Session I: Taking a Principles-based Approach to the Global Goals

1 Overview

Date: Monday, 12 March 2018
Time: 9:30 a.m. EDT/1:30 p.m. GMT/2:30 p.m. CET/9:30 p.m. CST
Link to join the webinar: https://zoom.us/j/942971925
Speakers:
- John G. Ruggie, Berthold Beitz Professor in Human Rights and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School
- Lise Kingo, CEO and Executive Director, UN Global Compact
- Moderator: Eric Roston, Sustainability Editor, Bloomberg

2 Introduction to the Session

During this inaugural session of the UN Global Compact Academy you will learn about why and how to take a principles-based approach to the Global Goals — an approach that puts respect for human rights at the centre of business action.

The Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights provide a crucial framework to help the private sector generate value while reinforcing essential human values.

By the time you complete this first session, you will have gained practical and insightful guidance on the role your company can play in achieving the Global Goals, and how a principles-based approach is the best way to make it happen.

How to engage during the session:
The session has been designed based on questions submitted by participants in advance, but you will also have the opportunity to contribute with questions in real time. Use the Q&A function of the webinar to submit during the discussion and it may be answered as a part of the live session.
3 Pre-read Perspective by Lise Kingo

How to Put Human Rights at the Heart of Your Business: Four Key Steps

Leading CEOs and investors have realized that sustainable business depends on a sustainable world. The impacts of human and business activities on climate change have been key to that realization. However, business leaders are also waking up to the role they must play in sustaining fair and stable societies.

While the link between business and social instability is less obvious than a carbon emissions count, the crises in our headlines inevitably share an economic thread. As 4 million people in Cape Town head toward Day Zero, the rich and the poor will experience that event very differently due to the private solutions available for those who can pay. The Advisory Committee led by Kofi Annan noted the role of economic inequality in fueling Myanmar’s Rohingya crisis. Even in a conflict as complex as Syria’s, economic problems (stemming in part from prolonged drought) contributed to the upheaval that has horrified the world.

We are witnessing that economic inequality is not just a problem on its own, but one being magnified politically as nationalism and protectionism rise in lock-step with distrust in business, Government and the media. The problem is not just urgent, but global. Oxfam reports that in 2017, the richest one percent earned more than eighty percent of all the wealth that year.

There is ample evidence that business and investors are looking to meaningfully take action on the sustainable development challenge. In that respect, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals have been described as a “gift” to the business world, as they provide a coherent global framework for creating the world we want. Business enthusiasm for the Goals is high — the UN Global Compact recently reported that seventy-five percent of surveyed companies are taking action on the Global Goals.

As leading companies and investors recognize there is no sharp line between the moral imperative and the business one, businesses are looking for the fastest, clearest path forward. But the biggest opportunities are waiting outside of the quick wins, and the path of least resistance may prevent us from creating the more just and equitable world we all want.

The core feature of the Global Goals is their interconnectedness. This means that companies wanting to act ambitiously must resist the urge to simply “pick a Goal.” Unlocking the interconnections has two main impacts: ensuring that action on one Goal doesn’t undermine progress on another; and encouraging deeply innovative thinking about how impacts can be magnified and multiplied.

And the key to unlocking those interconnections is human rights. The Global Goals are a human rights-based agenda. Numerous goals — from Decent Work to Gender Equality and Clean Water and Sanitation — are directly related to human rights. And human rights are also crucial to achieving all of the Global Goals.

Many companies still approach human rights through the compliance lens. It is crucial that proper human rights due diligence is performed on all SDG action to ensure that business does not undermine its intended contributions. For example, a company may invest in new climate infrastructure, such as wind farms, to advance Goal 13 on Climate Action. Yet if local indigenous
communities are disadvantaged or displaced as a result, then the loss of livelihood or access to clean water mean progress is walked back on Goals 8 and 6, respectively.

But building universal human rights principles into core business strategies is about more than just ensuring harm is not done. It is a pathway to innovation, to bridging digital divides, to shining a light on the neglected spaces. The businesses that rise to meet this responsibility also open up new opportunities. They become the future-fit companies that young people want to work for, that investors increasingly see long-term value in, and that other businesses and Governments will want to partner with.

By doing business through a human rights lens, business leaders are inviting the lateral thinking needed to make genuine progress towards all 17 Global Goals. The Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact and the UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights provide such a framework, and help businesses consider the full spectrum of impacts, both positive and negative. With this in mind, there are four key ways businesses can centre human rights in their business activities as part of a principles-based approach:

1. **Break down the silos between your core business strategy and your sustainability strategy.** When principles are an integral part of how you do business at every level, your sustainability efforts become more than just a box to tick. Your corporate sustainability report should not be something you file at the back of a drawer. Instead, create policies and enact practices that are felt by your employees, customers, partners and stakeholders — every step of the way.

2. **Assess your company’s human rights impacts, and put that at the centre of your strategy to advance the Global Goals.** By letting the perspectives of communities and workers illuminate blind spots, businesses can see the bigger picture, identifying unintended harms and exposing missed opportunities.

3. **Use the Ten Principles as a ‘design checklist’ for Global Goals strategizing.** These principles are neither a destination nor something to look at once, but rather a critical framework to keep coming back to. Consider each principle at all stages of a project or product lifecycle, from design and delivery to reflection.

4. **Advocate for a global principles-based movement.** Communicate about the Ten Principles and the Global Goals — not just with impacted stakeholders, but with your entire value chain and the general public. Use your influence to create a community of principles in which good business practices build more good business practices. This is how we rebuild communities of trust: not one or a dozen isolated examples of good practice, but a movement.

Transformative change is needed across the Global Goals. Business can help make a transformative difference in society by driving the expectation of respect and dignity for all people into strategies, operations and value chains. It takes leadership, innovation and collaboration to tackle these issues. It will not happen without the full and committed engagement of business. Success requires the lateral thinking, novel forms of partnerships and hybrid organizations that the private sector can bring. And a principles-based approach is essential for the rebuilding of trust between societies and businesses — the essential ingredient for both to flourish sustainably.
4 Discussion Questions

As you prepare for the session, we encourage you to think through the following questions:

- What does a principles-based approach to the Global Goals mean to you and your company?
- What happens when you view the Global Goals through a human rights lens? How do you assess your company’s human rights impacts?
- How are you prioritizing your Global Goals activities?
- How are you incorporating the Ten Principles into your Global Goals strategy?
- If all businesses in the world could start or stop one practice today to create significant impact for the 2030 Development Agenda, what would you suggest?

5 About the UN Global Compact Academy

The UN Global Compact Academy is designed to give Participants the knowledge and skills they need to meet their sustainability objectives. Delivered through a series of learning sessions taught by world-class experts, the Academy will coach Participants to develop their understanding of critical topics and build actionable skills. Anchored in our principles-based approach, the Academy is both accessible and solution-oriented, enabling Participants to accelerate positive impacts both now and far into the future. Regardless of your corporate function or where you are on your sustainability journey, the UN Global Compact Academy offers business-friendly solutions and the opportunity to join a highly-engaged learning community. unglobalcompact.org/academy

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Questions?
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