to average savings, and the PPI indicates that households are above the poverty line, it is reasonable to assume that earned-income is sufficient to keep people out of poverty (though it does not account for the number of working hours required to achieve this).

**Measuring individual household income**

Detailed household income studies, based on sound sampling methodology, enable in-depth analysis with greater confidence in results. Income is also an earlier indicator of change when compared with wealth or more macro-level indicators. However, well-crafted household income studies at a landscape scale are more complex and costly.

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**Measure individual household incomes for detailed analysis, attributing contribution, comparing to income benchmarks, and/or modeling impacts.**
Due to the size of informal economies, national census data is not recommended for income analysis in most emerging and developing economies.

There are many methodologies for collecting individual household income across large populations. Structured surveys, semi-structured interviews, open-ended dialogues and participatory methodologies are all used for household income studies, either independently or in combination. Each approach will need to be tailored to the unique landscape, specific use-cases, and priority research questions.

The two most important differences between household income studies within supply chains and studies across landscapes are: 1. the sampling frame, and 2. analysis.

It is important to capture all sources of income (earned, transferred and produced), both formal and informal. Analysis that illustrates the diversity and distribution of net income over time will be the most insightful and actionable.

Income profiles inform the sampling frame methodology, while seasonal calendars and hazard timelines help build a picture of income resiliency. Additional resiliency data can be captured during the household interviews. Resiliency is critical to long-term impact, as it protects against future income loss resulting from natural and manmade calamities. Data on resiliency enables better planning in the face of such events. The text box provides a list of other types of analysis recommended when conducting detailed household income studies. Annex 3 describes these in more detail.

What to include in income analysis for landscape-level understanding:
1. Distribution
2. Inequalities
3. Deprivations
4. Seasonality
5. Risks and resiliency
6. Reliance on remittances
7. % informal economy

Steps for understanding household income

STEP 1
Clarify the use-case
- Choose the household-level approach that best fits the use-case

STEP 2
Create a sampling frame
- Use income profiles steps 1 and 2 to build the sampling frame

STEP 3
Conduct research

STEP 4
Analyze data
- Sources, distribution and differences of income between groups
- If collecting detailed income data, analyze seasonal changes and resiliency
Conclusion

When viewed across landscapes, the diversity and complexity of income-earning is apparent. Each of the approaches described in the guidance can be used to monitor changes in income, with varying degrees of detail. Landscape-level Indicators may not quantify income or enable specific claims, but they do tell an important story of economic development and income security within landscapes. Income profiles go a step further with additional information about the composition of household incomes, and how they are affected by seasonal changes and external events. Income profiles make it possible to monitor relative changes to income alongside landscape-scale economic change. Poverty indexes can add an additional layer of information by indicating whether earned-incomes enable households to live above a poverty line.

Detailed household income data is needed to quantify and monitor incomes, and the impacts that interventions have on them. To understand incomes across a landscape, a representative sample of households is needed from each population group that calls the landscape home. It is not possible, for example, to collect household data from one population or a small sample of households and extrapolate to a landscape. Individual household data will enable in-depth and varied analysis.

Income research, like all good research, begins with a clear understanding of the use-case and priority research questions.

Annex 4 provides examples of use-cases matched to the approaches described in the guidance.

Figure 3: Summary of the three different ways to gather income information across landscapes

Increasing time and cost as move down the pyramid options

Landscape level indicators are a subset of those used to create income profiles.

Income profiles inform the design of individual HH studies, and provide essential information for interpreting results.
Annex

Annex 1: Conducting interviews for 3 landscape-level indicators

- Reliance on informal economy
- Reliance on remittances
- Economic opportunity

Steps

**STEP 1**
Collect secondary data
- Find out if data on the indicators exists for your landscape

**STEP 2**
2-3 Key informant interviews
- Local industries and income-earning options
- Estimate of % informal economy
- Contribution of remittances to local economy

**STEP 3**
3-5 Household focus groups (for comparison/cross-check)
- Remittances as a % of household incomes
- Informal economy as a % of household incomes

**STEP 1 Gather secondary data**
While these three indicators are tracked for most countries, it is quite possible the no secondary data exists at a sub-national level, for your landscape. Still, it is worth asking local officials if this or similar data does exist. If current, reliable, and landscape-specific secondary data does exist then the next two steps are not necessary.

