



## Ranking business and human rights: The potential of benchmarking corporate respect for human rights

Monday 1 December 2014

16:30 - 18:00

Room XXIII, Palais des Nations

*"The assessment of businesses performance is a matter of utmost importance"*

United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights (A/HRC/26/25)

Sustainability benchmarks can significantly influence corporate behavior. Yet, measuring the extent to which companies meet their responsibility to respect human rights is incredibly difficult. How can we validly and legitimately rank corporate policies, processes and impacts on human rights? What are the most daunting challenges? What are the best practices?

These are only some of the questions which will be addressed in this event organized by the Measuring Business & Human Rights project (MB&HR). The objective of the event is three-fold:

1. Uncover opportunities and difficulties relating to the creation of valid and legitimate business and human rights rankings.
2. Distil the most important lessons from two successful corporate benchmarks on human rights-related issues (Access to Medicine Index and Behind the Brands Scorecard).
3. Explore the mission and methodology of two innovative projects (Ranking Digital Rights and Human Rights Performance Benchmark).

### Potential benefits

Business and human rights rankings offer considerable opportunities. For instance:

- They produce easily accessible information on corporate policies, processes and impacts. This empowers investors, consumers and State agencies (such as public procurement offices and export credit agencies) to be responsible market participants and thus trigger a "race to the top" where companies are driven by ethical competitive pressures.
- They clarify what the corporate responsibility to respect human rights means in practice. Companies often do not know how to operationalize the UN Guiding Principles in their industries or geographies. The creation of indicators translate generic guidance into specific requirements which can be objectively measured.
- They facilitate swifter diffusion of responsible practices. Collaborative initiatives dedicated to implementing the second pillar of the UN Guiding Principles (such as the Global Business Initiative and the Global Corporate Community of Practice) have already showed the importance of learning through dissemination of best practices.



## Major challenges

Notwithstanding potential benefits, ranking business and human rights is not easy. For instance:

- Indicators simplify and standardize information which is inevitably partial. This might paint a misleading picture of corporate actions.
- The quantification of human rights might assign unwarranted prominence to issues that are easily measurable but not necessarily more important.
- The creation and use of indicators may disempower victims of human rights abuses and legitimate policy-making centers (such as the Human Rights Council or national Parliaments).

## Confirmed speakers (both presenters and discussants)

- Wim Leereveld, Founder and CEO, Access to Medicine Index;
- Erinch Sahan, Lead Adviser, Oxfam's Behind the Brands Scorecard;
- Rebecca MacKinnon, Director, Ranking Digital Rights project;
- Steve Waygood, Steering Group member, Human Rights Performance Benchmark;
- Ann Sofie Cloots, Co-Director, MB&HR;
- Gerbrand Haverkamp, Policy Officer on CSR, Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs;
- Rachel Cowburn-Walden, Global Senior Manager for Social Impact, Unilever;
- Peter Webster, CEO, EIRIS.

The event is chaired by Damiano de Felice. Presentation of the initiatives is followed by discussants who comment on major challenges and best practices. At least 30 minutes are dedicated to Q&A.

## About the initiatives

- [Measuring Business & Human Rights](#) is a research project that aims to advance the capacity of business managers and corporate stakeholders to assess the extent to which companies meet their responsibility to respect human rights.
- [The Access to Medicine Index](#) ranks the world's 20 largest pharmaceutical companies according to their efforts to make their products more available, affordable and accessible in developing countries.
- [Oxfam's Behind the Brands Scorecard](#) assesses the agricultural sourcing policies of the world's ten largest food and beverage companies on issues from water to land, from women to small-scale farmers.
- [Ranking Digital Rights](#) will evaluate and rank the world's major information and communications technology companies on the basis of their policies and practices related to freedom of expression and privacy.
- Aviva Investors, the IHRB, the BHRR, VBDO and Calvert Investments have partnered up to create the [Human Rights Performance Benchmark](#), a publicly-available benchmark on what companies are doing to implement their responsibility to respect human rights.