



Executive summary

Businesses have the responsibility to respect human rights wherever they operate, independently of a state's ability or willingness to fulfil their own human rights obligations. ¹

When challenges seem to grow due to a state's reduced capability to protect the population from abuses, business should strengthen their human rights due diligence processes.

The relevance of this process can be observed from the Brazilian perspective. Brazil has made great advancements with regards to respecting, protecting and fulfilling the human rights of its population since the Constitution of 1988. However, recent setbacks can be noticed.

This paper draws attention to the need for businesses to review their human rights due diligence processes in their supply chains or operations within the country. In light of recent events, some topics are considered to be of greater concern and, therefore, should receive special attention in companies' impact and risk assessments. ψ_1

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Introduction

It is well known that business enterprises can affect the enjoyment of human rights by others, either positively or negatively. Businesses can affect the human rights of their employees, their customers, communities and workers in their value chain.²

According to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, states have the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights set out in the international human rights conventions they ratify. They should translate the conventions into domestic laws and enforcement processes, including the protection of individuals and groups against human rights abuses by business enterprises.²

Businesses have the responsibility to respect human rights wherever they operate, independently of states' abilities or willingness to fulfil their own human rights obligations.¹

Apart from that responsibility, companies should prepare themselves for changing expectation from customers, investors and (future) employees. Several reports³ show that it is more important than ever to do business in a responsible and sustainable way.

States may not have adequate standards and regulations in place. It is also possible that national laws are in conflict with international human rights standards. Even when adequate regulations exist, states may fail to enforce them effectively.⁴

These situations pose bigger challenges for companies to manage human rights risks related to their businesses. Even when these challenges are recognized, it is expected that businesses are prepared for it.⁴

Challenges are everywhere. Human rights violations take place all over the world, however certain locations present many more challenges than others. A good understanding of the inherent risk present in operational locations and suppliers' production sites is an essential part of an adequate human rights' due diligence process.

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Stakeholders are pushing companies to wade into sensitive social and political issues – especially as they see governments failing to do so effectively.⁵⁰

Larry Fink - BlackRock Chairman and CEO

This paper aims to provide an overview of inherent risks in Brazil, given its relevance in global supply chains. It starts with a brief overview of how human rights topics have been addressed in the country since re-democratization and provides more specific information on key topics to which businesses should pay special attention.

The relevance of Brazil within global supply chains

In 2018, Brazil was the fifth most populated country and the ninth biggest economy worldwide, with a GDP of \$2.14 trillion.^{5,6} Foreign trade represents slightly over one-fourth of its GDP and the country was among the world's 25 largest exporters and importers.⁷

Its main trading partners are China, the United States, the countries of Mercosur and the EU. The country's main exports are agricultural and food products (soya, coffee, sugar, maize, meat), minerals, oil, and air vehicles. Its main imports are hydrocarbons, vehicles, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, and electrical and electronic products.⁷

Advancements since the Constitution of 1988 and recognized good practices

The 1988 Brazilian Constitution paved the way for re-emergence of democracy in the country. The inclusion of a long list of fundamental rights was one of the main achievements. Around the same period, the main international instruments for human rights protection were ratified and an intensive process of legislative production started on the matter.⁸

Over the past two decades, Brazil experienced a period of strong economic and remarkable social progress. More than 29 million people transitioned out of poverty and inequality declined significantly. 10

The Bolsa Família Program, a conditional cash transfer program, has been recognized as one of the most effective social protection programs to reduce extreme poverty in the world, and as a result also diminished the risk of child labour.^{10, 11}

In 2005 and 2009, International Labour Organization (ILO) reports recognized Brazil's leading steps in addressing forced labour, such as its adoption of a strict legal concept for slavery-like conditions, as well as the 'Dirty List'. The legal concept of slavery-like conditions in Brazil would go beyond what was set out in the ILO Conventions by covering other aspects of unacceptable or degrading labour conditions. The 'Dirty List' was a public register of names of employers (persons or legal entities) caught exploiting workers in conditions analogous to slavery. Credit restrictions, among other penalties, would be applied to employers present in the List.¹²

→3 The Committee on the Application of Standards is a permanent tripartite body of the International Labour Conference and an essential component of the ILO supervisory system. It offers the representatives of governments, employers and workers the opportunity to undertake a joint examination of the manner in which States comply with their obligations deriving from the Conventions and Recommendations adopted by the ILO – ILO www.ilo.org/global/standards/ information-resources-and-publications/publications/WCMS_154192/lang--en/index.htm

The setback of certain advancements and the current situation

Since 2015, the pace of poverty and inequality reduction seems to have stagnated and the period of economic growth and social progress gave way to a strong economic recession.^{9, 10}