**STEP 2 Key informant interviews**
In the absence of secondary research data, key informant interviews are not expected to yield precise information on the three indicators above. Rather, the information gathered is based on the perceptions and knowledge of interviewees in order to provide estimates. For this reason, it is important to conduct key informant interviews with different types of experts that have deep familiarity of the landscape, and the knowledge to make educated estimations. For example, interviews with local government agencies + research institutions + local community groups and/or non-profit organizations would provide a good range of informants and enable cross-checking.

Key informant interviews are not surveys. The questions are part of a conversation that gets to a reasonable estimate. The conversations can begin with fairly open-ended questions such as, “What percentage of the local economy, would you say, is based on informal industry and employment?” Follow-up with clarifying questions. Do not be afraid to ask the questions in more than one way if needed.

**STEP 3 Focus group discussions**
Focus group discussion with households are used to cross-check and validate information collected from key informants. Questions for households may vary slightly. For example, instead of asking about the contribution of informal activity to the local economy, the facilitator would ask the focus group a question such as, “what percentage of household incomes in this community generally come from activities that are outside of the national social security system?” The questions should be adapted to the local context, means of communication, and level of understanding of the focus group participants. Each focus group should engage different population groups, either together or separately depending on what is appropriate for the local context. Focus groups should also include different wealth groups, ideally separately.

Keep in mind that, while households may be reluctant to speak about their own situation in front of a group, they are often more open when asked to describe the situation of households in the community that have a similar background to them. It may be more difficult to engage some groups. If the groups are quiet, and direct questions do not seem to work, try using participatory tools such as drawings, proportional piling, storytelling or other tools.
Annex 2: Summary templates and example questions for income profiles

Information to collect:

### Income inequality
- Risks, barriers, and opportunities for different population groups

### Income modalities
- Economic activity, formal and informal
- Forms of income
- Productive assets and savings

### Income resiliency
- Seasonal income fluctuations
- Periodic hazards and losses
- Climate change risks

### Income legislation
- Laws/regulations affect income in the formal economy
- Legislation on migrant workers

Steps for collection information

#### STEP 1
Collect secondary data
- Examples:
  - Pertinent legislation
  - Populations details
  - Climate change data

#### STEP 2
3-5 Key informant interviews
- Identify key populations, barriers and opportunities
- Divide populations further into wealth groups
- Identify key industries and income-earning options
- Get an estimate of % informal economy
- Create seasonal calendar(s)
- Develop Hazard timeline(s)

#### STEP 3
Household focus groups (with each population/wealth group)
- Obtain % contribution of income sources to total income for a typical household in the population/wealth group
- Determine what is formal vs informal
- Document modes of payment for major income earning activities
- Identify productive assets and savings
- Confirm/adjust seasonal calendars
- Document past losses and coping based on the hazard timeline

The approaches for key informant interviews and focus group interviews are the same for income profiling as they are for collection information on the three landscape indicators (Annex 1). Afterall, the three indicators are a subset of the income profiling information. Key informant interviews and focus group facilitation takes a degree of skill, to pick-up on clues that participants may be uncomfortable or information is not adding up, to probe for more information or cross-check through different forms of the same question, and to use participatory tools and other methods to help groups along.
Seasonal calendars and hazard timelines are one aspect of income profiles. These are collected initially with key informants, and then later confirmed with individual focus groups. During the focus group discussions, additional information is gathered on losses that households sustained and the coping mechanisms they used during previous hazardous events. Below are general templates that can be used to collect this information.

**Template 1: Seasonal Calendar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRODUCT, ACTIVITY OR EVENT</th>
<th>JAN</th>
<th>FEB</th>
<th>MAR</th>
<th>APR</th>
<th>MAY</th>
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It is important that seasonal calendars identify important production events, such as harvest, planting, fishing seasons, etc., as well as other important economic events such as seasonal labor, high and low prices, high and low tourism seasons, etc. They should also capture the seasons themselves (e.g., dry season, monsoon season, etc.) and periods that may be particularly lean with higher vulnerability. Additional information might include the timing of government programs, significant cultural holidays that affect economic activity, or other events specific to the context.

