

# Narratives, complexity and better SDG results

Listening to authentic voices,  
making sense of lived experience,  
understanding the impact

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# Cognitive science



**Gary Klein, “Sources of Power”**

# The meaning of a story is not only in the words

Metaphor

**“Red shirt” is an assessment  
of life expectancy, not a  
statement about fashion**



# The meaning is not only in the words

Metaphor

Sarcasm

Language shifts



**We adapt urban development to the physical landscape**



Kigali - hills, dispersed city



Bogota - flat plain at altitude



Amsterdam - waterways as transport



Manhattan - grid surrounded by water

**We accept there are some things that we can't do, given the terrain**



# The same applies to the invisible cultural landscape

- Different work environments
- Different professional training
- Different values and objectives
- Different concerns



# So what does this mean?

Working to engage with people = need to understand their pre-existing narratives and micro-narratives

- But understand them from their perspective

Some shifts in perspective are impossible, others are merely hard to achieve

Stories need to have relevance and resonance

# Changing the narrative landscape

## Beliefs are not beaten by facts

- Our brains frequently put the conclusion first, and then come up with the evidence to support it, dismissing evidence against

## Changing myths can take a long time

- Demonstrate real change
- You need radically-different behaviour not just communication - do something that makes it impossible to tell the old story

## Some shifts may not be possible yet

- Start with what is possible and is in the right direction

# In a complex environment, we need ...

Detailed data, that combines actual experience and context, with quantitative elements for measurement

Diverse perspectives, from across the organisation

Scanning mechanism

- Regular, frequent information
- Fast input focused on key elements only

# Only the respondent knows what their story means

- Layers of meaning
- De-privilege the expert
- Clarifying the voice of the beneficiary

## حمامة الحرية

بتفكرنى بالحرية وهى عبارة عن حمامة  
الحرية شوفت زيها على النت ماكنتش  
بحرك كان مكتوب تحتها حمامة الحرية  
والحرية يستحقها كل انسان وهى غريزة  
فى الانسان والحيوان

# What type of justice is shown in your story?

Get your own back, revenge



Restorative, reconciling

Deterrence, stop other people doing the same

Get your own back,  
revenge

## حمامة الحرية

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والحيوان



# Get your own back, revenge

Filter: The sort of justice shown - Getting your own back

Cluster -- Selection from 286 673 to 682 899 (171 items)