According to Amnesty International, over the past two years, up to 200 different proposals for constitutional amendments, new laws, and changes to existing legislation threatened a range of human rights.⁴⁷

Given the country's economic crisis and the need to restore fiscal sustainability, efforts have been made to limit the public spending. One of the most controversial actions was the approval in 2016 of a public spending cap for the next 20 years. This measure was strongly criticized by several actors, including UN human rights experts who stated that this could have significant negative impacts on the fulfilment of fundamental rights.¹³

From 2014 to 2017, the monthly average of resources committed to combat slavery-like labour in Brazil fell by 50%. In 2017, attempts were made to change legal aspects and procedures that would weaken the fight against modern slavery.^{14, 15}

Also in 2017, a labour reform, that was approved with the aim of modernizing the country's labour laws had some of its topics heavily questioned by civil society. Given the reform, Brazil was included in the list of 24 countries to go under the scrutiny of the Committee on the Application Standards, ψ_3 due to a possible breaching of the ILO Convention 98 on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention. ¹⁶

Under a very tense electoral dispute, Jair Bolsonaro was elected president in October 2018. The new president was sworn in January 1 2019 with great concern from human rights defenders given his proposal and pronouncements in terms of public security, environment protection, rights of indigenous people and minorities, labour law, land rights, and freedom of the press.¹⁷

The new president has stated his government's aim to relax environmental licensing processes, loosen gun control, review labour rights and 'end all forms of activism', among other polemical initiatives. He has been accused of inciting hatred and discrimination against people of African descent, indigenous communities, women, and the LGBT community.^{18, 19}

The current business and human rights framework in Brazil

In December 2015, the Working Group on Business and Human Rights ψ_4 visited Brazil and provided recommendations to the state, public and private companies, and to civil society organizations.¹⁵

The Working Group observed early on that, although Brazil had "a solid legal system and institutions to protect against business-related human rights abuse" 19, there were initiatives going in the opposite direction of human rights protection enforcement. They therefore recommended that Brazil should not only move forward on business and human rights, but also avoid the risk of sliding backwards. ²⁰

Among its recommendations, the Working Group suggested that the Brazilian government establish a National Action Plan (NAP) on business and human rights. ¹⁵ Even though Brazil has not yet produced a NAP, the government has responded by publishing a decree in November 2018, outlining a National Guidelines for Business and Human Rights. ^{21, 22}

The decree is seen by specialist as a significant advancement as it provides "criteria for implementation, monitoring and reparation for Brazilian and multinational companies working in the country", ²² however, the same highlight that it contains serious weaknesses.

The main critique is related to the fact that the "implementation of the responsibilities set out in the Guidelines is voluntary which mitigates the obligations laid down in the national and international norms." ²² According to the decree, a 'Business and Human Rights' label can be awarded to companies that choose to implement the guidelines.

The Working Group reported that, while some companies have policies and practices in line with the Guiding Principles, this was not the case for the majority of business enterprises in Brazil. Therefore, awareness raising and capacity building of corporate actors were recommended as priority actions.²³

Main topics and Recommendations

Given this scenario, corporations should make sure they have robust due diligence processes in place if their operations or part of their supply chains are located in Brazil.

The Working Group highlighted the lack of awareness of businesses in the country about the UN Guiding Principles. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that companies engage with their business partners operating in the country to raise awareness and to conduct capacity building activities.

Taking into account the context and recent developments, some topics should be given special attention. This session aims to highlight them and to provide recommendations.





In 2016, it was estimated that more than 360,000 people were in conditions of modern slavery in Brazil.²⁴ Reported cases were concentrated in rural areas where labour-intensive industries create a demand for cheap labour; mainly in cattle ranching, farming (sugarcane, coffee and other products), forestry, and charcoal production. More recently cases were also reported in urban areas, the construction and textile sectors being the most commonly noted.^{24, 53, 54, 55}

As mentioned earlier, Brazil had at one point been internationally recognized for its efforts to combat modern slavery. However, in 2017 a government decree changed the definition of forced labour, labour inspections procedures, and the process to include employers under the 'Dirty List'. Campaigners affirmed that the decree represented a major setback in combating slave labour as it limited the circumstances under which slavery-like was defined and weakened the hand of inspectors, as well as the 'Dirty List' procedures. 14, 15 Not long after publication, the decree was suspended by the Federal Supreme Court and, as a result, the government issued another decree that restored the previous definitions and procedures.24 However, human rights defenders are still concerned, given that specific groups may continue to push for legislation to weaken around this topic.²⁵

