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Ministry of Foreign Affairs

FORUM REPORT



ASIA INCLUSIVE & RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS FORUM 2025

Driving IRB Actions for Asia

TUESDAY, 11 FEBRUARY—WEDNESDAY, 12 FEBRUARY 2025
EASTIN GRAND SATHORN HOTEL,
BANGKOK, THAILAND



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The second Asia Inclusive and Responsible Business (AIRB) Forum, held at the Eastin Grand Sathorn Hotel, Bangkok, on 11–12 February 2025, brought together 160 private sector leaders, civil society organizations, and policymakers from 20 countries across Asia and beyond. Building on the success of the 2023 AIRB forum, this year’s event focused on accelerating the transition to business models that are socially equitable, environmentally sustainable, and economically robust. Distinguished speakers—from UN Business and Human Rights Working Group representatives to EU Delegation officials and top business executives—highlighted the value that inclusive and responsible (IRB) businesses represent for the economy, society, and the environment. Speakers acknowledged significant challenges ahead in the current geopolitical context, including political disruptions causing inconsistent regulatory enforcement, trade sanctions creating uncertainty, the enforcement gaps in the rapidly evolving landscape of IRB business practices in Asia, lack of clarity in HRDD legislation leading to delays and fragmentation, and supply chain complexities increasing the risks of forced labour and weak due diligence enforcement. Existing legal frameworks for labour protection are not being effectively enforced, limiting their impact on improving working conditions and addressing business-related human rights risks.

Speakers also highlighted progress made, such as increasing awareness and efforts to introduce mandatory HRDD legislation in Asia, enhanced multi-stakeholder collaborations improving accountability, and the adoption of worker-driven models to strengthen due diligence and mitigate labour risks. National action plans, new regulations applying to listed companies, voluntary approaches, and evaluation assessments represent notable progress in the region. However, these efforts remain insufficient without stronger enforcement and broader adoption across industries. They also clarified upcoming legal obligations to identify, prevent, and mitigate adverse human rights and environmental impacts in large business operations.

To support these efforts, states need to put in place an enabling environment to help foster change. Business speakers at the conference emphasised the need to avoid costly, unnecessary, and unintended burdens on businesses and to use current resources to deliver real outcomes. Protecting human rights and the planet will call for a “smart mix” of voluntary and mandatory measures.

Interactive workshops and group discussions tackled practical challenges, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are vital to many Asian economies. Business operators shared insights on embedding IRB practices into everyday operations. Participants explored solutions for sustainable supply chains, living wage strategies, circular economy models, and multi stakeholder engagement, highlighting the need for supportive policy environments, improved financial access, and strong partnerships among governments, businesses, and civil society.

An innovative session on “Making Inclusivity and Responsibility the Norm” explored four modalities for scaling up IRB business models. Invited speakers shared good practices while identifying specific obstacles and dilemmas they are currently facing, to which focus groups responded by proposing recommendations to consider. Key recommendations included engaging state actors and finance providers, enabling meaningful stakeholder engagement at both the local and national level, fostering business collaborations, preparing cost-benefit analyses, and creating a regional knowledge-sharing platform.

A workshop on “Going beyond Sustainability and Inclusion” explored the potential for moving towards a regenerative and distributive economy through different business models such as social impact cooperatives and circular economy businesses to minimise waste and pollution. The workshop on “Getting Started on Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD)” was tailored for Asian companies and CSOs who would like to start the HRDD process. This provided clarity on what HRDD is (and is not) and on its implications, why it is needed, and who should be involved.



During the Forum, a marketplace of impact-driven SMEs was opened to market their products, discuss their core values, and highlight their contributions to inclusive and responsible business (IRB).

Several initiatives essential to driving these efforts forward emerged as key takeaways from the Forum:

- Stronger policy coherence and enforcement to ensure that HRDD legislation is effectively implemented across Asia.
- Scalable and practical solutions for SMEs to integrate responsible business practices without excessive costs.
- Enhanced financial mechanisms and incentives to support businesses in transitioning toward inclusive and sustainable models.
- Greater collaboration between governments, businesses, and civil society in aligning efforts and sharing best practices.
- A clear roadmap for embedding social and environmental responsibility into business strategies, including actionable steps for different sectors.

INTRODUCTION

The second Asia Inclusive and Responsible Business (AIRB) Forum brought together 160 private sector leaders, civil society organizations, and policymakers from 20 countries across Asia and beyond, including, from Asia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Japan, India, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam; from Africa, Kenya and Uganda; and from farther afield, Australia, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, UK, and USA.

The list of participants is included in Annex 2.

The meeting sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. To provide an updated picture and information regarding the state of IRB in Asia, recent developments, challenges, successes, trends, and innovations, emphasizing the values of IRB and the need for a fairer, more inclusive, and more responsible economy.
2. To nurture the momentum for IRB sparked by the 2023 Asia IRB Forum, and renew the connections and networks already established.
3. To profile and publicize the progress and successes already achieved in promoting IRB models by Oxfam and its partners through their programs in Asia and beyond.
4. To facilitate a space for dialogue and exchange with private sector actors regarding their experience in adopting IRB business practices, and identifying the potential challenges, opportunities, and benefits of collaborating with civil society groups.
5. To learn about the mechanisms of mandatory human rights due diligence (HRDD) and its impacts on business in Asia.

MARKETPLACE

During the Forum, a marketplace of impact-driven SMEs was opened to market their products, discuss their core values, and highlight their contributions to inclusive and responsible business.

The enterprises, listed below, are working in different ways to promote economic empowerment of rural livelihoods, fair trade, environmental sustainability, social inclusion (particularly for ethnic minorities and women), and zero waste, and to contribute to responsible value chains.

