



Webinar on Human Rights in Value Chains

Background

Human rights are moral principles and freedom inherent to all human beings, irrespective of their ethnicity, language, race, sex, religion, nationality, or any other status. According to the United Nations, human rights include the right to life and liberty, the right to work and education, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, among others. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.

Human rights are violated when they are directly or indirectly disregarded and disrespected. Violations can either be intentionally performed or come as a result of failing to prevent a situation that would cause violation. In the context of global value chains, they include labour rights violations, child labour, environmental damage, among others.

The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights¹ acknowledge that companies should undertake human rights due diligence measures to ensure their operations do not contribute to human rights abuses; instead, they should respect them. It is everyone's obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. The human rights due diligence include steps to assess actual and potential human rights risks, take adequate measures to mitigate those risks and act to end abuses, and ensure remedy for any activity that occurs despite those efforts. In addition, companies need to play a more active role in setting clear policies that looks at all human rights impacts using the [International Bill of Human Rights](#) and the principles concerning fundamental rights set out in the [International Labour Organisations Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work](#) as minimum standards, to the guiding principles into practice and report on its effectiveness. However, many businesses have no or inadequate measures in place, and their actions contribute to or cause human rights abuses.

What is at Stake

The world is currently adversely affected by the health and economic crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exposed many people to human rights risks. It has also shown the vulnerabilities that exist in our societies and deepened different forms of inequalities ranging from economic, access to health care and education. The global value chains have not been exempted as many businesses in various value chains reduced or ceased their operations due to lockdowns imposed by governments in an effort to curb the spread of coronavirus. This resulted to many workers being laid off or working without adequate precautions leaving them at risk of infection and their rights exploited.

Exploitation of human rights is a huge problem in value chains due to inadequate monitoring of abuses. In practice, businesses often fail to get a clear picture of the human rights risks contained in their value chain. Some companies do not even map out all actors involved in their chain. This has hampered efforts to eradicate the problem.

Cooperatives actively take part in the global value chains and occupy various positions across the value chain ranging from producers, workers, transport, consumers, and recycling. They ensure that their members and stakeholders receive a more significant share of the value of their products. As

¹ [The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) are guidelines for States and companies to prevent, address, and remedy human rights abuses committed in business operations.



people-centred enterprises, cooperatives places people before profit, and have a natural attribute to human rights. These traits are based on the values of self-help, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity and are embedded in the seventh cooperative principle on concern for the community. Therefore, respecting human rights is a key issue for the cooperative movement. In 2018, the ICA members approved a [declaration](#) on decent work and against harassment at work places. They committed to respect, promote and act diligently to support the fundamental tenets of decent work, namely freedom of association and full recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; an end to child labour; and the elimination of discrimination in employment and every form of work.

Respecting and promoting human rights in global value chains is a complex matter and requires joint efforts as it is a shared responsibility. Cooperatives need to demonstrate their uniqueness based on their identity, values, and principles as they respect and support human rights in their operations. They need to take steps to ensure they are aware of human rights risks and violations in their value chains and should monitor and address them on an ongoing basis.

Objectives of the Webinar

In reference to the above discussion, and also to celebrate the Human Rights Day (10th December), the [International Cooperative Entrepreneurship Think Tank \(ICETT\)](#), a Working Group of International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) is organising a webinar to introduce this topic on human rights in value chains to the cooperative movement. The aim of the webinar is to distil in 75 minutes the most relevant information and action-oriented recommendations on how cooperatives and their networks could respect and promote human rights within their operations and in their sphere of influence.

The panelists will share inspiration stories and best practices from their organisations, illustrate the value of cooperatives in local and global value chains, and how cooperatives could conduct Human Rights Due Diligence in their operations. They will also encourage cooperatives that are yet to put this into practice to align their operations with cooperatives values and principles, United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Specific Objectives include:

- Discussing how cooperatives can carry out human rights' due diligence in their operations to identify, prevent, mitigate, and assess actual and potential impacts of human rights in their value chains.
- Describing challenges that businesses go through in their practice and efforts to promote human rights in their sphere of influence and offer suggestions, good practices, and resources to consult for more information.
- Explaining some of the approaches that various enterprises have recognised as useful for businesses in their endeavour to respecting and promoting human rights and share how they have integrated human rights principles into their strategies, operations, and business relationships.
- Exploring possibilities for developing special initiatives as part of joint efforts to raise awareness and promote respect for human rights in value chains.