

Reflecting on inclusive business - progress and what is next?

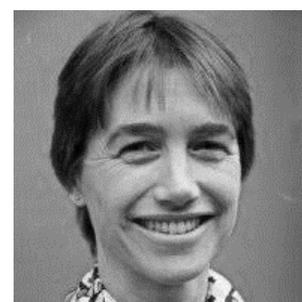
Are you head down, flat out, out of breath building inclusive businesses? Well, year-end is a good time to pause for thought. And this month we have many candid views and opinions to share from practitioners who are pausing, reflecting, and challenging us all.

What progress are we really making in inclusive business? And what's got to change in 2018 to realise the promise? This was the task we posed to our contributors. We hear from three successful African and Asian entrepreneurs, global leaders in the field such as Harvey Koh and Zahid Torres Rahman, and vox pops from many more.



This month, [we asked leading practitioners for their personal opinion](#) on the state of inclusive business currently and what they think is in store in 2018 and beyond.

- From the Practitioner Hub's inception in 2010 to now, Founding Editor Caroline Ashley has seen inclusive business grow and evolve. As she steps down from her editor role this month, she reviews the contributions from this month, and a few from years gone by, to reflect on [the essential questions that remain](#): How much impact is good enough? What is needed to drive scale? How can corporates successfully adapt their business models?
- An unwelcome but important question is posed by Harvey Koh, Managing Director of FSG. As he reflects on 11 years wrestling with inclusive models in Mumbai, he asks: ['What if an inclusive business model harms low-income people with unfair terms or discrimination?'](#) His answer: not blissful ignorance, but focus on building inclusive market systems, not just stand-alone inclusive enterprises



Caroline Ashley, Editor



Harvey Koh, FSG

*Others also question how much we know about
the impact of inclusive business models:*

- [Joost Guijt focuses on 'inclusive agribusiness'](#) - a term with growing traction. He calls for more real evidence on how models work, to ensure smallholders really gain and businesses have enough information to take risks. Looking ahead to the ongoing transformation of smallholder agriculture, he also wants to see inclusive business linked to transitions out of primary production.
- [Armin Bauer draws on years crafting and investing in inclusive business deals](#) inside the Asian Development Bank. Lack of clarity on social impact is one of the two big gaps he identifies, calling for a clearer focus on the bottom 40%, alongside more sophisticated shaping of deals.

*Our contributors have diverse ideas
for what is needed to truly scale inclusive business*



What is needed to scale inclusive business? Photo: Pixabay

- The policy context and role of government is highlighted by Ndidi Nwuneli, a social entrepreneur and investor in Nigeria. AACE Foods is an example of a business that is achieving significant scale, sourcing from over 10,000 smallholders, while tackling malnutrition. But Ndidi highlights [2 key policy actions needed to unleash local sourcing at scale: incentives and infrastructure](#).
- Dr Iffat Zafar Aga, founder of Sehat Kahani, gives an upbeat assessment of how technology has unleashed a raft of inclusive businesses in Pakistan, but a candid view from [personal experience of the collision between requirement of entrepreneurs and norms for women in Pakistan](#). More digital, fewer barriers are the way forward.
- KC Mishra is founder of eKutir, which provides 'soil to sale' services to farmers, [to create a connected non-exploitative agricultural market](#). In our exclusive interview, KC argues that such social enterprises can provide a key piece of the jigsaw going forward; partnering with farmers, designing around their needs, and partnering with corporates who lack such ability to differentiate and accommodate.

Corporates struggling to adapt their business model is a recurring theme

- From Nigeria, Soji Apampa, long-time facilitator of inclusive business and activist for transparency, argues that [pilots are happening but need to shift to scale](#). That will require scale agents, such as technology solutions, or federated cooperatives. However, the biggest challenge is internal - can companies really engage the huge BoP market effectively, listening and adapting to them?
- Zahid Torres-Rahman, Founder and Director of Business Fights Poverty, argues that [delivering the promise of inclusive business](#) means taking it deeper into corporate, into commercial and operational teams. And where necessary, jettisoning the language of inclusive business. Alongside this deepening, wider and more agile partnerships are needed for scale.



Soji Apampa, BIF



Zahid Torres-Rahman,
Business Fights Poverty

And finally...

- [It is not the global but the national companies](#) that are flagged by Markus Dietrich, senior advisor within the Inclusive Business Action Network. His priorities for the future include more support to national medium/large companies, clearer linkages with SDGs and alignment with the fast-emerging impact investment market. He also gives a great update on the growing policy support for inclusive business, seen for example in Filipino Government legislation and adoption of principles and commitments by ASEAN, APEC and G20.
- If this was not enough, [enjoy our vox pops](#) for a whole lot more. We asked what is going well, what is missing, and where inclusive business is going next. Read the short answers of our contributors, to see why they think technology, environment, fine-grained impact, SDGs, investment, and much more are top of the list.



Markus Dietrich, IBAN

Editor's Choice

Finally, our Editor's Choice flag up [the top blogs of the year](#), with the Hub team explaining why they are our favourites.

[Top 10 blogs of 2017](#)



Follow the Practitioner Hub on Twitter [@Inclusivebiz](#)



Join us on [Facebook](#)

Our monthly series only goes out to members of the Hub. Pass this on to others and encourage them to [sign up here for free](#)

The views presented here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of IBAN or its partners, and do not constitute professional advice. We welcome feedback on our publications – please contact us at enquiries@inclusivebusinesshub.org.

The Practitioner Hub is hosted by the Inclusive Business Action Network.