Items Summary

Text Indexing

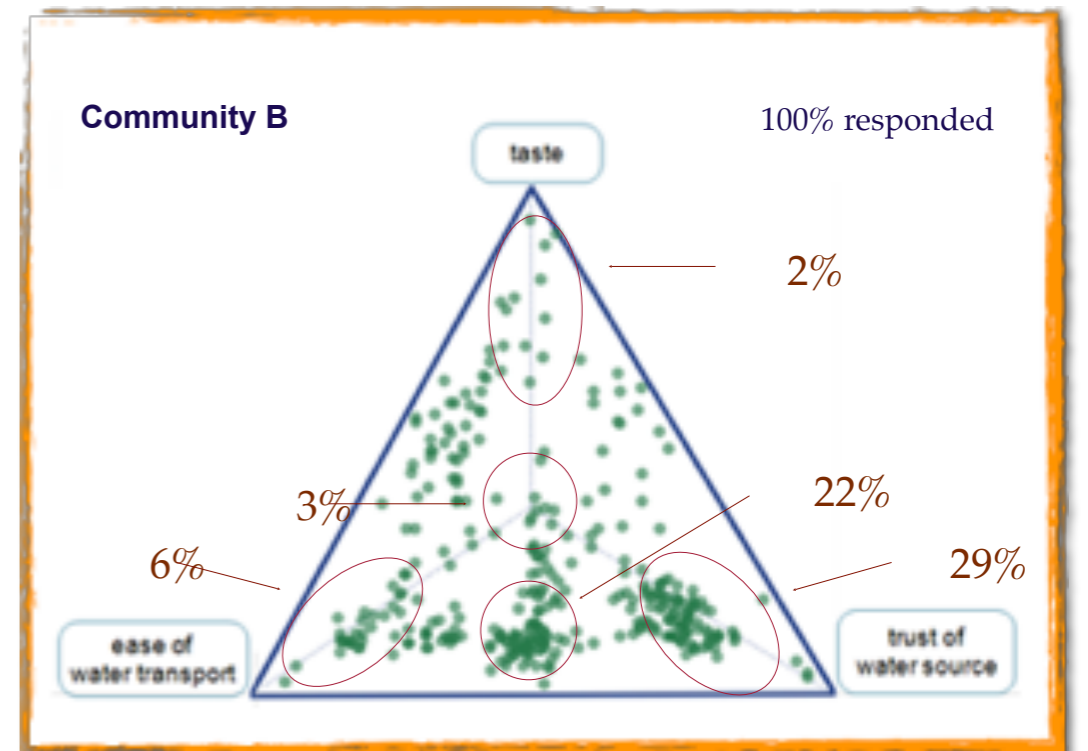
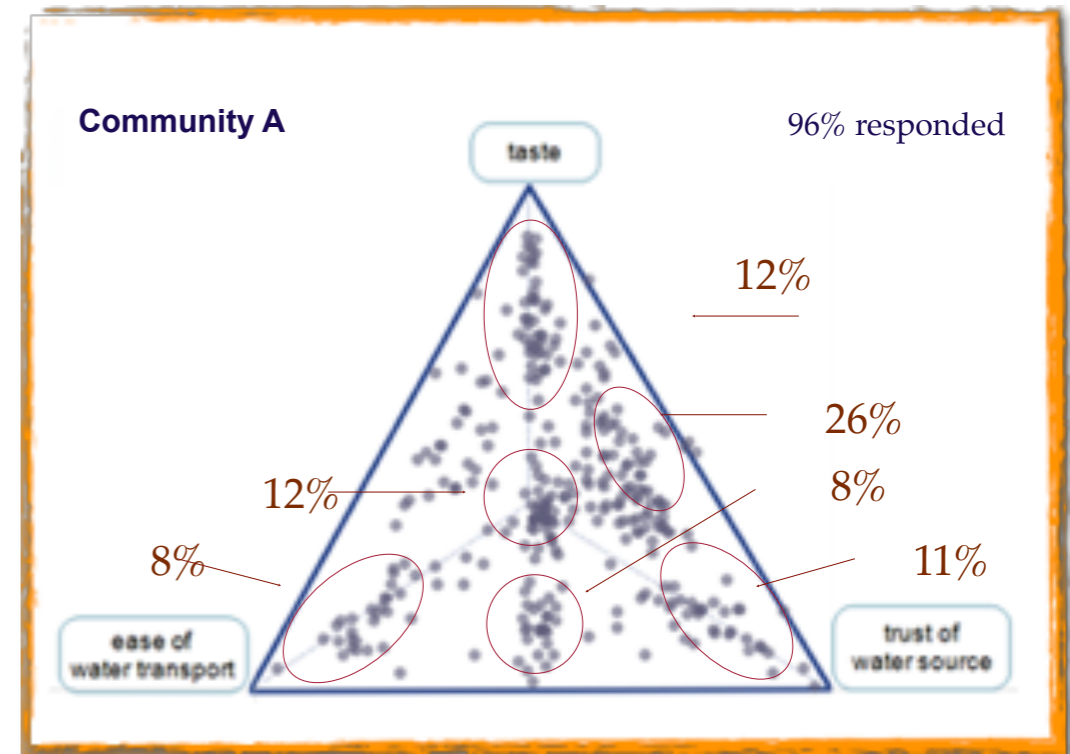
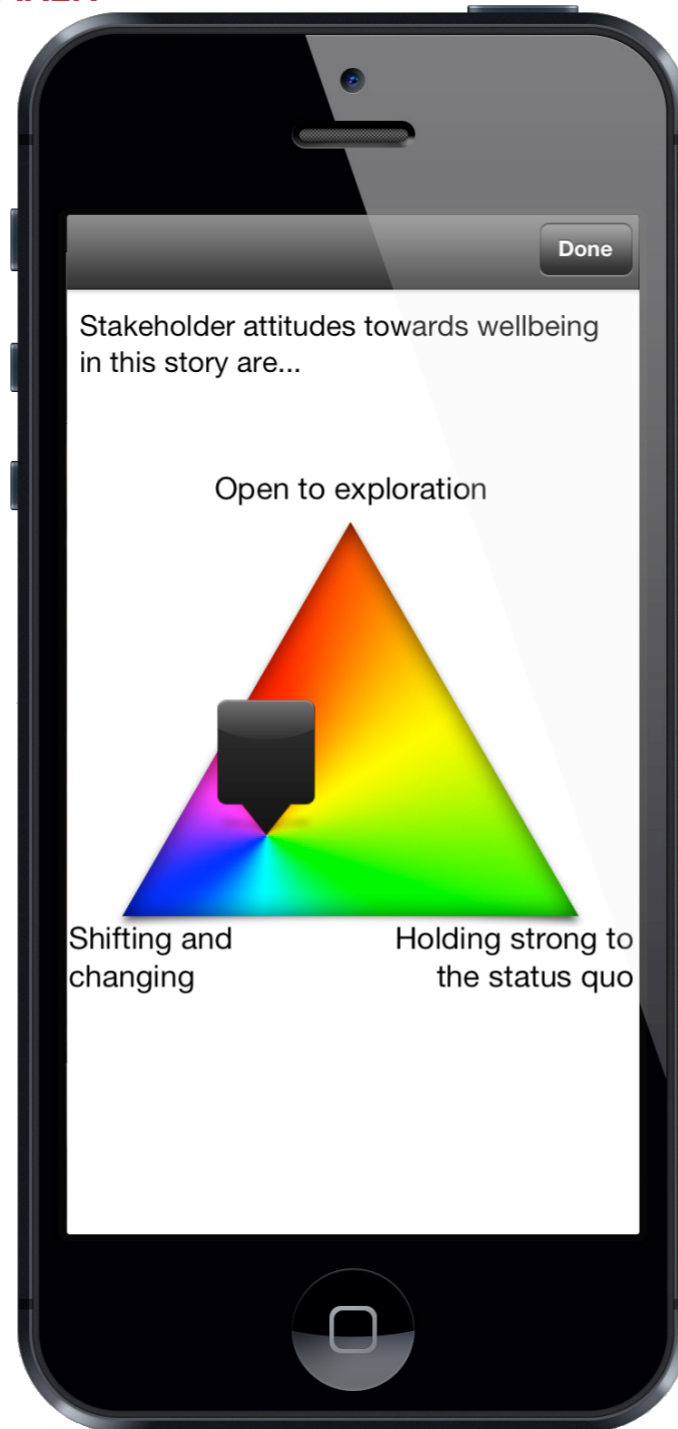
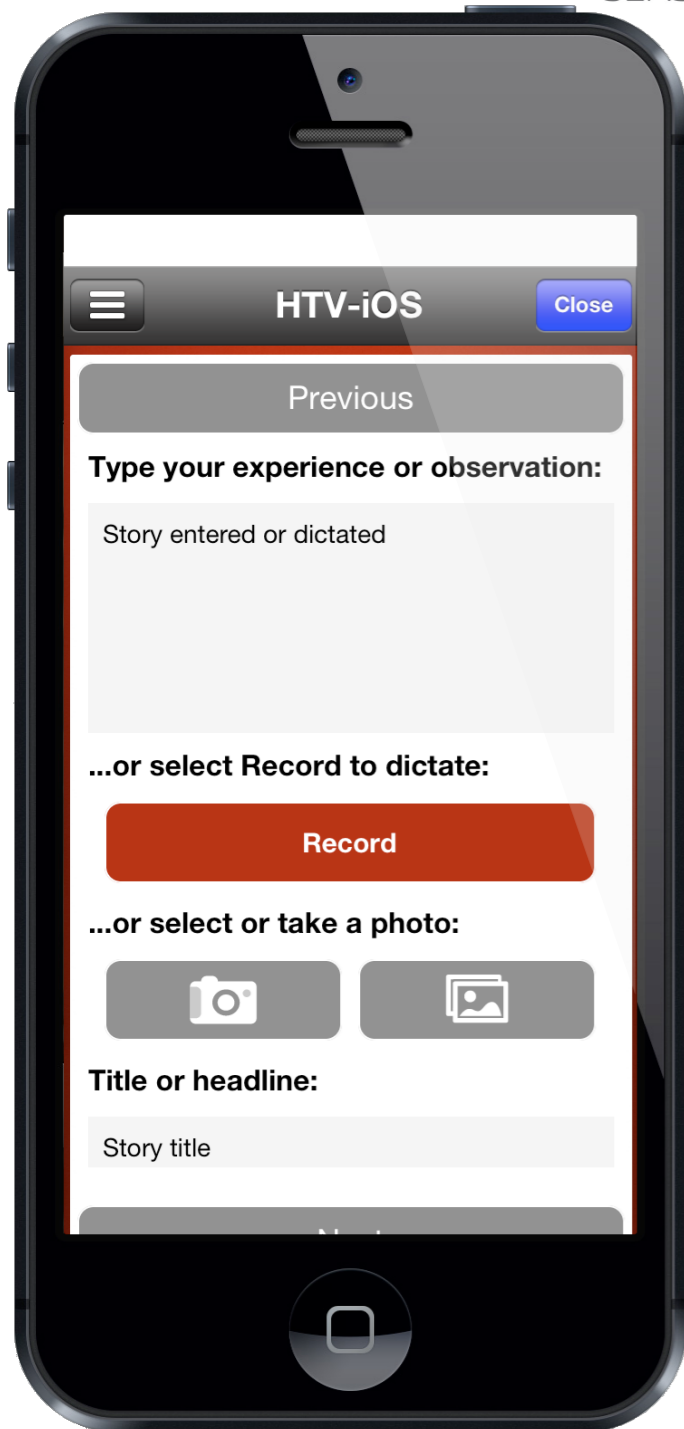
الفوز فرجة  
11 ممامة السلام  
الأنشطة الرياضيه  
الطائرة يخلق بين الأسطح  
NoTitle 472  
NoTitle 473  
كرة القدم في الشارع  
2 مساعدة محتاجين  
2 مساعدة المريض  
2 الفرحة  
البنات الغلبانه  
NoTitle 494  
الأطفال صنعوا التاريخ  
2 السوبر ماركت  
المساعدة والتعاون  
المجاعة والفقر  
اخلاق المصريين  
7 كرة القدم  
رسالة الى صديق  
18 اولاد الشوارع  
4 فلسطين  
22 اولاد الشوارع  
6 الكشافة  
الاعتذار واجب وحق  
2 ماتش مصر والمجزائر

الأطفال يردون الالعاب والمسابقات ولا كن الطفل لم يخلق في الالعاب بل  
خبق لا العلم والصلوات مثل قصة رمسيس الثاني كان في التاسعه من  
عمرة أبوه وضع علي رأسه التاج وقال له رمسيس الثاني لماذا وضع التاج  
علي رأسي قال له لم تعد صغير يا إني الأكبر يا ولد وبعد أن أتى من عمره  
عشرون سنه تولى حكم مصر وهزم الاعداء الذين كانوا يودون أن يستولي  
علي مصر لكن لم يقدر عليه ولقب رمسيس الثاني

nce, stop other  
people doing the same



POWERED BY  
SENSEMAKER



# Why have them use the triads, etc?

## More authentic voice

- Prevents misinterpretation
- Makes every voice equal

## Allows data-sharing with anonymity/confidentiality

- Sharing the meta-data without sharing the stories where necessary

## Can build dashboards for specific groups/users

- Data is often relevant to other departments

Lets us monitor and measure and perform statistics on essentially qualitative data

