

SUMMARY

Climate and Human Rights Workshop for Business Practitioners in Brazil

On 25 May 2023, the Global Business Initiative on Human Rights (GBI) and the Conselho Empresarial Brasileiro para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável (CEBDS) co-organised a workshop for business practitioners on climate and human rights in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The workshop was aimed at better exploring how businesses can better address the human rights impacts in their responses to the climate crisis. This includes identifying, preventing and mitigating the human rights impacts of company strategies to mitigate or adapt to the climate crisis, as well as strategies to transition to zero carbon emissions.

In Brazil, the climate crisis is particularly acute due to the presence of the Amazon, the world's largest tropical rainforest. 60% of the Amazon is in Brazil. The Amazon plays a vital role in mitigating climate change by absorbing and storing carbon dioxide. When the forest is destroyed either through cutting or burning, it loses its ability to perform this role, and also releases the stored carbon dioxide back into the atmosphere. Deforestation of the Amazon accounts for nearly half of Brazil's greenhouse gas emissions. In addition to the Amazon, Brazil is also home to other tropical rainforest and savanna biomes, including the Atlantic rainforest and the Cerrado. Under the Paris Agreement, Brazil has agreed to end all illegal deforestation by 2030.

Because of the large presence of traditional communities in Brazil, including Indigenous people, quilombolas, artisanal fishermen and miners, any efforts to mitigate the climate crisis, should be led in collaboration with them. For example, Indigenous communities maintain a way of life closely linked to the natural environment in which they live, they are the natural defenders of the forests and biodiversity and deeply affected by the climate crisis. Free, prior, informed consent protocols should be utilised when engaging with Indigenous or other traditional communities, particularly in situations that involve land use, for example, carbon sinks or large-scale renewable energy projects.

It is also important to note that the climate crisis in Brazil has a real danger of exacerbating already existing inequalities in the country, cementing the need for companies to centre their responses to the climate crisis on affected rightsholders. Given these existing inequalities,

there is increasing recognition that climate justice will be an important issue to consider in efforts to adapt to and mitigate the effects of the climate crisis in Brazil.

In the session, a representative from civil society highlighted the seriousness of the climate crisis in Brazil and the need to join efforts to accelerate actions to reach established goals.

Companies should include a focus on increased vulnerabilities of communities in plans to adapt to a warmer world and mitigate the impacts of the climate crisis.

As climate change will enhance existing vulnerabilities in communities, including Indigenous communities where business has their operations or activities, it will be important for business to assess these vulnerabilities in developing their strategies for adaptation. One research institution shared about a research project that was supported by an energy company in Brazil to understand the vulnerabilities of Indigenous communities due to the climate crisis. This research is intended for the company to be able to inform their adaptation strategy with an eye towards the impacts to people. The research explored community vulnerabilities from three angles: 1) exposure, 2) sensitivities, and 3) adaptability. Since many of the

activities impacting Indigenous communities, involved land use, including mining, land rights became an important sensitivity to consider in the context of warming temperatures.

Another company described their efforts to reduce their carbon emissions and prevent biodiversity loss in the Amazon. The company incorporated into its business model a commitment to defending human rights and tackling the climate crisis by protecting the Amazon. In its efforts to offset carbon emissions, transition to regenerative agricultural systems, conserve and prevent biodiversity loss, the company focused on the creation of inclusive instruments that prioritised and benefited the most vulnerable populations. The company also incorporated local knowledge from Indigenous communities into its conservation strategy as part of its carbon offset plan.

In the context of the energy transition, the transition out of oil and gas, including coal, will have impacts on the people and communities who are tied to these industries. A company operating a coal mine in Latin America shared the details of their mine closure plan, including the challenges of implementing the closure plan. A particular focus of the plan is to ensure resilience in the community where the mine is located. However, there are different views in the community about what future use of the land might look like, which poses a challenge.

In the transition to zero carbon emissions, companies must also put respect for human rights at the center of their transition strategies.

While transition is generally associated with the energy transition, transformation of agricultural and food systems is also an important part of the transition to lower carbon economies. Another company shared about their transition to a regenerative agricultural model in their sourcing of raw materials from Brazil. While the company considers environmental issues through their human rights action plans, as well as human rights impacts of the company's environmental programs people, especially smallholder farmers, are central to the regenerative model.

To further emphasize the importance of placing people at the centre of responses to the climate crisis, an Indigenous community representative from the Guarani shared about the ongoing impacts to her community in the Atlantic rainforest as a result of the climate crisis. This includes impacts to the community's livelihoods and food systems. Engaging in free, prior and informed consent with Indigenous communities in relation to company operations or activities involving community land use was stressed as essential, particularly in relation to company transition activities.

Looking ahead

This workshop was organised as part of an ongoing collaboration between CEBDS and GBI to support practical discussions among business practitioners in Brazil on implementing respect for human rights. GBI works to promote the corporate respect human rights through peer to peer learning within its membership and with business practitioners globally, this includes furthering the discussion around linkages between climate and human rights. CEBDS works with their member companies to promote an inclusive and sustainable economy.

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