- **Viêt Trang Handicraft** (Vietnam), crafting natural, hand-woven homeware made from renewable materials for over 20 years. The company supports rural artisans—primarily women—by providing fair income, skills development, and ethical working conditions.
- **Highland Herbs** (Vietnam), a social impact business from Kon Tum that works with ethnic-minority households to source ginger, turmeric, chillies, and other medicinal herbs. Highland Herbs markets teas, syrups, and spices domestically and internationally under the DATO brand.
- **Cambodia Knits** (Cambodia), a social enterprise, committed to fair trade and zero waste, that works with women in marginalized communities to produce handmade toys under fair and flexible employment conditions. Its products are marketed globally as “Beebee+Bongo”.
- **Cambodian Standard Development and Supply** (CSDS), procures safe and sustainable farm produce from 1,392 families, 13 cooperatives, and a union in 25 provinces. With an efficient distribution network CSDS supplies hotels, restaurants, retailers, supermarkets, and others.
- **HESED** (Cambodia), a social enterprise producing, processing, trading, and exporting agricultural products such as palmyra blossom sugar, additive-free dried fruits, cashew nuts, and pepper. The award-winning business is a member of the World Fair Trade Organization.





- **AgriHouse** (Cambodia), a business sourcing sustainable and nutritious foods and providing alternative livelihoods for marginalized communities through insect farming. Cricket farming is resource-efficient and low in GHG emissions, and the farms are powered by solar energy.
- **Tuwe Bora** (Kenya), a social enterprise offering mentorship and practical assistance to women producing bespoke and ready-to-wear clothing. Tuwe Bora scales its impact through textile recycling, sustainable production, and advocacy for responsible consumption.
- **Stina Foods** (Uganda), a woman-owned manufacturing company in Mbale that produces nutritious blends of maize, rice, and sorghum flours and other ingredients to support healthy diets. The company supplies to over 400 supermarkets and promotes sustainable business.
- **Tiddin** (Laos), markets palm sugar, wild almonds, teas, bamboo products, and pottery, nationally and internationally. It provides a village development fund for producer communities, while producers in turn commit to biodiversity conservation.
- **Print Squares** (Laos), a business specializing in sustainable and innovative 3D printing, using eco-friendly materials, and minimizing carbon emissions. The company seeks to foster diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunities for employees.
- **Riffai** (Laos), a satellite and AI company manufacturing small satellites for monitoring environmental change. RIFFAI provides tailored early warning and climate adaptation planning for governments, cities, and businesses.
- **Mae Tha Organic Community** (Thailand), a pioneering organic farming organization formed by seven villages in the northern Thailand. Mae Tha prioritizes economic viability through food security, environmental protection, and the transfer of knowledge to future generations.



OPENING SESSION

Mr. John Samuel, Regional Director, Oxfam in Asia, opened the Forum by highlighting several key messages linked to the insights that emerged from the first Asia IRB Forum in 2023. Inclusive and responsible business practices can result in commercial success. We now need to move beyond dialogue to action to ensure that business and human rights principles become embedded in business working practices to protect the rights of communities and workers. In a fast-changing world, there are new challenges to rights, justice, and equity. Governments must strengthen regulatory mechanisms and adopt policies that support IRB business outcomes.



TALK SERIES: THE FUTURE OF INCLUSIVE AND RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS IN ASIA

High-level perspectives were presented by five distinguished speakers on the value that IRB can produce for economy, society, and the environment. However, all speakers were clear about the significant challenges ahead in the current geopolitical context.



Ms. Pichamon Yeophantong, UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights: "Capturing IRB in Asia: Trends, Opportunities, and Challenges"

- We are facing serious challenges in uncertain times. Working together is the way forward.
- Progress is possible. There have been major accomplishments over the last two decades.
- The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights is a global normative framework that brought together states, businesses, and civil society to establish a shared understanding of the state's duty to protect and the corporate responsibility to respect human rights, as well as the need for access to remedy for affected rightsholders.
- Businesses are integrating the UN Guiding Principles into their policies, establishing operational-level grievance mechanisms, and shifting their workplace culture.
- National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights are being adopted by governments in Asia, with ongoing discussions to develop mandatory HRDD reporting. This reflects global trends, with the passage of new laws to require HRDD in the EU, France, and Germany.
- Voluntary measures are no longer sufficient. Hard laws with mandatory measures are also needed to ensure that businesses practice due diligence to respect human rights.

- States must ensure an environment that enables businesses to meet their responsibilities.
- Alarm is growing at budget cuts, rollback of diversity, equity, and inclusion measures, and SLAPP actions.
- Prevention of business-related human rights abuses requires enforcement and scaling up of policy commitments. Remediation through state and non-state mechanisms and judicial processes is needed to respond in a genuine way to those harmed by human rights abuses.
- The road ahead will be difficult, but there must be no backsliding. Real commitments, scaled up and accelerated, are needed to address the polycrisis affecting politics, economics, and the normative foundations underpinning the global order.

Ms. Renita Bhaskar, Minister Counsellor and Head of Trade Section at the EU Delegation to Thailand: “Shaping Future Policy Frameworks”

- The EU’s Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) laws and regulatory changes will impact businesses of all sizes in Asia. The EU is the world’s biggest trade exporter and importer.
- There is a huge economic case for sustainability. The European Green Deal was enacted in 2019 to bring about a sustainable way of living and doing business over the next decade.
- The new EU Corporate Sustainability and Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) adopted in 2024 is a huge package of measures. France and Germany have already put in place corresponding national-level legislation; this will be harmonized across 27 member states by July 2027.
- These initiatives were developed in response to stakeholder and consumer demands.
- In a connected world, transformative change comes through fostering sustainable and responsible business behaviour throughout the entire value chain.
- The CSDDD applies to EU and significant non-EU companies operating in the EU market, with high value (net turnover 450 million Euros) or large workforces (over 1,000 employees). Companies must identify, prevent, and mitigate adverse human rights and environmental impacts in their operations, subsidiaries, and value chains, and establish and implement due diligence.
- Company directors are responsible for setting up and overseeing the due diligence process—remediation, reporting, and transparency.
- Small companies will also be affected. Reporting is required at the level where impacts happen. SMEs with strong sustainability and human rights practices could gain a competitive advantage in this context. There is a process for training small enterprises for early adaptation.
- Transitions to change in the right direction need to take place through a fair and smooth process for the sake of a harmonious society. Concerns about implementation difficulties will be taken into account in the simplification and streamlining of CSDDD processes.
- Europe will continue moving toward these goals and will not change course. Sustainability is essential for the existential challenge facing the next generation.