# Gathers qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously

Every dot on a triad gives us three relative values - one per corner

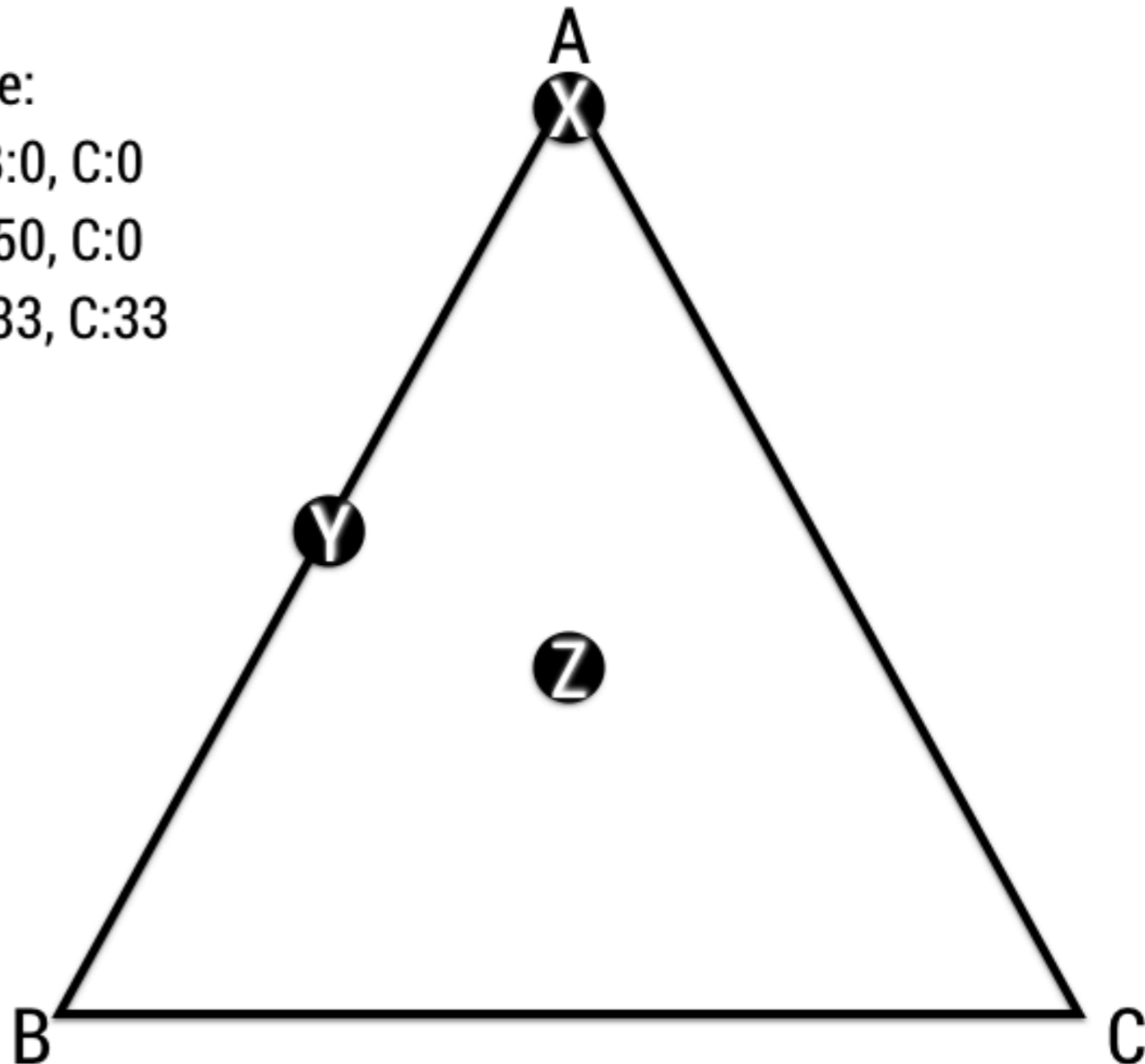
Then we can do stats and analysis...