In addition to the 2017 decree, it is important to observe that the monthly average of resources committed to combat slavery-like labour in Brazil fell by 50% from 2014 to 2017. As a result, there was an immense reduction in the number of inspections and, as a consequence, in the number of workers rescued.¹⁵

Specialist also believe that some topics of the 2017 labour reform would make it more difficult to combat slavery-like labour. This includes the "negotiated over the legislated" topic, which allows

collective bargaining agreements to prevail over what is written in the labour law. In this case it would be possible for limits on working hours and some health and safety standards for instance, to be defined by a collective bargaining agreement even if they don't respect the limits stated in the labour law.^{26, 27}

Bolsonaro also plans to carry out a new reform of the labour law, claiming that Brazil has excessive rights.²⁸ He also stated that he would like to withdraw from the Constitution a rule that determines the expropriation of properties in which slavery-like labour is found.²⁹

Recommendations

Companies with supply chains in higher risk sectors should give special attention to the topic when establishing its due diligence process and engaging with suppliers. As a first measure, they should consider screening the public register of names of employers caught exploiting workers in conditions analogous to slavery, popularly known as 'Dirty List', before onboarding new suppliers.

More information on preventing cases of forced labour in supply chains can also be found in the knowledge paper "Tackling modern slavery in the supply chain" (www. loening-berlin.de).

Possible changes on legislations around the topics should be monitored. Relevant monitoring sources include Observatório Digital do Trabalho Escravo no Brasil, \$\psi\$5 Reporter Brasil \$\psi\$6 and The Global Slavery Index. \$\psi\$7



The elected president has been accused of inciting hatred and discrimination against people of African descent, indigenous communities, women, and the LGBT community. ¹⁸ During and after the election, episodes of bullying raised anxiety among groups who feel vulnerable given the increase in hate speech by the president's supporters.

The tense election of 2018 brought the topic of discrimination and fear among minorities to debate. On top of its discriminatory statements, the elected president has stated that he is against affirmative actions to reduce discrimination.³⁰

Recently, Brazil's first and only openly gay congressman announced that he was leaving his job and the country after receiving death threats. He claimed that there was a "climate of heated rhetoric and intensifying violence toward members of the LGBT community in the wake of last year's heated election campaign." ³¹ In 2017, at least 445 LGBT Brazilians died as victims of homophobia. ³¹

Gender inequality is another relevant topic, especially at work. Recent data shows that women earn, on average, 76.5% of men's income in Brazil.³³

According to the ILO, "combating discrimination is an essential part of promoting decent work." 48

Recommendations

Companies should guarantee that they have adequate mechanisms in place to promote gender equality and fight discrimination in the workplace.

A very important element is the implementation of effective grievance mechanisms, in line with the UN Guiding Principles.

Companies can make use of relevant sources to verify data related to discrimination such as Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística 48 and Agência Notícias IBGE. 49



Brazil has about 240 tribes, totalling around 900,000 people, which corresponds to 0.4% of the population. 690 territories are recognized as indigenous land, representing 13% of the country total area.²³

It is relevant to observe that "over past decades, indigenous peoples have been subjected to forced displacement owing to the expansion of agribusiness and large-scale development projects." ²³ They have also been suffering due to conflicts over land and invasion by illegal loggers and mine workers into their territories. These invasions have resulted in several episodes of violence.⁴⁷

Based on its visit to Brazil in 2015, the Working Group on Business and Human Rights listed three main concerns related to indigenous peoples: (1) "the lack of effective consultation with indigenous peoples," (2) "violent social conflict perpetrated by armed militias and private security companies in the context of the intrusion of agribusiness on indigenous land," and (3) "ineffective or incomplete demarcation of indigenous land."

A proposed Constitutional amendment that could weaken the demarcation of indigenous territories, has been under discussion for several years.³⁴ In addition, the elected president, who has already threatened to revert land demarcations,³⁵ has recently transferred the responsibility of demarcating indigenous territories as protected lands to the ministry of agriculture. "The ministry has traditionally championed the interests of industries that want greater access to protected lands." ³⁶

Not only indigenous peoples are at risk of land disputes. Violence against rural activists over land also exists.⁴¹ The risk of increased violence is relevant given that the elected president claimed that members of landless peasants' associations should be treated as "terrorists".⁴⁹

Recommendations

Companies should assess the risk of having their own operations or supply chain involved in the violation of indigenous and land rights. A very important element is the consultation with potentially affected groups and other relevant stakeholders, such as local NGOs. Where the risk is relevant, an adequate due diligence process should be established.

Special attention should be given to the extractive and agribusiness industries, as well as large-scale development projects.

