

CONFERENCE NEWS

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Corporate Social Responsibility and Development: Towards a New Agenda?

*Report of the UNRISD Conference
17–18 November 2003, Geneva*

Overview

Rapid growth in the number and size of transnational corporations (TNCs), their global reach and their visibility in people's daily lives have heightened societal concerns about their social, environmental and developmental impacts. In response, an increasing number of companies are adopting a range of voluntary initiatives associated with improvements in working conditions, environmental performance, and company relations with workers, consumers, local communities, activists and other stakeholders. At the core of this "corporate social responsibility" (CSR) agenda are specific policies and practices involving codes of conduct, environmental management systems, stakeholder dialogues, community investment and philanthropy, as well as reporting, auditing and certification related to social and environmental aspects. In contrast to earlier decades, regulatory responsibility has shifted, to some extent, from state institutions to companies, business associations and civil society organizations (CSOs).

As the CSR agenda has gathered momentum, so too has an international debate regarding its merits and limitations. The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) has been particularly concerned with its developmental impacts and implications. As concerns have mounted, there have been increasing calls for regulatory approaches that emphasize cor-

porate accountability, binding regulation and international law to control TNC activities.

To examine these issues, UNRISD organized the conference that is the subject of this report, attracting 200 participants mainly from United Nations (UN) agencies, CSOs, research centres and the CSR service industry. The conference had four main objectives:

- to present findings from UNRISD¹ and other research on the developmental implications of CSR policies and practices;
- to consider the potential and limits of new types of relations with TNCs involving public-private partnerships and non-governmental systems of regulation;
- to discuss the substance and significance of recent proposals, demands and campaigns calling for "corporate accountability"; and
- to examine the role the UN is playing, or should play, in the emerging corporate accountability agenda and international regulation of TNCs.

¹ Since 2000, UNRISD has co-ordinated an international project, Promoting Corporate Responsibility in Developing Countries: The Potential and Limits of Voluntary Initiatives, involving research in seven developing countries and thematic studies on TNC regulation, the corporate accountability movement and public-private partnerships. This work, and the conference itself, were partially funded by the MacArthur Foundation.



This report summarizes the presentations, discussions and debates in terms of four areas of analysis: the developmental implications of CSR; the assessment of multistakeholder initiatives (MSIs) and public-private partnerships; corporate accountability and the regulatory role of the UN; and future directions for the CSR agenda.²

The conference discussions revealed that a particular discourse and selected voluntary initiatives have, indeed, taken off during the past decade. But presentations from researchers examining the scale and impact of CSR in developing countries questioned the number of enterprises seriously engaged, the way CSR policies are imposed on developing countries through TNC supply chains, and the fact that certain key development issues are still largely ignored in the mainstream CSR agenda. These issues include poverty reduction, tax avoidance, transfer pricing and corporate lobbying for regressive policies, as well as the limited capacity of many micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to raise standards and compete with TNCs.

New types of regulatory institutions, involving so-called MSIs or non-governmental systems of regulation that set standards and promote company reporting, monitoring, auditing and certification, have attempted to address some of the limitations associated with voluntary approaches to CSR. Some such initiatives constitute innovative forms of regulation adapted to the new realities of globalization and global democratic governance. Yet their future role as effective regulatory institutions is uncertain, given their cost and complexity, and their tendency to multiply, diverge and compete. Various participants called for a more co-ordinated approach, greater emphasis on complaints procedures and sensitivity to the reality of SMEs in developing countries. The process of designing and implementing voluntary and multistakeholder initiatives must also become more participatory in various respects: being more “bottom-up” as opposed to “top-down”; involving stakeholders from developing countries in CSR policy making and

implementation; engaging CSOs that are truly representative of key stakeholders, such as workers; and endeavouring to improve not only working conditions, but also workers’ rights and empowerment.

Recent demands and proposals promoting corporate accountability and legalistic approaches to regulation were seen by some conference participants as an important corrective to the emphasis of the past two decades on deregulation and weaker forms of voluntary initiatives. These new approaches also attempt to ensure that key issues related to corporate power, privilege and duties—often ignored in CSR discourse and policy—are addressed. However, considerable challenges are faced by the emerging corporate accountability movement and the Northern non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have assumed a leading role. Not least, they involve mobilizing support and overcoming resistance by building broad-based coalitions that include trade unions and Southern CSOs, as well as allies in government, political parties and business.

