

Jul 18 2014

Charline Daelman – Measuring the Impact of Business on Children's Rights

Damiano de Felice

The recent release of UNICEF's '[Children Rights and Business Principles](#)' has resulted in companies starting to understand the relevance of respecting and promoting children's rights. More importantly, companies are now rethinking the impact that their businesses have on children's rights.

In the implementation of respect for children's rights by businesses, measurement tools could be of great use. However, before developing a new tool there is a need for a 'market-study' to grasp what initiatives already exist, how they can be improved and what the gaps are for which new tools could be developed.

Measuring Business and Human Rights (MB&HR) is conducting a study on the issues of existing children's rights measurement tools. The preliminary interim findings were presented during the UN panel 'Measuring the Impact of Business on Children's Rights', organized by the Permanent Representative of Belgium on the 10th June 2014 in Geneva.

The instruments that were taken into account were: (i) [Children's Rights in Impact Assessments](#) (UNICEF); (ii) [Working on the Rights Shoes Scorecard](#) (Stop Child Labour); (iii) [Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel & Tourism](#) (The Code); and (iv) [Goodweave Standards](#) (Goodweave). There is a limited amount of stand-alone children's rights measurement tools. However, children's rights are often integrated in existing human rights measurement tools, such as the [G4 Sustainability Reporting Guidelines](#) and the [SA 8000](#).

A first observation is the limited scope of the existing tools. Both the 'Working on the Rights Shoes Scorecard' and the 'Goodweave Standards' for example, focus on the prohibition of child labour, and thus deal with only one aspect of children's rights.

Also, the existing tools typically focus merely on a particular sector such as the carpet industry (Goodweave Standards), tourism sector (Code of Conduct) or the retail industry (Working on the Rights Shoes Scorecard). This is not necessarily a disadvantage, especially if the tool goes into great depth and anticipates the specific needs of the sector. This could be the making of a great sector specific tool. However, in order to take into consideration the full spectrum of children's rights a multi-pronged tool would be required.

Furthermore, most tools are meant solely as guidance. A good example is the 'Children's rights in Impact Assessments' tool developed by UNICEF. The tool provides primarily policy and process 'criteria' which entails a tick-boxing risk, rather than actually resulting in improved children's rights performances.

The implementation/development of new policies and processes is a good starting point but one will have to make sure that it actually results in the increased respect for children's rights by also providing impact indicators. To achieve this, emphasis has been put on guiding companies and not necessarily on creating peer-pressure on businesses.

Another issue is the limited accessibility to the existing tools, given that access is sometimes made dependent on paying a membership fee which is the case for the 'Code of Conduct' and the 'Goodweave Standards'. Often, only the larger multinational businesses are able to pay these fees, leaving out small and medium-sized enterprises although these represent 99% of the businesses in Europe. As a result, a sort of favouritism is created towards multinationals and the companies that actually need the guidance the most, find it difficult to get access.

More generally, the limited accessibility also adds to the lack of transparency. Often there is also no clarity about the applied methodology which makes it hard to assess the reliability of the measurement tool. In the 'Working on the Rights Shoes Scorecard' for example, the processes and policies of shoe businesses are assessed according to a good, moderate or bad standard. However, it is not clear what the criteria is in order for something to be considered good, moderate or bad so the measurement process is not transparent and lacks clarity.

Finally, the majority of tools, such as the 'Children's Rights in Impact Assessment' and the 'Working on the Rights Shoes Scorecard', use corporate self-reporting as data-gathering mechanism which could undermine the validity of the data and the tool's credibility and legitimacy.

To improve existing tools and the creation of future tools, MB&HR presents some preliminary solutions along with possible guidelines.

To begin with, THE right format to develop new tools or indicators does not exist as it depends on several different actors. The creation process of indicators is constantly refined but meta-data such as the audience, goal and financing of the tool are often forgotten. Therefore, the impact of meta-data on the development of a measurement tool and indicators should not be underestimated and should be taken into account more.

In addition, before developing a new tool one should consider what the added value would be. As mentioned before, a market-study of existing initiatives is essential and more coordination between existing initiatives is vital to assure valuable content. It is also worth considering the integration of new children's rights initiatives in existing children's rights and/or human rights measurement tools.

Furthermore, a difference should be made between assessment criteria and impact indicators. Most of the existing tools provide primarily guidance and are not intended to be monitoring tools that could, for example, be used by civil society. Therefore, more children's rights monitoring tools that include impact indicators should be developed. This inclusion would also be relevant for companies who are obliged to assess their impact (UNGP 17).

Finally, there is a clear need for more transparency, legitimacy and accessibility.

Existing and new tools should be transparent regarding the relevant legal framework and methodology that is used, such as the 'Children's Rights in Impact Assessment' tool, in order to enhance the tool's reliability.

To enhance the legitimacy of the tool, a multi-stakeholder consultation during the development and other data-gathering mechanisms, such as third-party reports and surveys, should be considered.

Measurement tools should also be accessible to all. The use of membership fees is not necessarily a problem but it would be advisable to differentiate the financial contribution according to the means and profits of the concerned company as is rightly done by the 'Code of Conduct'.

The added value of children's rights measurement tools and indicators is recognized by many different stakeholders, which has resulted in the creation of multiple new tools. In comparison to the more general human rights measurement tools, the ones related to children's rights are relatively new and in the making. As a result, they benefit from previous lessons learned and should refine their development process in the light thereof.

Charline Daelman



Charline Daelman is one of the co-Directors of MB&HR, a PhD researcher and teaching assistant at the University of Leuven, a Board Member of the Flemish Journal for Human rights and the Essex Human Rights Law Review, and an associate at the Brussels office of SQ Law. In the past year, she was a guest lecturer at the University of Pretoria and the Tecnológico de Monterrey

This entry was posted in [Human Rights Impact Assessments](#), [Management tools](#), [Reporting](#) and tagged [children](#), [children's rights](#), [human rights](#), [indicators](#), [KPI](#), [measuring](#), [rights](#), [unicef](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).