Companies can make use of established sources to look for information related to indigenous peoples such as Fundação Nacionaldo Índio 410 and Instituto Socioambiental 411



According to the World Health Organization, Brazil had a rate of 31.1 homicides per 100 000 people in 2016. This gives it the ninth highest rate of homicidal deaths worldwide.³⁷

The country is among those with the highest rate of unsolved homicides, either due to failures or lack of investigation by civilian police. On average, only 15% of the country's murders are ever solved.³⁸

On top of the already violent reality in the country, the positioning of the recently elected government brings further concerns around the topic.

A few days after taking over the presidency, the new government established a decree to make it easier for the population to buy guns.³⁹ Specialists have strongly criticized the decree and emphasized the importance of adequate gun control in a country with such a high rate of violent deaths. They highlighted that around 70% of homicides involved firearms in 2017.⁴⁰

The new government also plans to allow "on-duty police officers to kill with impunity, known as 'exemption from illegality.'" ¹⁷ In 2017, police officers, including those off-duty, killed 5,144 people, and 367 on- and off-duty police officers were killed.⁴¹ "Abuses by police, including extrajudicial executions, contribute to a cycle of violence that undermines public security and endangers the lives of police officers and civilians." ⁴¹

Recommendations

Companies should take adequate steps to monitor the security risks of personnel and communities close to its operations.

All private security providers should be adequately trained on human rights and special attention should be given to all interactions between companies and public security.

A good reference for guidelines around this topic is The Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights. \$\psi\$12



The new government had initial plans to merge the environment and the agriculture ministries however, great pressure from civil society made Bolsonaro give up on this proposal.⁴² Even so, he continued to claim that environmental license hindered the execution of infrastructure works in the country and accused IBAMA, the Environment Ministry's administrative arm, of imposing abusive fines.⁴³

Currently, three bills that could dismantle environmental licensing laws at the federal level are already under discussion. According to specialists, the setbacks noticed at the federal level are accompanied by similar proposals at the state level.⁴⁴

Easing environmental licensing is of great concern given that Brazil has several cases of social and environmental impact due to infrastructure projects and business operations. Brumadinho's tailing dam collapse is one of the most devastating and recent examples. The breaking of an iron ore tailing dam in the town of Brumadinho killed at least 166 people and left 147 missing. Three years earlier, an iron ore tailing dam collapsed in the town of Mariana, 150 kilometers from the town of Brumadinho. The accident in Mariana killed 19 people, displaced several families and contaminated a river basin.

Another example was the construction of the hydroelectric dam of Belo Monte in the Amazon region. According to specialists, the licensing process was not able to guarantee the fulfillment of diverse social and environmental needs of the communities that were affected by the execution of this infrastructure work.⁵² A report produced in 2018 by Human Rights Watch denounces the poisoning of rural residents "from pesticides sprayed near their homes, schools, and workplaces" in different regions of Brazil. They highlight that rural communities fear "reprisals from wealthy and politically powerful farmers" if they denounce and advocated stronger protective laws and regulations.⁵⁷

Recommendations

Companies should be aware of the risk of having environmental licensing less strict. Even when governments do not pose very strict requirements, businesses should have adequate mechanisms in place to map potential social and environmental impacts and implement measures to mitigate them.

Companies can make use of established sources to look for information related to environmental protection such as Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis 413 and Instituto Socioambiental. 414



Certain social movements were branded as terrorists by the current president, who also promised to "end all forms of activism." ^{17, 56} This is of great concern in a country where, according to Amnesty International, human rights defenders, especially those in rural areas, are threatened, attacked and killed." ⁴⁷

The current president promised to end all forms of activism

Threats to freedom of expression were observed as the elected president said that he could cut public advertising of a media source after an article about illegalities in his campaign was published. In addition, access to his press conferences were limited to media outlets that sympathise with his government, while critical journalists were restricted access the president's Twitter account.¹⁷

Recommendations

Companies should publicly commit "to not tolerating threats, intimidation, physical or legal attacks against human rights defenders, including those exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and protest against the business or its operations." ⁵⁰

To make sure that employees and other rights holders along the supply chain feel free to raise their concerns, effective grievance mechanisms should be established. In addition, a continuous dialogue with relevant NGOs can help monitor the situation.

Conclusion

An adequate implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights not only provides a relevant tool for reputational and operational risk management, but also demonstrates a position of accountability to all relevant stakeholders.

Companies should be aware of their increased responsibility and relevance in guaranteeing the respect for human rights of those related to their business activity, both in their supply chains and their own operations within Brazil.

This responsibility is also a great opportunity: by strengthening human rights due diligence processes, companies can make a meaningful contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Be accountable towards your stakeholders!



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