Ms. Chau Lon Molika, CEO and Founder at Cambodian Standard Development & Supply (CSDS): “Inclusivity: SMEs as Drivers of Change”

- CSDS works with more than 5,000 contract farmers in 25 provinces in Cambodia.
 - The vast majority of businesses (98%) in Southeast Asia are SMEs, and they are integral to national economic growth.
 - SMEs have a unique role in promoting inclusivity. They work directly with farmers in the communities, ensuring fair wages and ethical practices.
 - SMEs are run predominantly by young entrepreneurs. By leveraging their agility and community focus, SMEs have the potential to act as important catalysts for change in business practices towards inclusivity and sustainability.
 - Challenges include access to finance, lack of regulatory support, and constraints in market access.
- Driving change together requires access to financing and to policy frameworks friendly to SMEs, and corporations need to collaborate with SMEs rather than replacing them in the market.
 - The future of IRB in Asia will not be built by corporations alone, but will instead be shaped by the millions of SMEs that fuel our economies, employ our people, and sustain our communities.

Dr. Netithorn Praditsarn, Secretary-General of United Nations Global Compact Network Thailand (GCNT): “Supply Chain Management: Navigating Risks and Corporate Accountability”



- The GCNT is Thailand’s biggest corporate and business network promoting sustainability, comprising 138 members from businesses of all sizes, spanning diverse sectors. Members generate approx. 47 trillion Thai baht in revenue and directly employ over 1.2 million people. Members are committed to the 10 UN Global Compact Principles and strive to align their operations with all 17 SDGs.
- Members are working to adopt policies of inclusivity and responsibility for human rights and environmental protection—critical for society and businesses.
- Nature dependent businesses face huge potential losses from climate change.
- All GCNT member companies are committed to net-zero carbon emissions by 2070 at the latest, while some aim to meet the goal by 2050. To protect biodiversity, the GCNT has committed to protecting at least 30% of land and marine areas in Thailand by 2030.
- Geopolitical changes in the supply chain, in international development assistance, and in migration patterns cannot be ignored, and will impact how everyone operates.
- The private sector must respect and embed HRDD into the way we operate and our supply chains. GCNT is committed to help implement the 2nd National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, delivering HRDD training to ensure transparency and effective disclosure.
- Human rights defenders have an important role to play. The GCNT has asked companies to commit to not using SLAPP, litigation intended to suppress genuine grievances.

- In Thailand, three million SMEs employ 12 million people. They play an essential role in Thai and global supply chains and contribute 23% of Thailand's GDP.
- Recommendations for all stakeholders to convert human rights principles into reality:
 - o Understand your business in reference to the guidelines. Reporting on sustainability and human rights will help to reveal any gaps and what to do next.
 - o Learn how AI, large language models, and blockchain can assist in protecting human rights.
 - o Work with suppliers and buyers, assist them in capacity building in this area.
 - o Set out a clear business case, with measurable and reportable benefits.
- Governments and other actors can help facilitate dialogue. We must be careful not to place unnecessary, costly burdens on colleagues, such as more reports and more audits, and instead to minimize unintended burdens, using current resources to deliver real outcomes.
- In a race to the top, inclusive business is good business. The Asia IRB forum is a safe space where business, civil society, and the public sector can come together to fulfill our mutual vision of a greener, safer, and fairer future for all.

Ms. Archana Kotecha, Executive Director, ReAct Asia and the Remedy Project:—“Advancing Responsible Business Practices: Bridging Gaps Between Policy and Impact”

- The landscape of IRB practices in Asia is rapidly evolving.
- HRDD is not only about understanding risk to business; it must also address the impacts.
- There is good progress in the region, including national action plans, new regulations applying to listed companies, voluntary approaches, and evaluation assessments. But this is not enough.
- Existing legal frameworks for labour protection are not being effectively enforced.
- Three concrete ways for businesses to bring about ground level impact in adopting more inclusive approaches to address complex human rights challenges while fostering resilience and accountability in their operations:
 - o **MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE.** Small and medium-sized enterprises are struggling with the burden of compliance. Brands are requiring suppliers to do more, and most suppliers are footing the bill. As a result, corners are being cut. New measures should include “light” versions in order to help bring in SMEs, meeting them where they are.
 - o **EQUITY SHOULD BE SHARED ACROSS VALUE CHAINS.** Tools can identify where forced labour is taking place. While suppliers should be held responsible for local practice, forced labour should also be recognized as a bigger market phenomenon—a business model issue. Brands must take responsibility for the prices they offer for their purchases.
 - o **MEANINGFUL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT.** Create participatory spaces for trust within company policies and processes. Trust deficits block businesses from engaging with CSOs. Risk identification and reporting needs to be bottom-up, with community-based approaches to risk mitigation supported by CSOs.
- Responsible business conduct is built on values of sustainability, equity, and resilience.
- The single biggest risk to business is the risk to people and planet.



PLENARY DISCUSSION WITH QUESTIONS TO PANEL

One participant raised calls for help from Myanmar migrant workers on various forms of exploitation. These cases related to hotel chains and the garment industry, some of which are part of the supply chain for renowned global brands. Migrant workers reported receiving no salary for months. When businesses and local officials try to help, they also face many challenges. The UN Business and HR Working Group has identified the treatment of migrant workers as a priority, with a focus on cross-border migration on land and sea. Speakers encouraged reporting the issues and the names of relevant actors not only to UN bodies but also to the relevant brands through existing human-rights due diligence (HRDD) grievance mechanisms.