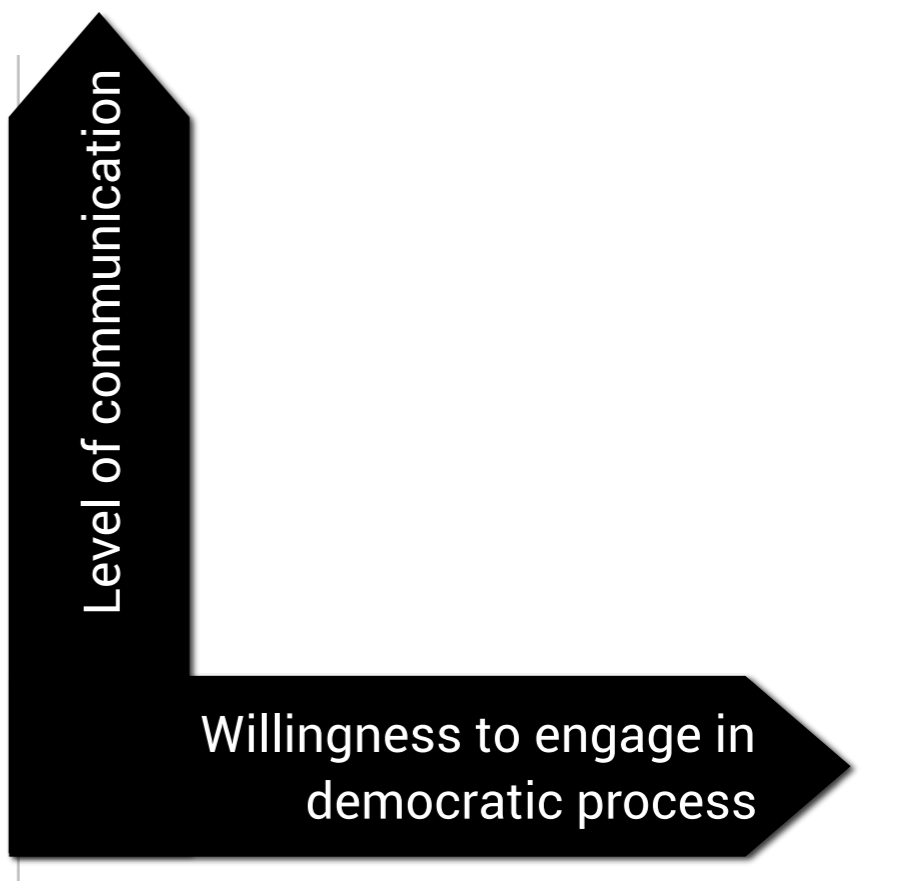
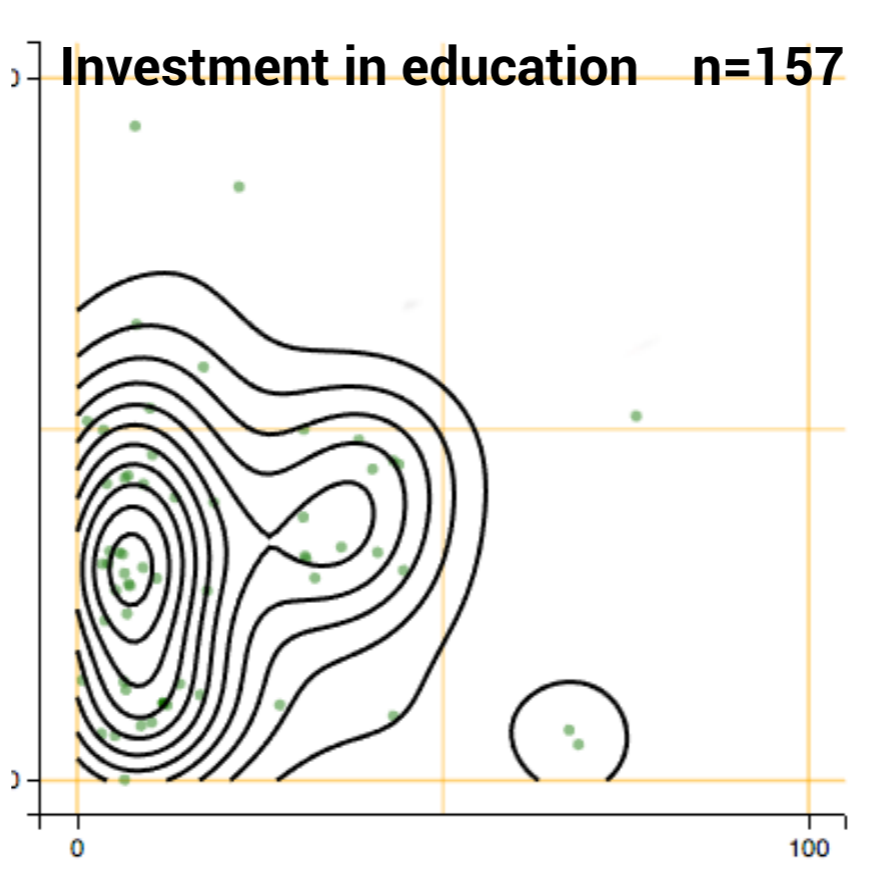
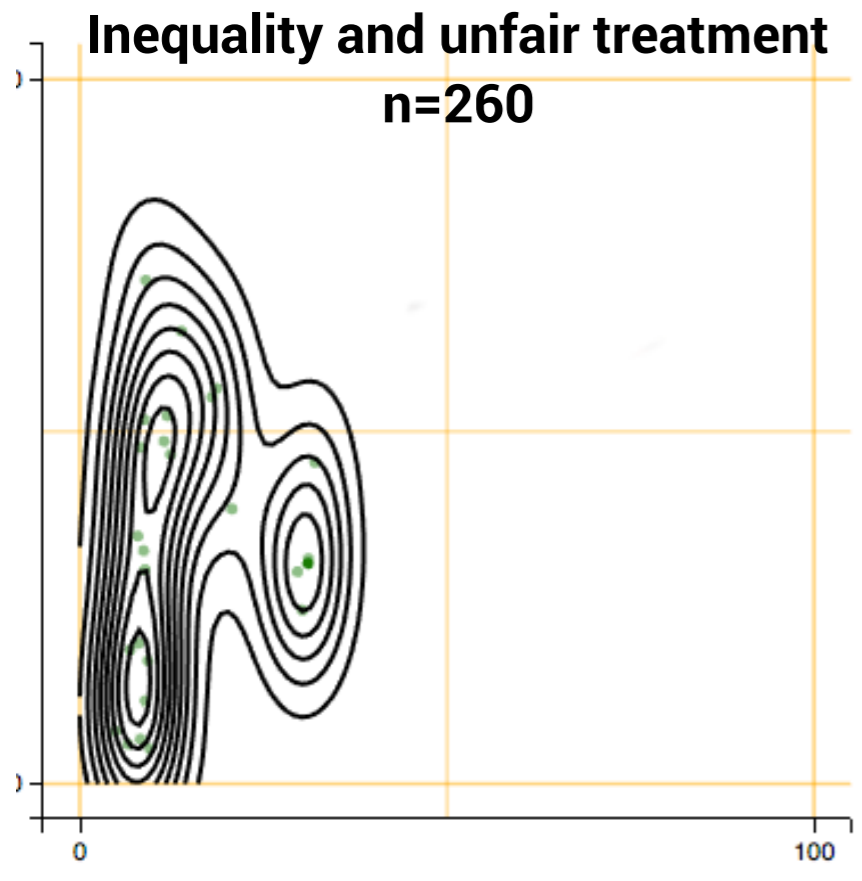
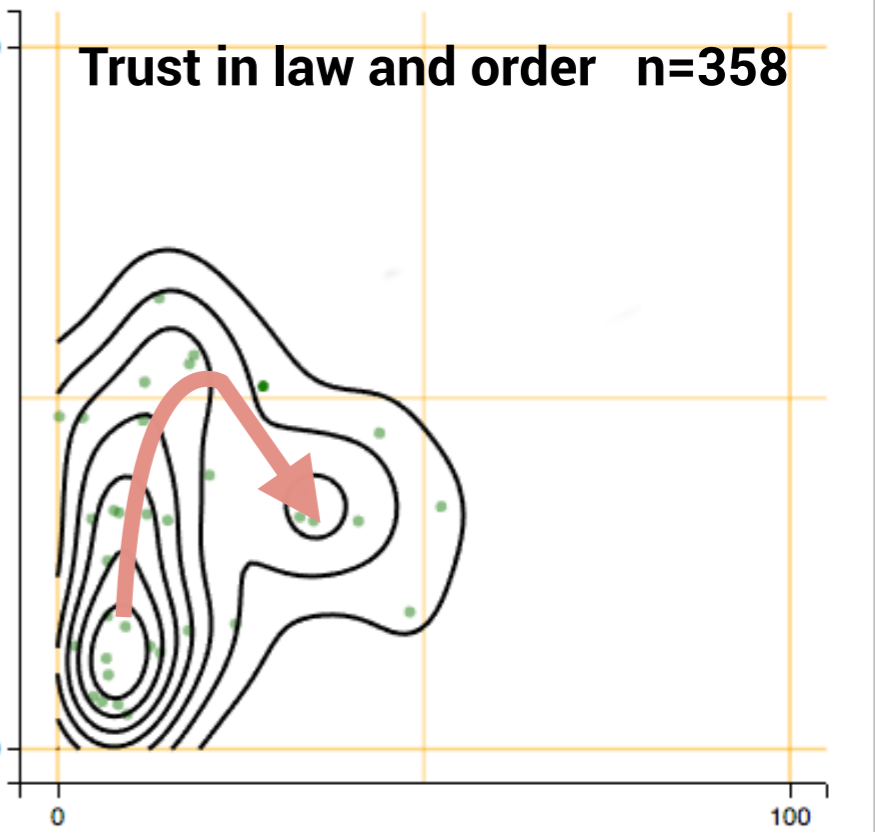
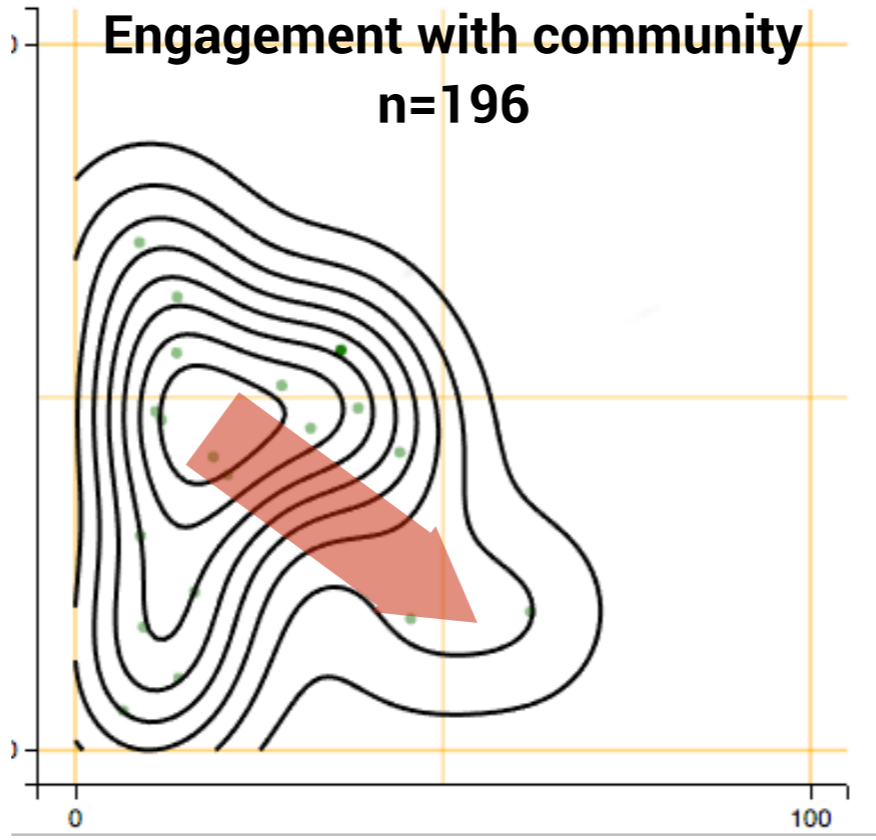
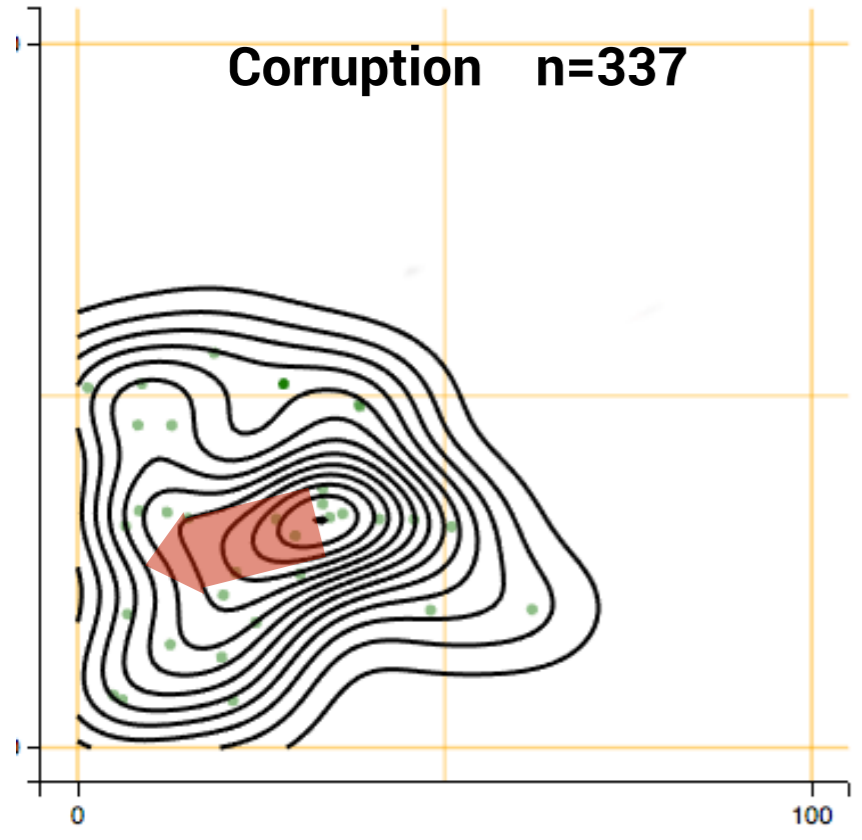
For example:

X= A:100, B:0, C:0

Y= A:50, B:50, C:0

Z= A:33, B:33, C:33





# What we do with it

## Research

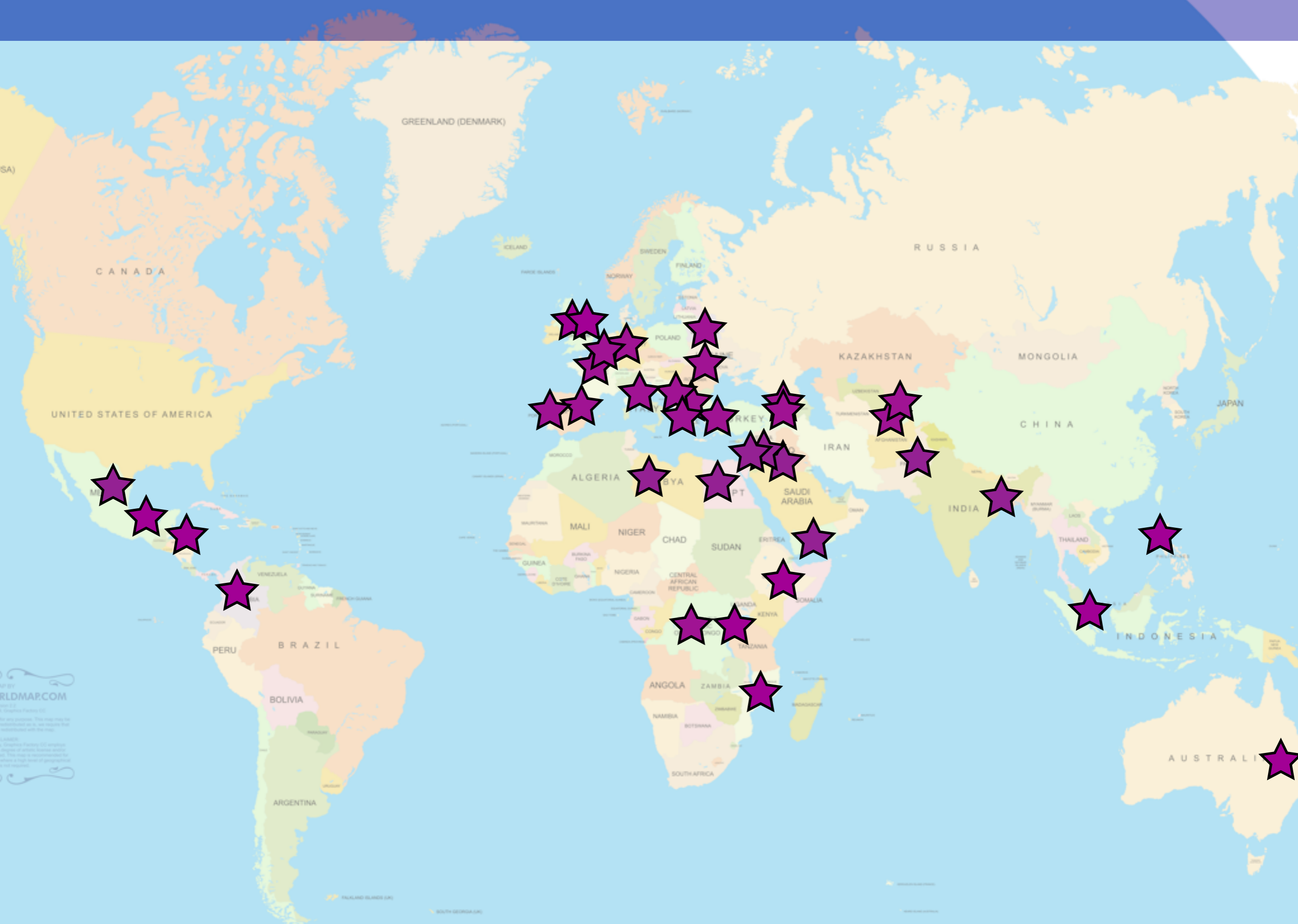
- Situational awareness
- Broadening voice
- Understanding possibilities