Conference presentations by several UN officials and others highlighted the eclectic nature of the regulatory role of the UN vis-à-vis TNCs. The Global Compact generated considerable debate, with some participants seeing it as a useful forum for dialogue and learning, and others concerned that both the Compact and UN-business “partnership” initiatives have crowded out the consideration of more effective regulatory approaches, and done more to legitimize TNCs and facilitate their business activities in developing countries than to fundamentally improve their social and environmental performance. The recently drafted United Nations Norms on the Responsibilities of Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with Regard to Human Rights were generally viewed in a positive light, but there was considerable uncertainty regarding their political future. The conference discussions gave rise to various proposals for regulatory reform, including the effective implementation of existing UN norms and instruments; using the procurement power of the UN to promote CSR; strengthening the monitoring and investigative role of UN bodies; and embarking on the longer-term task of developing a comprehensive global regulatory infrastructure to deal not only with labour, consumer and environmental protection, but also with taxation and competition.

A recurring theme throughout the conference centred on the fact that the scope, scale and quality of

² As a means of providing a more comprehensive report of this UNRISD conference, this document is organized by themes and issues, rather than according to the actual progression of presentations and discussions on the meeting’s agenda (see pages 24 and 25). In this format, which attempts to provide more analysis, the main points or recommendations of speakers are dispersed throughout the report.

The papers and presentations of the event’s main speakers are available at www.unrisd.org.

CSR essentially depend on the institutional and political contexts in which companies operate. Despite some tendencies within the CSR movement to see voluntary approaches as an alternative to government regulation and law, the discussions highlighted the crucial role of public governance—involving government policy, civil society activism, international regulation and rights-based institutions—in shaping effective CSR practices, as well as the need to better articulate voluntary and legalistic approaches. They also emphasized the need for CSR policy makers and practitioners to be more sensitive to the developmental impacts of TNCs, and the priorities and realities of developing countries.

I. CSR and Development

The considerable groundswell of support for CSR from governments, international agencies and some sectors of civil society and business suggests that there is much to commend CSR from a developmental perspective. As Thandika Mkandawire (UNRISD Director) observed in his opening address at the conference, the discourse and agenda of CSR are now quite different from those of the 1980s, when TNCs and international financial institutions were concerned with “how to accelerate foreign direct investment by freeing up trade and investment, with little consideration of social, environmental and human rights impacts”. Today there is greater recognition of the need to strengthen or create institutions that promote CSR and good governance.

During the past decade, CSR critics and supporters alike have been concerned with the difficulties of scaling up the number of companies actively engaged in voluntary initiatives, and problems of weak implementation of CSR norms. But, as Peter Utting (UNRISD Deputy Director and CSR Research Co-ordinator) explained, the debate about CSR has evolved considerably. While the polemic of the early 1990s—between those who saw CSR as a “win-win” proposition and those who saw it as window-dressing or “greenwash”—still persists, other issues have emerged. Some companies are more proactive about CSR and cognizant of the limits of corporate self-regulation. Critics are concerned not only about whether companies are doing what they say, but also about how they are doing it. And they question whether CSR can really make a significant contri-

bution to development, even if many companies become more engaged.

Country-level impacts

Presentations by researchers from several developing countries revealed that a particular discourse and selected CSR initiatives have, indeed, taken off. They questioned, however, the number of enterprises seriously involved, the way CSR policies are often imposed on suppliers, and the fact that key development concerns—in which TNCs are implicated—are still largely ignored.

South Africa

David Fig (University of the Witwatersrand), explained that certain South African business sectors, mainly comprising large export or globally oriented corporations, are adopting CSR initiatives. But this agenda has not only been characterized by fairly weak implementation of CSR initiatives; it has also failed to address “the real development issues”. Attempts to deal with “the overriding development question”—the social and economic exclusion of black South Africans—through employment equity and black economic empowerment have often benefited those who already had access to skills and capital, and have not had significant impacts in terms of poverty reduction. Food security is another issue that has received little attention. CSR also takes place in a context of double standards where, for example, investment in nuclear energy, genetic modification (GM) technology and aluminium smelters contradict both government and corporate commitments to a sustainable development agenda. This situation, however, is not the sole responsibility of the corporate sector. It is facilitated by the state, which has shifted from a neo-Keynesian to a neoliberal strategy and has failed to enforce environmental regulations. And it is also partly explained by the fact that civil society activism in relation to certain issues is relatively weak.