Another participant asked how to mainstream understanding of human rights as being integral rather than additional to business practice, and how to ensure that national action plans are implemented. Speakers pointed to the need to tailor regulations so that it is clear how exactly they apply to a particular sector, and how companies of different sizes need to respond differently. The PRISMA self-assessment tool has been adopted in Indonesia, but it could be improved. The Japanese government has invested heavily in communicating voluntary guidelines to business, providing trainings on Business and Human Rights (B+HR) and HRDD to Japanese companies working internationally.



Another question related to how to ensure citizen engagement in a shrinking civic space where there is violence against human rights defenders. Companies need to work out exactly what they need to do when issues such as a threat to life are raised. Brands should develop direct engagement with NGOs on the ground in areas where issues have arisen so that they can access help at the local level immediately. Systems need to be put in place to support corporate commitments.

A business representative on the panel was asked how best to work with multiple stakeholders. She responded that, in the case of Thailand, there has been enough training, and the many guidelines and checklists end up becoming quite burdensome, particularly to SMEs. After a training, it is not always clear where to get started. It is important for suppliers to understand the UN Guiding Principles as well as fundamental issues of child labour, forced labour, occupational health and safety, and gender equality, and to offer "hands on" coaching particularly to SMEs.



ON THE REAL CHALLENGES THAT SMES FACE,

- One speaker highlighted access to information about principles and laws, what they mean in practice, and who to ask. In multicultural societies, information has to be tailored to different communities around the country. SMEs also need access to finance in order to develop. The primary concern of MSMEs is getting food on the family table.
- Another panellist added that ensuring that systems are in place—e.g. systems to collect data—represents a costly investment for the industry as a whole. However, brands are not releasing funds to pay for it. Because profits are not being shared along the value chain, SMEs cannot always think beyond immediate survival. When are systems going to be fairer? When will there be decent work?
- A participant from South Asia raised concrete examples of the increasing pressures on smallholder farmers. Smallholder tea farmers who currently benefit from access to higher-value markets worry that even their tiny share of the market will be at risk when global directives such as the CSDDD come into effect. While labour laws are not implemented, unions that raise their voices are seen as antagonistic to liberal models of development.
- Asking about potential solutions, he partly answered his question by suggesting that cooperative models can help to facilitate certification and spread other costs.
- This was strongly echoed by a panellist who saw cooperatives as the future, saying that workers in solidarity will find markets. There have been many successful trials of cooperative models in Africa. More value is likely to accrue to cooperatives in the future as they become attractive options for global supply chains that need to comply with responsible business standards.

A final question related to how to foster transparency, a big challenge for responsible businesses. A panellist acknowledged that, in a competitive market, it can be difficult to reveal a business's flaws. However, HRDD is not meant to be punitive; instead, it seeks transparency for the sake of a stronger social contract. Transparency highlights what is going wrong so that it can be addressed before others reveal what is happening. Transparency also helps everyone to learn from positive practices.

FINAL REFLECTIONS: Speakers acknowledged that, although work is needed to help businesses engage with their suppliers to implement human rights legislation in practice, existing voluntary and mandatory measures remain critically important. It is important to stay focussed on the single biggest risk to business—the risk to people and planet. No one should be left behind; all parties—workers, businesses, SMEs, CSOs, and governments—need to move together. It is equally important to acknowledge that systems take time to develop; everyone working toward the same goal should be tolerant, patient, and willing to listen to one another.

The topics raised by the audience were further discussed in smaller groups and interactive sessions throughout the rest of the AIRB Forum.



THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS

BREAKOUT I: WALK THE TALK: HRDD COMMITMENT AND ACTIONS IN ASIA

1) Enabling Policy and Environment for Inclusive Business in Asia:

- Encourage stakeholders to propose concrete recommendations to government. Start with small-scale initiatives. In some initiatives, SMEs will actually take the lead.
- Provide HRDD training to all relevant government officials.

2) Bridging the Gap: From Commitment to Action:

- Ensure that companies apply their code of conduct throughout their supply chains.
- Communicate about human rights to stakeholders to foster transparency and accountability.
- Develop transparent and accessible grievance mechanisms.
- Designate focal points where grassroots representatives can liaise with local communities.

3) Collaborating with key Stakeholders:

- Identify key stakeholders and initiate face-to-face meetings for meaningful engagement.
- Establish long-term partnerships with government and other stakeholders through cooperative measures.

4) Engaging Meaningfully with Rightsholders:

- Create safe spaces to engage with workers, farmers, and communities.
- Engage with local CSOs and trade unions.
- Provide capacity-building support, and ensure that rightsholders have access to safe digital technology.
- Foster a bottom-up approach to engagement, ensuring that CSOs play a critical role in amplifying rightsholder voices.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. From Policy to Practice: Concrete HRDD Actions matter. Businesses need to turn commitments into concrete action by embedding human rights due diligence across their supply chains.
2. Collaboration is Key to Progress: Effective HRDD implementation requires engagement by multiple stakeholders, including government, SMEs, CSOs, and local communities, to ensure long-term partnerships and cooperative solutions.
3. Rightsholders at the Center of HRDD: Meaningful engagement must be safe, inclusive, and participatory, employing a bottom-up approach that empowers workers, farmers, and communities while leveraging CSOs and digital tools for accessibility.



BREAKOUT II: GENDER INEQUALITY AND UNPAID CARE WORK IN SUPPLY CHAINS

The key challenge is a lack of environments that enable women to enter or remain in the workforce. Barriers such as unpaid care work, time poverty, gender-based violence, and insufficient legal protections hinder women's participation. Additionally, all sectors face limited resources and budgets for capacity building.

• Key actions for CSOs:

- o Help build CSOs' capacity to overcome the power imbalance with respect to the private sector. Provide more opportunity to engage with private sector partners in multi-stakeholder collaboration.

• Key actions for governments:

- o Address the challenge of law enforcement on unpaid care work and gender equality.
- o Collaborate to build capacity on addressing unpaid care work.
- o Provide tax incentives to encourage the private sector to adopt policies that support women's workforce participation.