## Designing new projects

- Setting direction
- Developing innovative interventions
- Participative design

## Feedback mechanisms

- Monitoring & Evaluation
- Detecting problems
- Adapting programmes

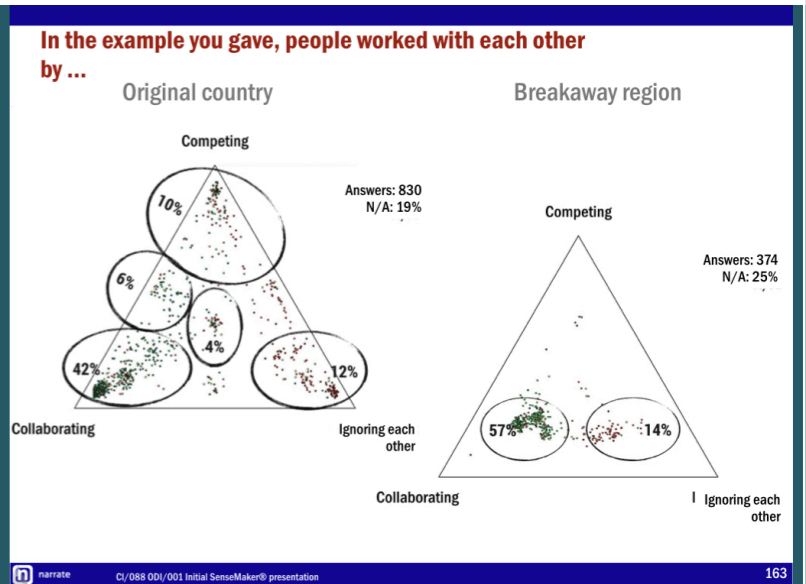


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Confidential country

Peace and reconciliation

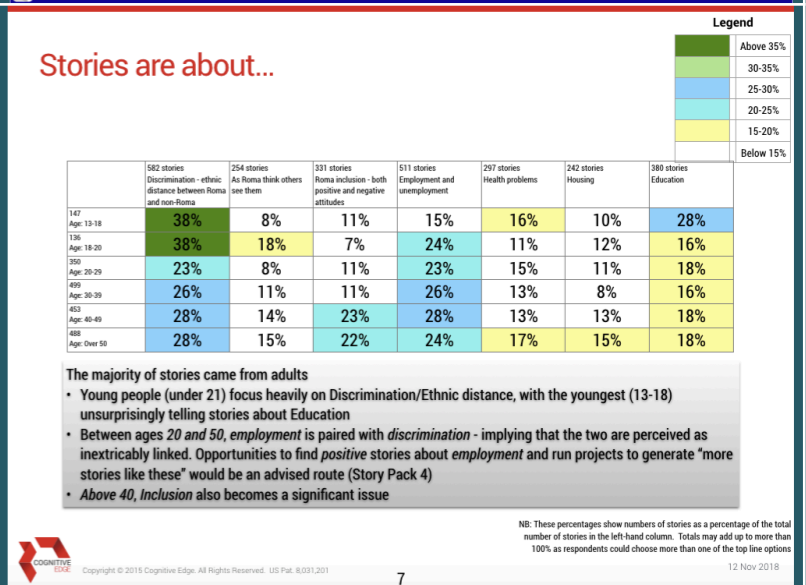
Showed key issues in isolated breakaway region were not international isolation, but poor local infrastructure, creating increased community



Balkans

Roma social deprivation and immigration cycle

Revealed different national perceptions of Roma groups, key areas of social need, along with likelihood of re-entering EU countries



Jordan

Sustainable Livelihoods programme as PVE

Showed multiple programme effects - importance of social capital, increased diversity and reduced susceptibility to radicalisation

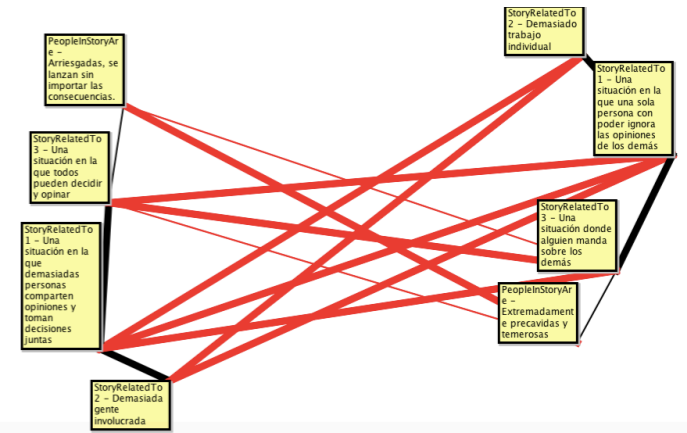




Colombia

Economic innovation

Identified key obstacles and attitudes to developing more SME economic activity

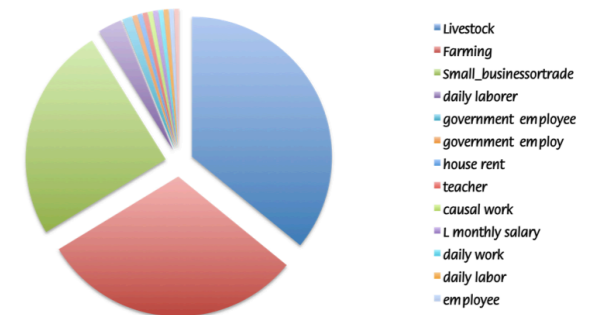


UK

Healthcare

Gave patients voices to shape transformation, share knowledge and improve training of healthcare professionals

Where do their livelihoods come from?



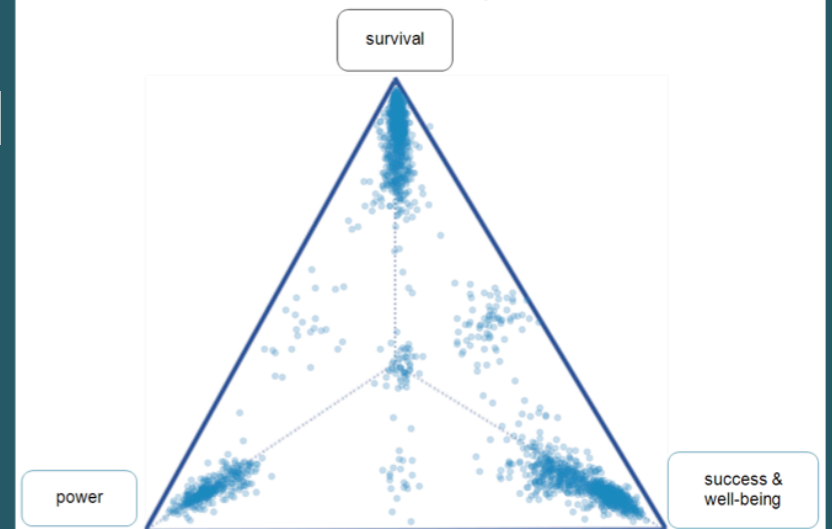
Saving and improving lives in the world's toughest places.