Mexico

David Barkin (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco) noted the very different response of Mexican-based companies in relation to “corporate environmental responsibility” (CER) and CSR. Many large firms, from diverse sectors, are active on environmental issues, particularly eco-efficiency. And a host of organizations, associated with business, government, the non-governmental sector, universities and international bodies, have emerged to promote CER. SMEs

have been less active. CSR issues have been largely confined to the *maquiladora* (export assembly) sector, and have been vociferously raised by consumer and labour groups in the United States (US) and Canada together with Mexican counterparts. In other sectors CSR is often defined narrowly in terms of philanthropy. The lack of attention to CSR issues is largely explained by the regulatory and policy context within which business operates:

Firms come to Mexico for its cheap labour and relaxed administrative framework, and the government is attempting to simplify existing restrictions further and reduce corporate tax burdens. In this political environment it is little wonder that paternalistic systems of corporate charity are accepted as a substitute for social responsibility. ... Environmental issues are a different matter...because of the relatively widely recognized social benefits and the competitive demands for enforcement from trading partners.

China

Monina Wong (Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee / HKCIC) highlighted the difficulties of generalizing about the effectiveness and impacts of CSR initiatives, given the sectoral variations that exist. In the toy industry, for example, an international campaign involving Hong Kong-based NGOs and trade unions, and international counterparts, has been instrumental in generating some improvements in labour standards. In many other sectors, however, there are few CSR pressures or incentives. In fact, structural conditions associated with the abundance of cheap labour prepared to accept “3D” jobs (those that are dirty, demanding and dangerous); a weak regulatory environment, where labour law is often unenforced; and the lack of freedom of association and collective bargaining mean that “the incentive to not comply is always bigger than the incentive to comply”. Reporting on her own research on working conditions in labour-intensive industries in southern China that form part of international supply chains, Wong referred to three categories of firms. In the first category, “façade CSR” predominates, with many suppliers of some well-known Northern computer companies, for example, constituting “high-tech sweatshops” where neither national labour law nor TNC codes of conduct are implemented. In the second category are those firms whose CSR initiatives can be called “corporate policeman responsibility”; this category includes many toy and apparel manufacturers. CSR initiatives are implemented in a top-

down manner by TNC buyers, costs of compliance are not shared between buyers and suppliers, and workers are put under pressure not to reveal real conditions to auditors and outsiders. Furthermore, it is difficult for suppliers to sustain improvements in labour standards due to ongoing “race-to-the-bottom pricing” and pressures on delivery times exerted by buyer firms. Wong’s third category consists of CSR initiatives characterized by a bottom-up approach; greater involvement of NGOs in monitoring and complaints procedures; and more attention to workers’ education, training and organization. Some TNCs, such as Nike, are moving in this direction. But this approach is not without its tensions and limits, for example, when it involves efforts “to avoid and preempt real workers’ organizing”.

A narrow agenda

The fact that the mainstream CSR agenda often ignores key development issues that relate to TNCs was noted by other participants. Utting pointed out a major concern in this regard:

the dominant agenda has tended to focus on fairly narrow aspects of social and sustainable development and has ignored some of the basic issues to do with corporate size, power and policy influence; the negative effects of labour market flexibilization and economic liberalization; unsustainable investment and consumption patterns; and perverse fiscal and pricing practices.

Some of the fundamental determinants of maldevelopment, poverty and inequality do not figure prominently, if they figure at all, on the mainstream CSR agenda.

Deborah Doane (New Economics Foundation / NEF) noted that CSR should be about “how we solve some of the bigger global problems of our times that have to do with market systems”, rather than simply what business can do to get a leading edge through social and environmental initiatives. “[CSR] is quite good for the leaders, but there [are] problems with the laggards”, which require certain types of regulation. Ann Zammit (independent consultant) noted that “if we are talking about development and eliminating poverty, then one has to take into account the policy environment” and the way corporations have shaped a macro policy regime that can have perverse developmental effects.

Halina Ward (International Institute for Environment and Development / IIED) noted that CSR can have

negative developmental impacts due to the way in which costs and benefits are allocated, sometimes penalizing developing country firms and benefiting dominant players. “Have we unwittingly created an agenda that plays into the hands of big business by calling for higher and higher standards that the base can’t meet?”