• Key actions for the private sector:

- o Provide more input on enabling environment, by providing more policies for family-care support and flexible working conditions.
- o Foster more opportunities to collaborate with CSOs and NGOs.
- o Uphold women's leadership in the recruitment process and at the management level.
- o Address gender-based violence against women workers in the supply chain.

BREAKOUT III: ENABLING LIVING INCOMES AND WAGES IN GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS

- Several methodologies exist to calculate a living wage, and these methods can be harmonised.
- Living wage is promoted as a different approach for bargaining, emphasising wage commitments that must be fulfilled by organizations.



- In the power dynamics of tripartite negotiations, however, workers tend to lose. Unions are still not focused on the issue of a living wage. Instead, bargaining remains fixed on the minimum wage, which is often too low to supply basic needs.
- New, different business models—piecework, digitalization, etc. It is unclear how a living wage can be incorporated into new business models.
- Often CSOs are not trained in using complex methodologies to calculate living wages.
- Workers and collectives in the informal sector need to be empowered to increase their bargaining power.
- It is important to show that paying a living wage will not decrease company profits but will instead result in increased workers' efforts, and companies' profits will be rewarded in long run.
- Good experience and practice is that the companies learn, get inspired or convinced and get pressure from their peers who are implementing or on their right track of doing it.

BREAKOUT IV: PARTNERSHIPS FOR A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

This session explored how different stakeholders such as businesses, cities, and support organizations can drive the transition to a circular economy, in which sustainability is achieved through reuse and regeneration of materials or products, through practical solutions and partnerships. Participants were introduced to the 8 principles of circular economy and engaged in hands-on discussions to identify opportunities for circularity across sectors.

The participants were invited to dive into three interactive missions:

1. **Sustainable Circular Events:** Creative Migration and the Austrian Embassy shared their Sustainable Events Toolkit, demonstrating how event organizers can minimize waste and integrate circular practices.
2. **City-SME Collaboration:** SEI highlighted ways that cities and SMEs can co-design circular solutions, ensuring that local policies and business models align for greater impact.
3. **SME Transition to Circularity:** Two SMEs shared their experiences—Tuwe Bora, an experienced circular business, and Stina Foods, which is in the early stages of transitioning. Participants worked together to develop actionable recommendations for supporting SMEs in adopting circular practices.

The session emphasized that SMEs play a crucial role in driving circularity but need tailored investment models, technology adoption, and strong networks to scale their impact. Enterprise Support Organizations (ESOs), such as Platform Impact and Oxfam Kenya, shared insights on how financial and technical support can accelerate circular transitions for businesses.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Collaboration is essential: SMEs, investors, policymakers, and support organizations must work together to overcome barriers to circularity.
- Circular solutions vary by sector: From waste reduction in events to city-SME partnerships and business-model transformations, circularity requires a tailored approach.
- Financing and knowledge gaps remain challenges: Expanding access to funding and sharing best practices will be key to advancing circular business models.

The session ended with a networking activity in which participants identified opportunities for collaboration and explored ways to apply circular principles—not only in their work, but also as consumers and in their daily lives at home.



MAKING INCLUSIVITY AND RESPONSIBILITY THE NORM

This session explored four different modalities for scaling up inclusive and responsible business (IRB) models. Using a World Café Method with speaker rotation, each speaker presented their achievements related to a particular scaling method and shared the specific obstacles or dilemmas they are facing. Participants, guided by facilitators, contributed actionable recommendations, which were compiled and presented by the speakers at the end of the session.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SESSION:

FOCUS 1: SCALING THROUGH EXPANSION

Mai Thi Anh Dao, Việt Trang Handicraft:

- o Engage governments as customers, since governments host many events to promote local products in international markets. Participation in the government's One Community One Product (OCOP) scheme could help.

Sylvie Gal, Triple Jump:

- o Develop mechanisms to improve financial access for SMEs, such as collecting data to better tailor financial offerings to SME needs.
- o Explore blended finance loans, potentially paired with insurance products, to help SMEs manage climate change risks and improve sustainability.

FOCUS 2: SCALING THROUGH REPLICATION

Maetha Organic Community Enterprise, Thailand, and Siwat Aumpradit, Sal Forest Co., Ltd., Thailand:

- o Organize multi-stakeholder meetings with large companies, SMEs, and CSOs to bridge gaps and differences in understanding.

- o Facilitate business matching by pairing small companies with larger businesses for mutual understanding of each other's context, needs, and limitations, including sustainable farming groups. Large companies should commit to long-term investments or purchases from SMEs.
- o Start with simple, manageable steps for smaller businesses, focusing on core issues such as improving wages or providing support for reaching production standards and certifications. IRB needs to be unpacked into measures that correspond to the varying size and complexities of different businesses.

FOCUS 3: SCALING THROUGH ADAPTATION

Huan V. Nguyen, TESCO:

- o Build long-term collaborative relationships with your supply chain. Responsible business practices help avoid emergencies and reduce costs. Collaboration fosters awareness, information sharing, and capacity building.

Tatat Tatat, Oxfam in Indonesia:

- o IRB practices must be measurable. If a business improves its ranking in important standards, its reputation improves and securing more resources for IRB improvements becomes easier.
- o Present a cost-benefit analysis. Improving human-rights practices can enhance efficiency, but its primary purpose is more fundamental. Businesses have to integrate human rights into their core operations, upholding ethical and legal obligations beyond cost benefits.

