



Sharing the lessons learned: Business & Human Rights, Conflict Sensitivity and Business & Peace

17 November 2016

Villa Barton, Geneva

Brief Background

Business and Human Rights

Over a ten year period the UN human rights mechanisms have been engaged in debating the scope of human rights responsibilities of businesses and exploring ways for corporate actors to be accountable for the impact of their activities on human rights. A key milestone was the endorsement in 2011 by the UN Human Rights Council of the [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights for implementing the UN “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework](#), which was intended as a global standard for preventing and addressing the risk of adverse impacts on human rights linked to business activity¹. Since then the human rights focus has developed two-fold with a focus on national level implementation while simultaneously exploring a potential binding treaty that covers transnational corporations and other businesses.

Environmental Access Rights

Another relevant rights-based approach has been the development of environmental democracy deriving from Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development of 1992. The Declaration proclaimed that environmental issues are best handled with the participation of citizens and that each individual should have appropriate access to information concerning the environment and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes and that public awareness and participation should be encouraged. Effective access to remedial measures and redress should also be provided. The relevance for the conduct of business and impact of investments, especially large scale, is clear and those communities working with this approach have also gained experience in engaging with governments and business to ensure these rights.

There are also important links between these rights and the prevention of destructive environmental conflict, including violence. Informed public participation facilitates greater consensus in the decision making process, mitigating the potential for conflict and increasing the likelihood of finding effective, long-lasting solutions. This reduces the likelihood of destructive conflict and costly dispute resolution or legal procedures further down the line.

¹ UNOHCHR UN “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework on human rights and business, which was elaborated by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, building on major research and extensive consultations with all relevant stakeholders, including States, civil society and the business community

Conflict Sensitivity and Business and Peace

Conflict sensitivity emerged out of the reflection process following the perceived failure of development and humanitarian agencies to anticipate the Rwanda genocide of 1994. The role of development actors in exacerbating conflict or the conditions for conflict led to guidelines and tools to “do no harm”² in development and humanitarian settings. The application of this approach to business investment came most notably in 2005 with International Alert’s work on producing guidance for the extractive industry with further contributions to this field in theory and practice from swisspeace and American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) among others. Concerns were centred on the impact of, particularly large scale, investment on contexts where high inequality, fragility and latent or actual conflict are present.

Going beyond conflict sensitivity is a business and peace approach that more generally seeks to foster mutual understanding, integrity and justice through dialogue between private sector investors, communities affected by investments and government bodies, leading to positive investments. Proponents of this approach such as AFSC see that good business practice can also be a driver for peace during turbulent times. The current trend is to look to the private sector to play a more conscious role in development and even peacebuilding, which reflected in the strategies of national development agencies and the UN Global Compact with their Business for Peace programme.

Programme 17 November

The aim of this exchange is to pool some of these insights and learn from the different approaches while increasing understanding of what each of them contributes. We also hope to be able to identify points of collaboration that could be initiated or strengthened between them. The event thus aims to bring together experts from the human rights, environmental rights and peacebuilding communities to share their experiences in engaging with businesses. Both the rights- based and peacebuilding approach have become increasingly established, with ambitions growing from respecting basic human rights and adhering to the “do-no-harm” principle to contributing to just and fair development and building peace with local participation. The aim of this workshop is to share key lessons from these different approaches and identify points of collaboration and mutual reinforcement. There are lessons that have been learned in the different approaches about how to engage the various stakeholders as well as the type of pitfalls and degree of resistance that these efforts call forth.

In each segment we will have short inputs from experienced representatives from the human rights, environmental rights and peacebuilding communities to provide impulses for our reflections. The insights and ideas that come out of the exchange will be shared after the meeting.

² Anderson, M 1999

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Thursday, 17 November 2016, Villa Barton, Room Abi Saab

9:15	Welcome remarks Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Geneva Peacebuilding Platform (GPP)
9:20	Setting the Scene: Introduction and framing Diane Hendrick
9.30	Lessons learned from different approaches to engaging with businesses <i>Moderated discussion</i> Moderator: Hannah Peters, FES Geneva
10:45 - 11:15	Coffee break
11:15 - 12:45	Common Challenges and ways forward <i>Moderated discussion</i> Moderator: Diane Hendrick, QUNO
12:45 - 14:00	Closing and Lunch