Human Rights Reporting and Assurance Frameworks Initiative (RAFI)

Third Round of Expert Multistakeholder Consultations
Yangon, Myanmar, November 3, 2014
Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business

CONSULTATION REPORT

On November 3, 2014, the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB), in partnership with Shift, organized a workshop in Yangon, "How Businesses Can Report on Their Respect for Human Rights." The objectives of the workshop were:

- Discuss research conducted by the MCRB relating to the transparency of Myanmar companies regarding their responsible business practices,[1]
- Solicit participant views on the approach adopted in the UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework (Reporting Framework), which provides guidance to companies on what good human rights reporting looks like.[2]

Approximately 40 participants primarily from national and international companies operating in Myanmar attended the workshop. This report summarizes the key themes discussed at the consultation.

I. Workshop overview

Vicky Bowman and Hnin Wut Yee from the MCRB first provided an overview of the research project, "Transparency in Myanmar Enterprises (TiME)/Pwint Thit Sar." They also discussed next steps and encouraged more companies to report on their responsible business practices.

Anna Triponel from Shift then provided an overview of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (Guiding Principles) and the process followed to develop the draft UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework.

Bobbie Sta. Maria from the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre next discussed the types of information welcomed by civil society organizations, including openness about challenges companies face.

Finally, Belinda Ford from the Coca-Cola Company discussed the type of due diligence processes and issues they chose to report on in their public reports to the US government. She also emphasized the company's conscious decision to be as thorough as possible in their human rights reporting.

II. Key themes on human rights reporting

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[1] Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business, Transparency in Myanmar Enterprises (TiME)/Pwint Thit Sar report (July 2014), available at http://www.myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org/news/pwint-thit-sa/first-pwint-thit-sa-transparency-in-myanmar-enterprises-report-launches.html
[2] The draft UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework and further information on the process that led to its development is available here: http://business-humanrights.org/en/business-and-human-rights-reporting-and-assurance-frameworks-initiative-rafi

The conversations highlighted four key themes relating to human rights reporting.

1. Participants remarked that **companies, as well as consultancies and academia, are increasingly aware of the importance of transparency in human rights**. Company participants remarked that reporting can help them demonstrate what they are doing, improve their reputation and gather more business opportunities. As companies seek to conduct business with larger companies, reporting can help them demonstrate why they are good business partners. Furthermore, as Myanmar seeks to launch the Yangon Stock Exchange in the next few years, public reporting can help companies meet the requirements for listing. Reporting can also help companies demonstrate why they implemented specific corporate social responsibility programs and how these programs effectively help them manage their human rights risks.

2. **Credible stakeholder engagement forms the foundation of any good human rights report**. Participants emphasized a number of reasons for this:
   - Trust should be built through stakeholder engagement between the company and the people who could be impacted by the business. If this engagement does not take place, the report may be negatively perceived, regardless of the information it contains. Reporting can be one step in the process of building trust, but should not be seen as a replacement to direct engagement with people;
   - Engaging with people can help the company improve its data collection processes. Participants remarked on the difficulty of obtaining accurate information, for instance because site managers may not wish to report all incidents. Checking the accuracy of information with stakeholders can help improve the quality of the data collected that feeds into public reporting;
   - Stakeholder engagement can help the company ensure that the information it discloses is clear and accessible to all types of audiences.

3. **The UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework should assist companies to understand how human rights could be impacted in their operations**. Participants remarked that some companies have a good understanding of their human rights issues, and some do not. It can be challenging for companies to see which human rights topics are relevant beyond labor rights and land tenure issues. It will be helpful for the UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework to provide further guidance on this point.

4. **Companies operating in Myanmar recognize that many of their risks lie in their supply chain and are increasingly engaging in dialogue with their business partners**. Participants noted the importance for companies of finding ways to have better conversations with their business partners on these issues. Although the level of awareness of what human rights mean for business remains low, there is a great receptiveness and eagerness to understand more about human rights. This could include providing information and education to business partners, including a shift in focus from audit to dialogue. The approaches adopted by companies could be elaborated upon in public reporting so that other companies can learn from them.