FOCUS 4: ENABLING CONDITIONS AND GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Marta Pérez Cusó, UN ESCAP; Jeroen Boonzaaijer, Netherlands Embassy; Destry Anna Sari, Indonesian Ministry of Cooperatives:

- o Create a knowledge-sharing platform for governments, CSOs, and the private sector, with initiatives replicable at the ASEAN level.
- o The private sector, especially multinational corporations and other large companies, can influence governments to implement better IRB policies by producing a ranking of top companies with best IRB practices. Such a ranking, by promoting reputation and recruitment, would incentivize businesses and governments alike.
- o Multi-stakeholder engagement and business practices must align at both the local and national level to create effective collaborations.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FROM DISCUSSION GROUPS:

- Work must be aligned with the priorities of different ministries, which must be engaged in a shared agenda.
- Businesses need the flexibility to define their actions under an overarching framework with clear regulations and indicators.
- Market opportunities will drive the adoption of IRBs within businesses. Multinationals need to have a role in bringing in consumers who are interested and ready to pay for IRB products.
- CSOs need to clearly articulate shared goals and values, speaking the language of business to demonstrate the value of IRB.
- SMEs, especially those facing pressure from both large companies and challenges in scaling, need support in capacity, resources, and knowledge. However, SMEs also need to be well prepared with the changing trends and highly increasing of market demand to have their own voice and readiness to be part of the global supply chains.
- Civil society needs to play a critical role in bridging gaps between business, government, and local commitments. Civil society groups will need protection and support to continue this work.



WORKSHOP ROOM I: GOING BEYOND SUSTAINABILITY AND INCLUSION

The session opened with an imaginative exercise inviting participants to envision a new economy—one that benefits everyone and operates within planetary boundaries. The need for such a regenerative and distributive economy has never been more urgent, given today’s extractive and exploitative economic models that concentrate wealth and degrade ecosystems.

A regenerative economy actively restores and replenishes natural and social systems rather than merely reducing harm. A distributive economy ensures that economic value and opportunities are fairly shared among all contributors rather than being concentrated in the hands of a few.

This interactive session explored how businesses can integrate regenerative and distributive principles into their models. Participants analyzed different approaches, including steward ownership, cooperatives, open-source models, and circular economy strategies. The discussion emphasized that adopting regenerative practices means designing business models that restore natural and social systems, while becoming distributive requires sharing value fairly across supply chains, workers, and communities.

Two enterprises, AgriHouse and Cambodia Knits, served as case studies for applying these concepts in practice:

- AgriHouse sources sustainable and nutritious foods while providing alternative livelihoods for marginalized communities through insect farming, a resource-efficient and low-carbon agricultural model.
- Cambodia Knits empowers women in marginalized communities by offering fair and flexible employment to produce handmade toys under ethical and zero-waste production principles.

Participants explored strategies for enhancing these businesses’ regenerative and distributive potential:



- **FOR AGRIHOUSE:**

- o Strengthening closed-loop farming systems by integrating cricket waste as fertilizer or feed, enhancing its regenerative impact.
- o Expanding cooperative ownership to include farmers in decision-making and profit sharing, making it more distributive.

- **FOR CAMBODIA KNITS:**

- o Upcycling textile waste into new products, thereby reinforcing circular economy principles.
- o Introducing a profit-sharing or cooperative model to provide artisans with greater financial benefits and decision-making power.

By embedding regenerative and distributive strategies, businesses can create long-term social and environmental impact rather than simply reducing harm.



WORKSHOP ROOM II: GETTING STARTED ON HUMAN-RIGHTS DUE DILIGENCE

This workshop elaborated on what human-rights due diligence (HRDD) is, what are the implications of HRDD, why is it important, and who should be involved? Exercises with hypothetical cases were worked out to determine who should be involved in multi-stakeholder engagement and in involved HRDD processes. Some key points from the discussion included:

Definition: HRDD is a process to identify, prevent, mitigate, and account for actual and potential negative impacts on human rights in business operations and value chains.



Key principles: Do no harm – Risk-based approach – Dynamic and continuous always keep improving stakeholders at the heart – Transparency and communication are key. HRDD is not ESG reporting, CSR, or philanthropy, compliance, and auditing, managing risks to business finance or materiality, and it is not a project for the sustainability department alone.

Reasons to Pursue Human-Rights Due Diligence: To ensure a responsible and inclusive supply chain in which people and planet thrive. The EU CSDDD will require large businesses (including 3,400 EU and 880 non-EU corporations) to carry out HRDD for their operations and supply chains. The process can be summarized in six steps:

- 1) Embed responsible business conduct in policy and management. HR policy should be integrated into a business rather than standing alone. To get started: Commit to the UN Guiding Principles. Review and align existing policies. Formulate a plan to implement HRDD.
- 2) Risk scoping and prioritization. Identify all human-rights risks and prioritise the highest risks. To get started: Map your operations and supply chains. Gather general information about the risks for the sector, geography, and company. Consult stakeholders to fill the gaps.
- 3) Cease, mitigate, and prevent negative impacts. To get started: Consult your stakeholders.
- 4) Keep track. To get started: Collect data, conducting audits and other assessments through stakeholder interviews, surveys, worker interviews, worker voice tools. Review stakeholder websites and credible publications that cite stakeholder perspectives.
- 5) Communicate and be transparent. To get started: Publish policies. Reach out to stakeholders.
- 6) Provide remediation. Provide for financial compensation, apologies, and reinstatement to fired workers, restoring workers to the status they enjoyed before the impact occurred. Sanction staff or entities responsible for any wrongdoing. To get started: Set up a grievance mechanism, or join an existing grievance mechanism.

Throughout all of these steps, companies should encourage meaningful stakeholder engagement. The ultimate purpose of such engagement is to drive real and positive change by empowering rights-holders, addressing risks and impacts on human rights, and improving working conditions. The key principles of meaningful stakeholder engagement are: Legitimacy, Accessibility, Safety, Equitability, and Respect.

Throughout the discussions and reflections, participants pointed out the vital role of CSOs in engaging stakeholders to ensure respect, diversity, empowerment, safety, and more to all stakeholders, especially those groups in vulnerable positions.