The issue of taxation prompted several commentaries from panellists and participants. The underlying concern was that the CSR agenda often ignores issues of taxation. Eddy Rich (Department for International Development / DFID) noted:

I am a bit surprised to hear again a discussion on CSR and development that spends a lot of time discussing things like codes of conduct, health and safety and labour standards, when in fact the...biggest contribution that business can make to development is through taxation. ... You have companies spending a lot of time developing codes... [while at the same time] employing an army of accountants to try and avoid paying their full social and economic duty in the places where they operate. ... [T]axation is the way that the government and the private sector can start engaging properly—that is the mechanism for partnership.

Derek Yach (World Health Organization / WHO) observed that the CSR agenda often ignores health issues as well. This is particularly apparent in the case of tobacco companies that are “very proud of their human rights record, their labour standards and their environmental standards. Pity their product kills half of its regular users.” He added that many NGOs and the UN Global Compact have not paid sufficient attention to health issues. If these issues are not addressed, situations will arise where corporations are recognized as socially responsible when, in fact, their core business activities kill or harm people.

Several participants noted that CSR is structurally constrained by the fact that it takes place in a context of neoliberalism and policy frameworks that cultivate business practices that can have perverse developmental impacts. These include subcontracting, fiscal incentives and the downsizing or weakening of the state’s regulatory apparatus. Barkin observed that the problem in Mexico is not the lack of laws, but rather the shift from state inspection and monitoring to “self-compliance”. Referring to Peru, Renato Alva Pino (independent consultant) commented that

given this context, CSR appears more as a way of “decorating” neoliberalism rather than an effective means of allocating or transferring resources for sustainable development.

Florian Rochat (Centre Europe–Tiers Monde / CETIM) observed that the issue of corporate responsibility extends well beyond the factory floor. This is evident not only in relation to subcontracting, which enables companies to externalize risk, but also in relation to the political strategies of corporations to liberalize trade and investment regimes, including agriculture, which threaten the livelihoods of millions of peasant producers.

John Sayer (*Development in Practice*) noted that discussions on CSR tend to pay insufficient attention to the fundamental development issue: how to achieve poverty reduction in developing countries. “And when we do touch on poverty reduction, we seem to do it at the macroeconomic level...[rather than] the micro level.” The challenge is to deal with the impacts of investment and corporate activity on jobs, prices, the affordability of basic goods and services, and social equity.

When looking at CSR from a societal perspective, Judith Richter (independent researcher, and author of *Holding Corporations Accountable*) warned that we need to go beyond the question of labour standards. It is necessary to adopt a broader perspective, starting from a vision of what society and development might look like from the standpoint of human rights and social justice, and from there defining what firms should and should not do.

How broad should the CSR agenda be?

Several speakers introduced a note of caution regarding the tendency or temptation to add more and more issues to the CSR agenda.

John Dunning (University of Reading) argued that CSR needs to be placed within the wider context of the effectiveness of market and extra-market institutions in influencing the goals and conduct of firms. He also asked panellists whether there is, in fact, an optimum agenda, noting that the content and scope of CSR is “very strongly contextually related to firms, stages of development, belief systems and institutional capabilities”. Reminding the conference of the past history of “performance requirements” imposed on TNCs, he noted that burdening companies with more and more

responsibilities can have unintended consequences, and that it is important to focus on incentive structures.

Guy Standing (International Labour Organization/ILO) noted that CSR approaches tend to confuse what *should* be done with what *can* be done. At the company level, CSR needs to start from basics, identifying minimum responsibilities related, for example, to training and hygiene facilities, gradually building up—on the basis of bargaining and capacity—to address issues of “social equity” and employment security, and finally aspects concerning democratic practices within the firm. Measurable outcomes and impacts are also required.

Referring to the experience of promoting company “triple bottom line” reporting, Dwight Justice (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions/ICFTU) also reiterated the need for tangible results. “We seem to be moving into areas of greater and greater intangibility, and it becomes very hard to measure and quantify things in a way that is meaningful and comparable.” There is a tendency to promote reporting “for the sake of it”, rather than reporting that can be tied to some form of accountability, as is being proposed, for example, by the Publish What You Pay campaign, or requiring companies to report on whom they are sourcing from.

