



Children's Rights & Business Principles Initiative

On 24 June 2010, UNICEF, the UN Global Compact and Save the Children launched a process to develop a set of Principles offering concrete guidance on what business can do to respect and support children's rights. Currently, no such comprehensive set of Principles exist to guide business on the full range of actions they can take.

The Principles will present business, civil society, trade unions, government, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), academia, children, adolescents and other stakeholders with an unprecedented opportunity to join forces in an effort to enable the private sector to become a more positive force for children. Whether in the workplace, marketplace or community, the Children's Rights & Business Principles will maximize the positive impacts and minimize the negative ramifications that their activities may have on children.

The Initiative's objectives are to provide practical guidance for business to embed children's rights into business strategy & operations; inform government engagement with business, offer a unifying framework for existing and future initiatives, promote business-multi-stakeholder collaboration, and raise awareness of the positive and negative impact of business on children.

Recognizing the important contribution that business can make in shaping these Principles and ensuring their relevance to business operations, the partners have launched an extensive multi-stakeholder consultation process which will invite business across sectors and geographies to be fully engaged from the outset.

The Children's Rights & Business Principles will be released around the anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which takes place on 20 November 2011 - culminating an extensive multi-market research, consultation, drafting and refinement process.

Rationale

The Children's Rights & Business Principles Initiative is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the UN Global Compact Principles and the UN Protect, Respect & Remedy Framework.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) has been nearly universally ratified and identifies the basic human rights that children everywhere have: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The four core Principles of the Convention are non-discrimination; ensuring the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development, and respect for the views of the child.

Every sector has a role to play and something to gain in taking action to respect and support children's rights. The private sector, for example, has enormous potential to impact children's lives, both positively and negatively through their operations, products, marketing practices and other activities. For business, respecting and supporting children's rights brings with it a unique opportunity to nurture important current and future stakeholders. In addition to being affected by business operations or forming part of a customer base, children have the potential of being future employees, employers, suppliers, community members and leaders.

Supporting the Principles will provide companies with an opportunity to enhance their brand image, increase employee satisfaction and retention as well as increase profits and sustainability through improved risk management. Further, the Principles will assist companies in aligning operations and strategies with investor expectations, corporate citizenship initiatives and business and human rights mandates.

While the business and human rights agenda has evolved significantly in recent years, a child rights perspective has rarely been applied to discussions regarding the human rights responsibilities of business nor the duties of

government to regulate business practices with regard to human rights. While good progress has been made by existing initiatives designed to address specific issues concerning children and the private sector¹, currently, no comprehensive Principles exist to guide business on the full range of actions companies can take to respect and support children's rights.

The Principles will be designed to serve as a unifying framework and reference point for existing and future initiatives concerning business and children. For example, they will help elaborate Principles 1 and 2 of the UN Global Compact which ask business to respect and support human rights and not be complicit in human rights abuse. Additionally, they will support Principles 4 and 5 which call for the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour and the effective abolition of child labour. The second objective of the UN Global Compact also calls on business to take action in support of broader UN goals, including development goals, many of which concern children. While the Children's Rights & Business Principles will assist UN Global Compact signatories, they will also be relevant to non-participating companies.

Project Governance, Management & Process

A Steering Committee with representation from each of the partnering organizations is leading the conception development and launch of the Principles and a Project Coordinator is managing the project on their behalf.

The development of the Principles is being informed by Advisory Groups, desk research, interviews and surveys. The key components of the research strategy are: a literature review, business case studies & lessons-learned, thematic overview of ways in which business impacts (positive and negative) on children's rights, review of how children's rights are addressed in selected companies' human rights policies and practices, mapping the role of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in children's rights and business, identifying countries that have played a leadership role on business and children; and, a review of governments' role in engaging with business on children's rights.

Advisory Groups contributing to the Initiative include Internal Reference Groups from UNICEF and Save the Children and an external Expert Reference Group (ERG). Global Compact local networks will also be engaged throughout the process. The ERG contributes independent, objective feedback on the development of the Principles and provides thought leadership throughout the process. The group is comprised of individuals from the North and the South with extensive experience in human rights, child rights, corporate responsibility, international business, international development, finance, policy and/or related issues. Regularly-scheduled ERG meetings capture the perspectives of the private sector, the United Nations, other international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGO), academia, and the investment community.

Multi-stakeholder consultations are a critically important Initiative component. These aim to engage multi-stakeholder audiences across all regions in the development of the Principles - seeking substantive inputs to the themes on which the Principles are based, building support, encouraging ownership, and fostering long-term commitment to upholding the Principles. Key plan components include: a public online consultation process hosted via the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre website <http://www.business-humanrights.org/>, in-person consultations in selected countries and regions²; a global consultation with governments; and on-going engagement with the UN Global Compact participants, stakeholders and local networks.

A Child Participation Strategy has been developed by Save the Children and Plan to ensure that children are respected as equal stakeholders and that minimum standards for children's ethical participation are met. The Strategy supports children's participation in the development and implementation of the Principles, builds the capacity of children and adolescents to engage with business and understand business responsibility to respect and support children's rights. Ultimately, the Child Participation Strategy develops a long-term sustainable plan that builds accountability and knowledge in the area of business responsibility to children's rights.

Participation

The Steering Committee warmly invites the public to contribute research, case studies/lessons-learned, participate in online consultations and assist in co-organizing consultations at the country-level. For further information on how to become involved, please contact Ms. Elisabeth Abeson, Coordinator, Children's Rights & Business Principles Initiative at eabeson@unicef.org or childrensprinciples@unglobalcompact.org

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¹ Such as child labour or the sexual exploitation of children

² BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China), Middle East, Africa (Kenya), Europe (UK) and North America