FINAL PLENARY DISCUSSION —KEY POINTS

- It is important that big companies take part in events of this kind, in order that other participants get to hear their perspectives and learn about measures they are undertaking.
- One participant shared their research, presented at Davos, asking large corporations about the difficulties involved in enhancing inclusivity. While there is ample support for change, major corporations are big machines, with thousands of employees all over the world. Thus, a change in procurement processes may involve many departments with different layers of power in the corporation, and it typically takes time to put in place proper teams and engage with others.
- Businesses and CSOs typically have different understandings of IRB, and a big communication gap remains. Businesses typically need to be persuaded of the value that working with CSOs can provide for their own business, but it is often difficult for CSOs to approach large companies. The only way forward is working together.
- Though companies are often willing to negotiate with CSOs that can provide insights from ground-level experience, it often takes time for both sides to understand and build trust. It is usually difficult to engage heads of corporations, and it may be hard to reach other stakeholders as well. There may be various people—in procurement, CSR, innovation, or marketing, etc.—who need to be contacted, and identifying the right individuals can turn out to be extremely important.
- From a business perspective, work on understanding the nature of the problems should start with small, easy steps, since attacking ambitious targets at the outset is typically not helpful. CSOs need to understand the language of business as well as the needs and the priorities of individual businesses, and to acknowledge what will be needed to build a longer relationship. Though CSOs and businesses are fundamentally different, they can often negotiate the same vision of improved business practices.



REFLECTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS ON THE ASIA IRB FORUM

Participants reflected that the Forum was very well organized, energetic, positive, open, and engaging, with good opportunities for networking and meeting other participants. They highlighted the value of expert insights on market trends and regulatory updates, and in general found that the information shared was deep, practical, and inspirational. For the next Forum, participants hoped they would hear from more of the bigger companies. They hope for more time to learn from best practices and examples of good business partnerships with SMEs; other hoped for topics include access to remedy, deeper market analyses, case studies, and innovation trends, as well as more on environmental sustainability. One participant suggested that Oxfam consider creating a learning hub to share best practices, and another proposed smaller national IRB forums to bring in key local actors. The takeaways from the meeting included a sense of hope despite dark days, given the passion for change that is cutting across countries, languages, and types of organisations, as well as the importance of civic spaces, meaningful multi-stakeholder engagement, and the building of alliances to overcome obstacles.



CLOSING REMARKS

A lot of ideas were discussed, and new friendships made. Oxfam and Sal Forest co. ltd intend to keep this spirit alive when bringing different stakeholders together again on a single platform in the future. In a challenging global situation for planet and people, civil society needs to keep its voices loud. While the issues remain difficult and complicated, we can find common solutions through this space that we have created, while also providing a space for businesses that are implementing good practices. We all dream of making the world more fair, inclusive, and liveable, while avoiding environmental catastrophe with its huge social costs. From the moral obligation, voluntary guidelines, and regulations are beginning to be put in place. We need more multiparty commitments.

This kind of forum is not a luxury; it is aimed at finding a way forward to live in harmony. The role of civil society in arranging this type of dialogue and facilitating this Asia IRB space is critical. Human rights defenders and other marginalized communities need to be protected and should be part of all our discussions. We will continue the dialogue and open further opportunities to engage and grow collectively.



ANNEX 1: AGENDA

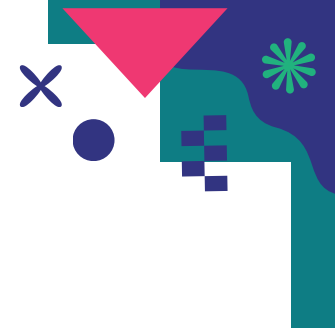
Time	11 th February 2025 Agenda
08.30–09.00	Registration
09.00–09.30	Welcome, introducing the people and the marketplace
09.30–09.45	Opening Remarks by Mr. John Samuel, Regional Director, Oxfam in Asia
09.45–10.30	Opening Talks: Future of Inclusive and Responsible Business in Asia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Pichamon Yeophantong, UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights • Ms. Renita Bhaskar, European Union Delegation in Thailand • Ms. Chau Lon Molika, Cambodian Standard Development & Supply (CSDS) • Dr. Netithorn Praditsarn, UN Global Compact Network Thailand • Ms. Archana Kotecha, Executive Director, ReAct Asia and Remedy Project
10.30–10.50	Break
10.50–12.00	Interactive Plenary 1: Panelist Discussion and Interactive Participation from Speakers and Audience Moderator: Ms. Fatema Tuz Johoor, Oxfam GB
12.00–13.30	Lunch / Market visit
13.30–15.30	Thematic Breakout Discussions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Walk the Talk: Paving the Way for HRDD Commitment, Action in Asia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Poramintorn Vongtrirat, Mars Petcare (Thailand) • Mr. David Kim, HESED (Cambodia) • Ms. Nareeluc Pairchaiyapoom, Ministry of Justice (Thailand) • Ms. Eline Achterberg, Oxfam Novib (The Netherlands) • Moderator: Ms. Rapatsa Trirath, Oxfam in Asia 2. Addressing Gender Inequality and Unpaid Care Work in Supply Chains <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Bidowra Tahmin Khan, Oxfam (Bangladesh) • Mr. Harry Yuli, PT. ATINA (Indonesia) • Ms. Monika Nowaczyk, Cambodia Knit (Cambodia) • Ms. Vally Vetsaphong from National Assembly of Laos (Laos) • Moderator: Ms. Fatema Tuz Johoor, Oxfam GB 3. Enabling living incomes and living wages in global supply chains <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Rana Alok Singh, Ethical Trade Initiative (India) • Mr. Nayeem Emran, Oxfam (Australia) • Mr. Nguyen Thong Ba, IDH (Vietnam) • Moderator: Ms. Esti Nuringdyah, Penabulu (Indonesia) 4. Partnerships for a Circular Economy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Chloe Pottinger-Glass, Stockholm Environment Institute (Thailand) • Ms. Lidia Vajda Creative Migration (Thailand) • Mr. Michael Schmeiser, Austrian Embassy (Thailand) • Ms. Linda Sigilai, Tuwe Bora (Kenya) • Ms. Justine Mukazungu, Stina Foods (Uganda) • Mr. Hassan Hajam, Platform Impact (Cambodia) • Ms. Gladys Ominde, Oxfam (Kenya) Moderator: Ms. Windy Massabni, Oxfam Novib
15.30–16.00	Break
16.00–16.30	Sharing back from Thematic Discussion and Closing Moderator: Mr. Ponpakin Phruttiwongwanit, Sal Forest Co. Ltd
16.30–18.00	Market Visit and Networking Reception