Northern bias and Southern realities

Various speakers observed that the CSR agenda is heavily influenced by Northern concerns, priorities and perceptions about development in the South. David Murphy (New Academy of Business) presented the findings of case studies and projects carried out in several developing countries to bring new and diverse Southern perspectives to debates about CSR. “Most current CSR debates are framed at the international organization or Northern country level with little attention to many of the particular issues and concerns of Southern stakeholders.” Home-grown CSR initiatives and approaches, generally involving micro and small enterprises, receive relatively little attention in the international CSR discourse, debates and literature, as compared to the initiatives of large corporations.

Lorraine Ruffing (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development/UNCTAD) noted that in many countries SMEs are often excluded from public-private sector dialogues on CSR, given their relatively weak participation in chambers of commerce. Governments

often design their SME policy in a top-down manner and do little to promote dialogue with this sector. Other constraints also impede SME participation in CSR initiatives. Referring to a public-private partnership to promote cleaner production in the tanning industry in Mexico, Barkin observed that red tape and opposition from larger corporations make it extremely difficult for SMEs to access the credit they need to be able to participate. He noted that chambers of commerce associated with some industrial sectors are dominated by large enterprises that can block the flow of benefits to small enterprises:

So the question isn't simply how to get entrepreneurs [interested in CSR], but how to deal with the unequal exercise of political and economic power that is preventing international programmes from effectively working at the SME level.

Asif Hasnain (United Nations Industrial Development Organization / UNIDO) observed that unless enforceable regulatory frameworks are in place, local politics can easily undermine the implementation of CSR initiatives.

Contradictions in CSR activism

Several speakers and participants were concerned about the apparent bias in the mainstream CSR agenda toward large TNCs and labour standards in their core enterprises when much of the working population in developing countries is unemployed and underemployed, and when employment and business are heavily associated with the self-employed, micro and family enterprises.

Ajit Singh (University of Cambridge) noted that in India and most other countries, the vast majority of the working population is in the informal sector. He was concerned that the CSR agenda, and some North American activists in the anti-sweatshop movement, had not fully taken this fact on board; nor had they understood the developmental implications of their efforts to improve formal sector labour standards and labour rights associated with freedom of association and collective bargaining. Enforcing higher labour standards in a situation of mass unemployment would serve to reduce employment. “Increasing the demand for labour in both the rich and poor countries would be a much better way of increasing labour standards.” More attention also needs to be focused on basic issues of poverty reduction, the prevention of hunger and raising labour standards in the informal sector.

Particularly important is the need to reverse the trend of the past 20 years whereby “developing countries have been deprived of policy autonomy” to deal with issues such as foreign direct investment (FDI) and financial flows. “The anti-sweatshop movement should partly change its focus and ask people in the US treasury and in Wall Street what *they* are up to.” Singh also emphasized that achieving high rates of economic growth is essential for development. In response to a question about the possible negative implications of a high-growth strategy for sustainable development, he noted that the only way out of this dilemma is to change consumer preferences from products and methods of production associated with polluting activities to those that do not pollute or that pollute less. The considerable ability shown by Northern anti-sweatshop activists in changing consumer preferences in the footwear and apparel sectors could be extended to the environmental field.

The contradictory effects of some types of anti-sweatshop activism were also pointed out by Peter Newell (Institute of Development Studies/IDS), who referred to the unintended consequences of certain efforts to eliminate child labour in Bangladesh. He noted, however, that this was less a criticism of the movement than a reaffirmation that it is the responsibility of the state to deal with the so-called informal sector.

Activist perspectives

Activists involved in the North American and European anti-sweatshop campaigns acknowledged that insufficient attention has been paid to the situation of workers in the subcontracting chain, including home workers. Referring, however, to recent initiatives in North America and Australia, Bob Jeffcott (Maquila Solidarity Network/MSN) noted that this situation is beginning to change. According to Ineke Zeldenrust (Clean Clothes Campaign/CCC), the issue of the informal sector is a major challenge for activists concerned with labour standards. In relation to the garment industry, she identified three issues. First, “even in the so-called formal sector...a lot of workers are, in fact, informally employed” as they have no security of contract. Second, the nature of informality varies considerably throughout the subcontracting chain, and requires different activist strategies. Third, “we need a transformation of the labour movement”, as current trade union structures often cannot address the needs of subcontract labourers and women workers, in particular, who may want to organize on a com-

munity basis rather than in the workplace. Reform in labour law is also needed in many countries because informal workers are not covered by current legislation. Regarding activist strategies, she proposed that the issue of security of employment be placed firmly on the agenda, as had been done with the issues of a “living wage” and freedom of association. It is also important to develop a division of labour that corresponds to the realities of globalization, moving beyond the traditional thinking that divides the world into consumers in the North and producers in the South. Increasingly, production in the garment industry is controlled by TNCs from East Asian countries with supply chains in Africa and Central America. And countries such as India are becoming important consumer markets for companies like Nike and Adidas.