You can color in the boxes for the applicable months (or part of months) and use arrows to indicate increases and decreases (as with price). Label as needed.
Template 2: Hazard timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HAZARD</th>
<th>TIMEFRAME</th>
<th>IMPACTS</th>
<th>COPING STRATEGIES</th>
<th>RESULT OF COPING STRATEGIES</th>
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Hazard timelines tell of events that affected livelihoods within the landscape. They should capture the event itself, the timing, any losses that were suffered, and how households and communities coped. Coping information should include what households did, as well as the degree to which this strategy helped them. For example, did the strategy enable them to fully meet basic needs?

Annex 3: Income analysis for detailed household income studies

What to include in income analysis:

1. Distribution
2. Inequalities
3. Deprivations
4. Seasonality
5. Risks and resiliency
6. Economic relationships

**Inequalities:** Differences between the highest and lowest income earners in the landscape. Include explanation of why inequalities exist and if/which population group face greater inequality compared to other population groups.

**Deprivations:** The percentage of the population that experiences deprivity of income. This could be expressed in a number of different ways, including the percentage of people below a poverty line, the number of homeless persons, and/or the percentage of the population that is reliant on food or other government or community assistance.

**Seasonality:** Descriptions of and reasons for seasonal variations in income earning, including lean periods where relevant.

**Risk and resiliency:** A description of the climate threats to the local area and potential impacts on local livelihoods. This should include explanation of potential losses and coping mechanisms (including household coping and government-assisted early warning and coping strategies) where possible.

**Economic relationships:** Relationships between different industries or different population

Distribution: The distribution of income across a population. At minimum, it is useful to show distribution across each key population, across each wealth group within the population, and across the landscape as a whole.
Annex 4: Use-case examples for 3 potential approaches

Set of 3 landscape-level indicators

1. Monitor landscape-scale changes without attribution to any specific intervention.

Income Profiles

2. Understand, qualitatively, how incomes of commodity farmers influence the incomes of the rest of the population across the landscape.

3. Design programs, targeted for certain populations or income activities, and monitor changes in relative household income over time.

4. Design sampling frames for individual household studies while gathering data on income seasonality and resiliency for income analysis and modeling.

Individual Household Data

Poverty indexes with relative income

5. Get indication of whether or not earned-incomes are sufficient to keep populations out of poverty (controlling for remittances, government assistance, and gifts).

Detailed household income studies

6. Monitor impact and establish contribution of specific landscape-level programs on net household incomes across the entire landscape (control groups or additional also needed).

7. Determine a value for ecosystem service payments which would enable income stability at or above a living income, over time.

8. Compare the net household incomes of different groups to a living income benchmark.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM DESIGN</th>
<th>PROGRESS MONITORING</th>
<th>EFFECTIVENESS/CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Income profiles</td>
<td>• Landscape-level indicators</td>
<td>Individual household data</td>
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<td>• Income Profiles</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Individual household data</td>
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ISEAL supports ambitious sustainability systems and their partners to tackle the world’s most pressing challenges. With our growing global network and our focus on credible practices, we drive impact and make markets a force for good.

From the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis to human rights and persistent poverty, the world needs scalable and effective solutions. Our convening power and thought leadership accelerate positive change on these critical challenges, so companies and governments can meet their sustainability commitments and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Endnotes

1. The Living Income Community of Practice (LICoP) facilitates learning with organizations that want to improve smallholder farmer incomes, including measuring farmer incomes against living income benchmarks.
3. Including informal production, trade and labor
6. https://familyremittances.org/
10. Organizations such as Food Economy Group, Save the Children UK, World Food Program and the Famine Early Warning System produce livelihood profiles. However, these are typically produced for humanitarian response purposes and may not have all the information needed.
11. Referring to events that have historically taken place cyclically (e.g., every 3-5 years)
12. The Living Income Community of Practice (LICoP) has resources for measuring household income among those whose livelihoods include farming commodities for international supply chains. Some of the principals and resources are also valid for wider landscapes or non-agricultural populations. However, many organizations and international agencies have methodologies geared toward broader contexts.

About ISEAL

We work by:

- defining credible practice for sustainability systems based on emerging global consensus
- convening forums for collaboration, sharing of experience and collective action
- delivering expertise, advice and training
- facilitating and promoting innovation to strengthen sustainability systems.

Together, we can deliver real and lasting change for the benefit of people and planet. Join us.

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