The power of data to address business and human rights

Side session at the UN forum on Business and Human rights, Geneva 3 December 2014

Organised by Oxfam, in collaboration with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the

Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers Association (ZELA)

Workshop with Oxfam Novib, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers Association (ZELA) to explore how the greater availability of sustainability related information can work to advance human rights, poverty reduction and justice.

The majority of the Global Fortune 500 companies report according to the GRI Guidelines, as do over 4 000 other companies large and small worldwide. Policy and regulation supporting sustainability reporting as well as sustainability reporting itself, is becoming more common in many countries in the world. Data on social, environmental and governance impacts is now readily available for stakeholders and shareholders on the companies of interest to them. Most important question is: is this data leveraged to advance change and how can people living in poverty benefit from this?

Part of the Theory of Change of sustainability reporting is that with reporting comes transparency about impacts, which can be used by the company itself and its shareholders to bring a degree of responsibility and accountability for these impacts – which is an essential building block for change. For this change to be realized, stakeholders should be engaged in the reporting process, and be able to access and use reported data to enter into a dialogue about corporate practices. By example, Oxfam uses data from these reports (among other sources) and translates the information into a format suitable for consumers through the [Behind the Brands](http://www.behindthebrands.org/en-us/about) campaign, which is driving a race to the top for the world’s food and beverage companies on poverty and human rights issues.

Main questions to be addressed in this interactive session are:

* How can data be used by individual stakeholders to advance meaningful engagement processes, and re-balance business-society relations?
* How can data be used in aggregate to inform and educate consumers, investors, journalists, and society at large about business contributions and risks?
* Despite years of reporting, such information remains beyond the reach of many stakeholders, especially those living in poverty. How can this be addressed?

The above will be explored in the workshop, stimulated by experiences shared by Oxfam, Zela and GRI. The audience will be challenged to share their experiences and insights. Results will contribute to a forthcoming publication on the use of sustainability data to affect change.

The workshop will be facilitated by

* Gerard Steehouwer – Head of the Bureau Business for Development Oxfam Novib
* Mutuso Dhilwayo – Director Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers Association
* Alyson Slater – Director, Regional Network and Sustainable Development, Global Reporting Initiative