Honduras

Situational awareness for transition

Developed small-scale local actions to begin to stabilise communities and reduce conflict inclinations

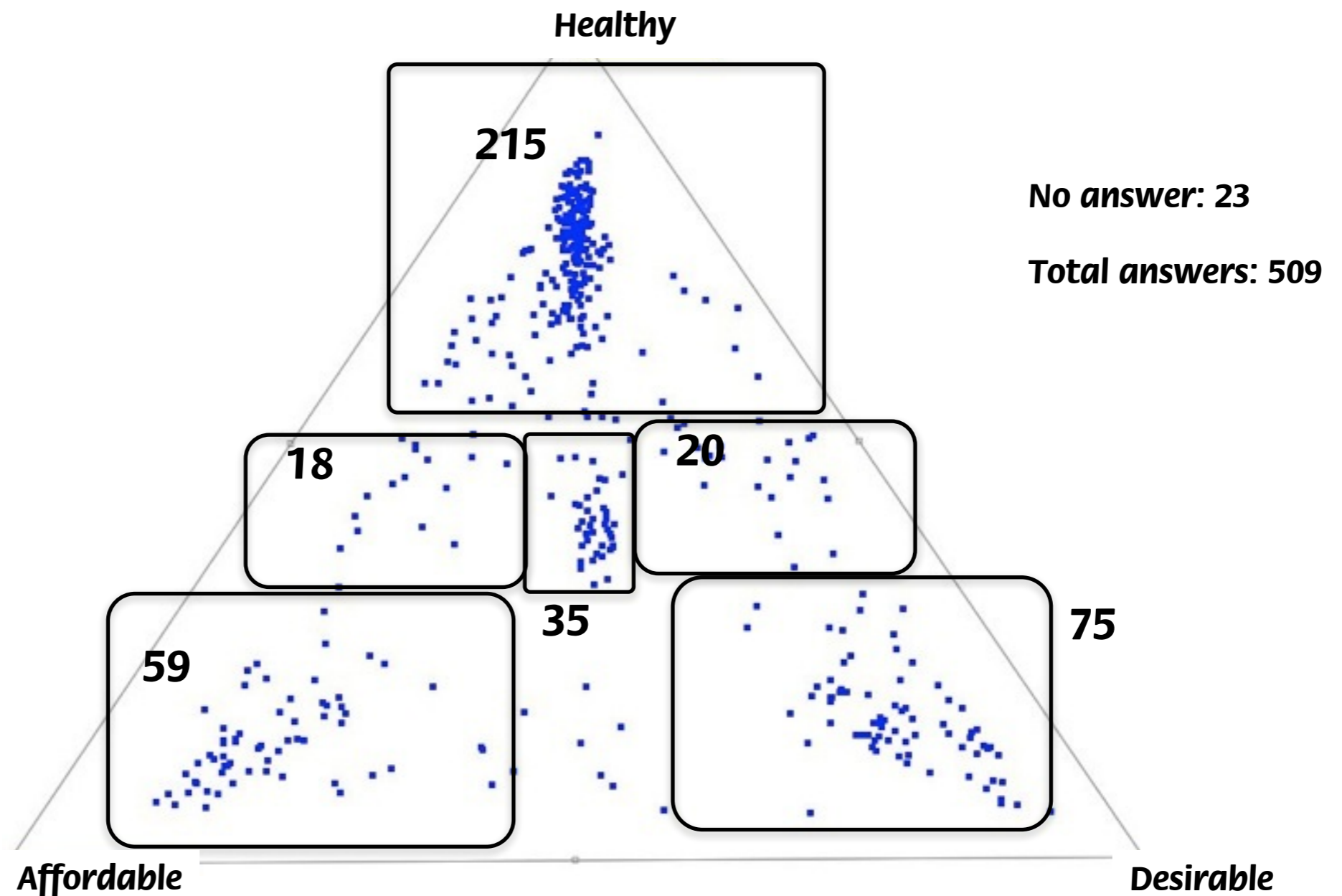
T11. Motivations in this story were about...



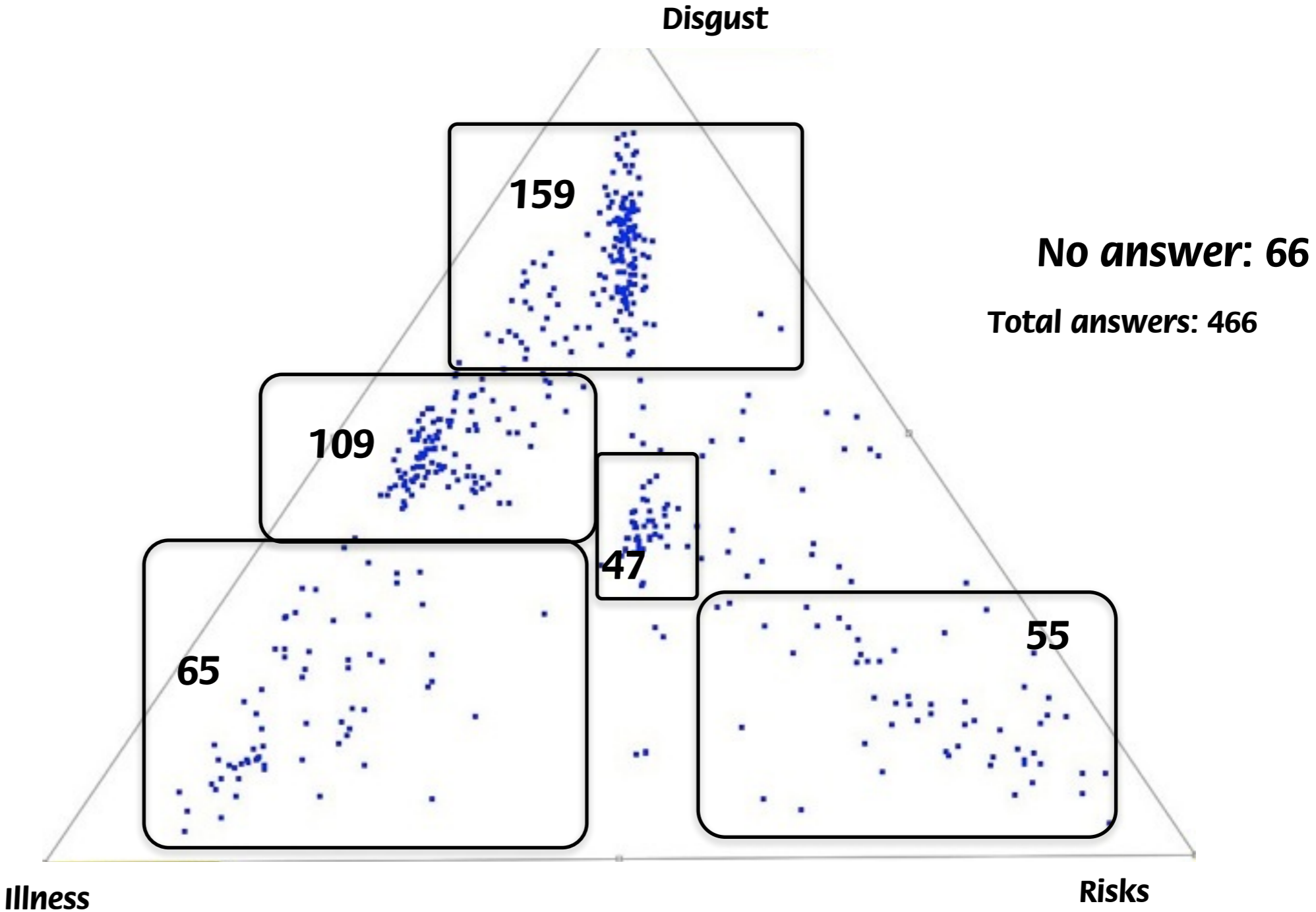
**BRAC**

# **Increasing use of latrines in Bangladesh**

# In the story, a hygienic latrine was seen as:



# In the story, what were people trying to reduce?



**In the story, what were people trying to reduce?**

**In the story, a hygienic latrine was seen as:**

Lots of families in Keutgao village did not have latrines. Many of the girls from the families living in this village were of appropriate age for marriage, and therefore were receiving proposals from nearby villages.