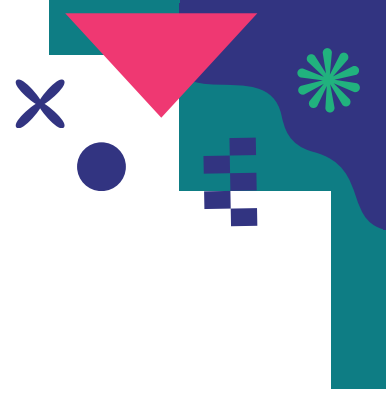
Time	12 th February 2025 Agenda
08.30–09.00	Registration
09.00–09.30	Fun activity and recap of the first day
09.30–12.30	Interactive Plenary 2: Making IRB the Norm Focus 1: Scaling through Expansion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Dao Mai, Viet Trang Handicraft (Vietnam) • Ms. Sylvie Gal, Triple Jump (Thailand) Focus 2: Scaling through Replication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Aphisak Kamphen, Mae Tha Organic Community Enterprise (Thailand) • Mr. Siwat Auampradit, Sal Forest (Thailand) Focus 3: Scaling through Adaptation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Huan V. Nguyen, Tesco (Vietnam) • Ms. Tatat Sukarsa, Oxfam (Indonesia) Focus 4: Enabling Conditions and Government Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Marta Pérez Cusó, UN ESCAP (Thailand) • Mr. Jeroen Boonzaaijer, NL Embassy (Thailand) • Ms. Destry Anna Sari, Ministry of Cooperatives (Indonesia) <i>Moderator: Ms. Windy Massabni, Oxfam Novib</i>
12.30–13.30	Lunch
13.30–15.30	Drive through Actions 1) Workshop Room I: Going beyond Sustainability and Inclusion Facilitators: Ms. Gladys Ominde and Ms. Bun Khim 2) Workshop Room II: Getting Started on HRDD Facilitators: Ms. Eline Achterberg and Mr. Moon Light
15.30–15.45	Break
15.45–16.15	Plenary Discussion: Report Back and Cross-Sharing Mr. Nguyen Hung Cuong (Private Sector Engagement Specialist, Oxfam in Vietnam)
16.15–16.30	Summary and Closing Remarks Mr. Mustafa Talpur (Advocacy and Campaign Lead, Oxfam in Asia)

ANNEX 2: PARTICIPANT LIST

1. Agri House Co., Ltd
2. Aruna Indonesia
3. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
4. Asosiasi Perikanan Pole & Line and Handline Indonesia (AP2HI)
5. Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE)
6. Austrian Embassy, Bangkok
7. Baan Dek Foundation
8. Bangkok Bank Public Company Limited
9. Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC)
10. Betagro Group
11. Cambodia Knits
12. Cambodian Standard Development & Supply Co., Ltd



13. Charoen Pokphand Group Co. Ltd (CP Group)
14. Creative Migration
15. Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Bangkok
16. Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok, Regional Development Cooperation Section—Asia & Pacific
17. Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)
18. European Union Delegation in Thailand
19. Export-Import Bank of Thailand
20. FairAgora Asia
21. Fair Wear Foundation
22. Federation of Thai Fisherfolk Association (FTFA)
23. Fisherfolk Social Enterprise, Nakhon Si Thammarat
24. Foundation for Consumers, Thailand
25. Foundation for International Human Rights Reporting Standards (FIHRRST)
26. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Thailand
27. Giribandhu Tea Estate Pvt. Ltd
28. HESED Agriculture Trading Co., Ltd
29. HIGHLAND HERBS COMPANY LIMITED
30. Human Rights and Development Foundation (HRDF)
31. Human Rights Now
32. Human Rights@Work
33. Humanity Institute
34. IDH Vietnam
35. International Justice Mission
36. International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development (INFID)
37. International Organization for Migration (IOM)
38. iRespond
39. IUCN Thailand
40. Joint Foreign Chambers of Commerce in Thailand (JFCCT)
41. Kasikorn Bank
42. Kementerian Koperasi Republik Indonesia
43. Labour Rights Foundation (LRF)
44. LDC Watch
45. Maetha Organic Community Enterprise
46. Mars Petcare
47. Mekong Inclusive Ventures
48. Member of the National Assembly of Lao PDR & Laos National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI)
49. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion Agency, Ministry of Industry and Commerce Laos
50. Minh Phu Social Enterprise
51. Ministry of Justice, Rights and Liberties Protection Department (RLPD), Thailand
52. Ministry of Labour (MoL), Thailand
53. National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children, Lao PDR
54. New Energy Nexus
55. Nishimura & Asahi



56. Office of Thai Trade Representative
57. Oxfam
58. Penabulu Foundation
59. Platform Impact
60. Print Squares Sole Co., Ltd.
61. PT. Alter Trade Indonesia (ATINA)
62. PT. Bumi Menara Internusa
63. PT Dharma Satya Nusantara Tbk
64. Raks Thai Foundation
65. The Remedy Project
66. RIFFAI
67. Rocket Media Lab
68. Sal Forest Co., Ltd.
69. SCG
70. Seafood Legacy
71. Serikat Petani Kelapa Sawit (SPKS) / Palm Oil Smallholders Union Indonesia
72. Stella Maris
73. Stina Foods Limited
74. Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)
75. Tesco
76. Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI)
77. ThaiPublica
78. Thai Wah
79. Thai Youth Coalition
80. Thammasat University
81. THE PRAKARSA
82. TIDDIN Sole Co., Ltd.
83. Tilt Collective
84. Triple Jump
85. Tuwe Bora Limited
86. UN ESCAP
87. UN Global Compact Network Thailand (UNGCNT)
88. UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights
89. University of Kelaniya
90. Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI HCM)
91. Viet Trang Handicraft Company

