

Conference Summary - The role of the private sector in fostering peace, justice, and strong institutions

Overview

On Tuesday 2nd of May, the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law, with the support of Jones Day, organised a conference on the role of the private sector in fostering peace, justice and strong institutions, as enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.

Set at Jones Day in London, this conference considered various questions arising from the intersection of business and SDG 16, including how the business community should engage to advance SDG 16's themes of peace, justice and strong institutions; in what ways the SDGs - and SDG 16 in particular - are good for business; the role of the business community's in advancing SDG 16, and the various tools and instruments that can help the private sector work to advance this Goal. The conference also evaluated the scope for engaging various stakeholders - including governments and law firms - in advancing SDG 16; as well as the steps (both internal/external) that business can take to concretely advance SDG 16, together with the challenges and opportunities this presents.

Keynote speakers included: Harriett Baldwin MP, Minister of State for Africa at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Minister of State at the Department for International Development and Manoelle Lepoutre, Senior Vice President, Civil Society Engagement, Total.

The conference featured other distinguished speakers from the business community (Diageo, Nestlé, Anglo American, Safaricom Limited, the Sahara Foundation), as well as from international organisations (Alejandro Alvarez, Chief, Rule of Law Unit, Executive Office of UN Secretary-General), civil society and the legal profession.

Conference Summary

The following is a summary of the key themes

1. The Business Case (Panel 1)

- Making money is not inimical to the SDGs. In fact, investing in the SDGs can make good business sense, and help turn a profit. The SDGs shouldn't be seen as a challenge and can help mitigate risks. They should be part of sustainable strategies of companies. A long-term vision is essential.
- A lot of themes captured in SDG16 (e.g. strong institutions, lack of corruption) are vital for a stable and sustainable business environment. But we still lack coordinated approaches to implementing SDG16 and engaging the business community.
- The private sector covers a broad swathe of organisations, and not all have genuine interests in Rule of Law, or in the SDGs. It is possible for the private sector to act on SDG16, but it will require putting aside their self-interest.

2.How should private sector engage to advance peace, justice and strong institutions? (Panel 2)

- Investing in the SDGs makes strong business sense, but also hinges on the importance of strong and sustainable partnerships with the local communities. The SDGs should be part of any business strategy - they help leverage opportunities, and mitigate risks.
- Internally, tone from the top, and aligning performance reviews against delivery of the SDGs are some of the strategies that help advance the SDGs. Externally, many companies engage with the UN Guiding Principles on Human Rights (UNGPs). It was argued that the UNGPs are inter-related to the SDGs, such that a company that meets the former automatically addresses the later. Training and capacity-building throughout the supply chain also provide means of mainstreaming the SDGs.
- In addition to investing in advocacy and information-raising, there is a need to localise the SDGs, as well as a need to engage with SMEs (as they can be more nimble, but don't always know about the SDGs).

3.Who can help the private sector engage to advance peace, justice and strong institutions? (Panel 3)

- It was stressed that 'access to justice' is a key component of the SDGs - governments have a key role to play in this, including in coordinating action on the SDGs. However, although collaboration between government and the private sector is needed, there may be a risk when the private sector seeks to affect justice outcomes.
- 'Justice innovators' are equally important, and data suggests that local communities are key in facilitating access to justice. These can be Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), who are often more flexible and nimble. The private sector can help foster access to justice, e.g. by investing in technology, focussing on public goods, etc.
- Lawyers and the legal profession have an important role to play in implementing the SDGs, e.g. by advising on laws and legal problems that various stakeholders encounter.
- Critically, the business sector and lawyers do not always prioritise social outcomes, and thus it is important to build strong and lasting partnerships (including with local communities), and to facilitate the work of these stakeholders (e.g. via pro-bono mechanisms).

4.A call to Action - the role of the private sector in fostering peace, justice and strong institutions (Panel 4)

- The SDGs provide a unique framework for countries to address most issues affecting humanity. However, there are clearly some challenges to their implementation, and SDG 16 remains controversial.
- Success in achieving the SDGs depends on coordination across governments (who are responsible for setting the frameworks and creating incentives for engagement), and the private sector. Although, as was remarked previously, the private sector is eclectic in nature, it is also vital for the private sector to organise and coordinate if the SDGs are to succeed. Coordination can be mediated by third-parties.
- Three examples were provided showing how the private sector can engage a broad range of stakeholders in addressing SDG16 - the Pathfinders Programme, the UN Global Compact, and the Rule of Law Clearing House. As was remarked, these are three examples out of a broader pool of initiatives, and thus coordination is vital.

A full conference report is available [here](#) and a conference agenda is [here](#) .

URL: <https://binghamcentre.biicl.org/comments/50/conference-summary-the-role-of-the-private-sector-in-fostering-peace-justice-and-strong-institutions>

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