The business case debate

The considerable data that the ILO and others have generated from surveys of firms in developing and transitional countries suggest that there is a positive correlation between good performance on labour standards, equity and democracy, and good economic performance. Given this apparent “business case” for CSR, Standing asked why more firms are not taking CSR seriously. In his opinion “market failure”, associated with lack of information, is an important factor.

Others were less convinced of the so-called “win-win” argument. Justice noted that while some companies are taking the “high road” in terms of CSR, there is not always a business case for doing the right thing.

Sometimes you need rules. ... [A] problem with the CSR agenda is that so much of it is dependent on an almost religious attachment to a business case idea or a faith that contradicts what we have learned about altruism and philanthropy—we can’t depend on it.

In Doane’s view, the market does not necessarily reward good behaviour:

there are a plethora of examples where the opposite would seem to be true. ... [C]ompanies ... have to make ends meet and in hard or ‘ruthless’ times, profits must ultimately override any altruistic concerns for society or the environment.

The recent withdrawal of Littlewoods from the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) is one example. The pressures to compete can also fuel a race to the bottom, as evidenced in the pressures on companies to relocate their sourcing of garments from Sri Lanka to China.

II. New Relations with TNCs

A second set of issues addressed at the conference concerned the potential and limits of new types of relations that have emerged in recent years between TNCs and other corporate interests, on one hand, and non-governmental and international organizations, on the other. Two panels focused specifically on public-private partnerships and MSIs associated with standard-setting, company reporting on social and environmental aspects, monitoring, auditing, certification, and stakeholder dialogue and learning. These panels addressed the following kinds of questions.

- Are these new institutional arrangements an effective means of deepening and scaling up CSR?
- Are they overcoming the problems and limits that characterize corporate self-regulation?
- Can they move from the current phase of pilot testing and experimentation to become a new global system of regulation of corporate activity?

Dara O'Rourke (University of California-Berkeley) noted the rapid expansion of "non-governmental systems of labour regulation" in various sectors and the lack of serious analysis of their role and impact. The growth of these initiatives reflects not only an attempt to go beyond traditional regulatory approaches, but also changes in global production processes.

As networks of production extend out along increasingly complex supply chains, interested stakeholders are exploring systems of dispersed but interconnected regulation over production. These emerging regulatory systems are almost

complement government legislation and constitute an important response to the adverse impacts of globalization. To do so, however, they need to evolve toward more credible, transparent, accountable and democratic systems, and they need to connect in some interoperable way so that they complement and reinforce each other. The danger is that rather than converging toward more complete and democratic regulatory systems, they will "diverge into a plethora of initiatives competing for the hearts and minds of consumers, serving only to confuse the public and undermine the credibility of non-governmental initiatives". Evaluating these initiatives on the basis of criteria associated with legitimacy, rigour, accountability and complementarity is, therefore, crucial.

Zeldenrust also referred to the genesis of MSIs, emphasizing their intended role as instruments and institutions that could address two fundamental problems: the limits of corporate self-regulation, and the "regulation gap" that has resulted from the fact that local and national governments, as well as international organizations such as the ILO, lack "teeth" and enforcement capacity. MSIs should also be seen in relation to the fact that trade unions are often repressed or weak; and suppliers, constrained by their relations with retailers and TNCs, have little room for manoeuvre when it comes to meeting workers' demands. A defining characteristic of MSIs is their engagement with NGOs and trade unions, although "the type of engagement varies considerably", with some (for example, the ETI and the Fair Wear Foundation /FWF) but not all (for example, the FLA) having tripartite boards. Regarding the experimental nature of MSIs, this should be seen more as an ongoing feature rather than a phase. "Given the inherent risks and the many

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