There was such a case where a man and his family from a nearby village came over to this village to meet a girl who was a prospective match for him.

After some conversation and dinner, one of the guests asked to use the latrine. The girl's father showed him the way to some bushes and informed him that they all use the bushes as a toilet.

The man's family then left the girl's house and informed her family that they would not be able to form a new relationship with a family that did not have a latrine.

Seeing how the lack of a latrine prevented their daughter from being able to get married, the family decided to install a proper, sanitary latrine in their home. Eventually, the family gained social acceptance and the girl got married. Not only did this family acquire a latrine of their own, but they inspired others to do the same as well.

Illness

Desirable

# **UNDP Jordan**

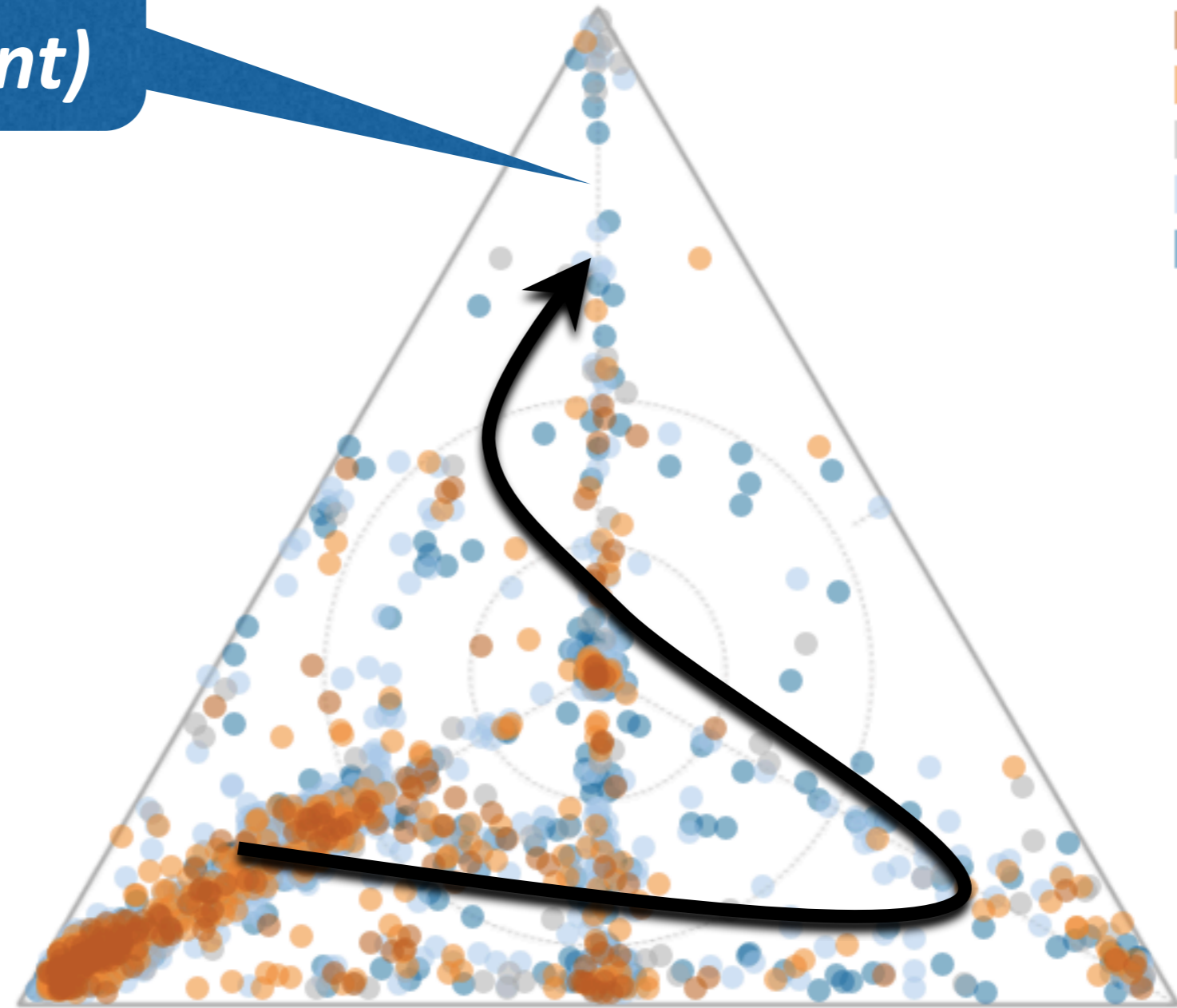
## **Monitoring effects (PVE and others) of Sustainable Livelihoods programme**

T4. In the example you gave, what mattered to people?

س4 في المثال الذي أعطيته، ما هو الأمر المهم بالنسبة للناس؟

*Desired shift  
(government)*

Prosperity  
الرفاهية



Legend

very bad

bad

neutral

good

very good

Surviving

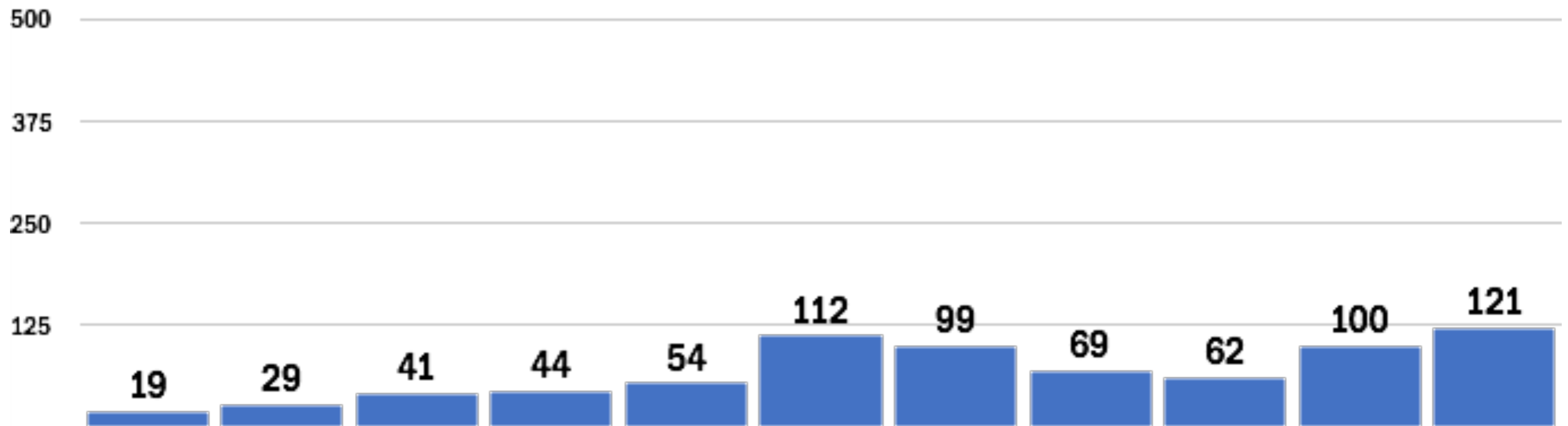
Status

حياة كريمة (تأمين الحاجات الأساسية)

مكانة اجتماعية

# More subtle effects and indicators

## Working with different people helps



These people believe less than they did that diversity is helpful

These people have not changed

These people now believe more than they did that diversity is helpful



# After this workshop...

Slides will be available

Webinar to learn more

One-to-one clinic sessions  
for confidential  
discussions

[www.narrate.co.uk/](http://www.narrate.co.uk/)  
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