Short Session Report

Session Title: The Business Case for Civic Rights
Date & Time: 23/10/2018 12pm – 2pm
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Moderated by: Sameera Mehra, Head of Global Alliance Development, CAF
Session coordinated by: B-Team and CAF

Main issues raised in kick off remarks. What’s the focus of the session?

Closing space trend is intensifying – 90 legislations have been recently introduced to restrict civil society. A global issue.
Undermining Civil society undermines society as a whole
New collaboration between sectors required, need to better understand the links between the enabling environment for both business and civil society
What does closing civic space mean?
  - decolonisation – current govt still uses British laws = colonial mindset
- History of military dictatorship
- Neo imperial approaches (USA, CIA)
- Together creates a greater crackdown on civil society legitimacy
- Business can be a source for good
- Change the narrative for business as business deeply depends on civic space – argues for reform, holds govt to account, highlights issues of corruption
- Closing space is a threat to business
- First and foremost a threat to democracy
- Active restrictions, passive restrictions, normalisation
- Open govt is meaningless without civil society – democracy, dialogue, innovation happens when sectors come together

What initiatives have been showcased? Briefly describe the Game Changing strategies/ ideas (if applicable)

Looked at protection of civil rights and long term economic growth
Factor in civic rights to investment decisions
Positive relationship between civic protection and child mortality etc – links with SDGs and responsible business
Free exchange of information – ideas and innovation
Social licence to operate – buy in from communities equals better business
Pakistan – Tender for URL filtration work that would censor and be anti-democratic. National and international NGOs pressured international companies to not bid for the tender and was relatively successful. Also petitioned host governments to intervene
B-Team prioritising connecting big business to local civil society to help ground issues in the local context and develop relevant networks at the national level
Social media campaigns are gaining traction – e.g. ‘Delete Uber’ campaign went global, hit share prices and business had to act

Briefly describe the highlights including the thematically interesting questions and ideas that were generated from the discussion or from the floor, and session quotes.
Short term cost of inaction vs long term cost of inaction -
‘Be outspoken about the need to protect human rights...not just for
business reasons, but moral reasons’
‘how do we get more businesses to join to promote this?’

Endorsement of UN Guiding Principles and comply to ensure credibility

Global Companies thrive on users rights e.g. Facebook – thrives on
selling personal data; Google working with China to create a censored
search engine
Businesses need to take a stand and not be part of a system that
violates human rights

Business as advocates – active vs reactive – difference between
consumer facing companies who need to be active and understand
current and future issues

‘Tech companies are waking up to how powerful they are’

New democracies - policies are in place but the structures that uphold
them lack capacity
Trans-national accountability - Companies can take advantage of this
and therefore, need to act beyond borders and engage with company’s
host governments

Three types of companies – a few that are doing good, a few that are
doing bad and a lot in the middle – how do we get the middle to move
and engage more and take a position in favour of human rights?

How do companies act globally and locally consistently, respecting
global norms and expectations but countering local issues e.g. LGBT
rights – position in US vs position in Nigeria?

People in business may want to act but the price of doing so can be too
high

What are the key recommendations, follow-up Actions (200
words narrative form)
We need to highlight and detail the cost of inaction and get more businesses involved to raise their voice on this issue. What are the costs of remaining silent for business? Make studies, data more public. GDPR is a good thing – how can these type of regulations be further developed?

We need better and stronger cross sector networks to address these issues. Develop mechanisms for faster response from all sectors. Business to play a more active role in policy making.

Increase joint advocacy between private sector and civil society.

For business to appreciate the role of civil society we need govt involved too.

Celebrate when we see leadership from business – don’t just focus on the bad things.

Civil Society needs to look for new ways to work with business e.g. YouTube – banned in Pakistan for 3 years. Engaged with IT start ups documenting social benefits and business benefits of YouTube and other platforms e.g. Gmail, Skype. Engaged with academics, small businesses, parliamentarians.

Naming and shaming – often issue dependent - engaging first and trying to find internal advocates can be more beneficial in the long run. Confrontation should be the last resort.

Engaging shareholders and investors on these issues could accelerate business engagement and raise issues of human rights and civic space up the agenda.

Key Insights that could be included in the IACC Declaration:

Not enough business engagement in this dialogue.

Sustaining collaboration and dialogue requires global and local.
engagement and momentum

The pretext of transparency can become a way of curtailing civic rights

At the national level – NGOs are not respected and seen as foreign funded but businesses have greater credibility which supports govt engagement

The balance between leveraging the access business has due to financial and political position and not further entrenching this position and giving it legitimacy

Rapporteur’s name and date submitted

This Short Report needs to be submitted within 2 hours after the session.