



BUSINESS FIGHTS POVERTY: REBUILD BETTER

# THREE INSIGHTS BUSINESS LEADERSHIP TO REBUILD BETTER

DATE: MONDAY 21/06

THEME: LEADERSHIP

FORMAT: WEBINAR

## SPEAKERS

■ **Matthew Oh**, Global Sustainability Manager, Unilever

■ **Catalina Garcia**, Global Director of Corporate Affairs, AB InBev and Interim Director & Board Director AB InBev Foundation

■ **Ruth Mhlanga**, Head of Private Sector Team, Oxfam GB

■ **Paul Ellingstad**, Pearson

### Moderator:

Zahid Torres-Rahman, Founder and CEO,  
*Business Fights Poverty*

IN THIS WEBINAR, OUR PANELLISTS DISCUSSED HOW COMPANIES TURN COMMITMENTS INTO ACTIONS, THE IMPORTANCE OF BUSINESS GOING BEYOND PHILANTHROPY, AND THE PRACTICAL CHALLENGES THAT MAY ARISE WHEN TRYING TO DO THE RIGHT THING.

OUR SPEAKERS LISTED EXAMPLES OF INITIATIVES THAT DEALT WITH BOTH IMMEDIATE NEEDS AND LONG-LASTING CHANGE, TALKED ABOUT THE CRITICAL ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS IN IMPROVING THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF BUSINESS, AND EXPLAINED WHY CORPORATE CULTURE MAY NEED TO BE REFORMED.

## KEY INSIGHTS

### 1 BUSINESS LEADERS MUST TURN COMMITMENTS INTO REAL ACTIONS

Our panellists kicked off the conversation by recognising it has never been so urgent that business leaders work to transform their commitments into actions. Multinational

corporations must not only offer the necessary support to communities in supply chains badly hit by the pandemic but also promote the type of systemic change required to tackle global problems. With respect to this, Catalina Garcia cited initiatives at AB InBev that met emergency demands (such as repurposing plants to produce hand sanitizers) as well as other actions that fostered long-lasting changes (such as offering technical and financial help for small retailers opening their ecommerce shops).

Similarly, Matthew Oh highlighted how Unilever's principle of embedding human rights into the company's strategy works in practice. He mentioned Unilever's education campaigns around body confidence and self-esteem, the company's efforts to provide access to hygiene facilities for the most vulnerable, and initiatives that offer training and supporting networks to women entrepreneurs.

**MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS MUST NOT ONLY OFFER THE NECESSARY SUPPORT TO COMMUNITIES IN SUPPLY CHAINS BADLY HIT BY THE PANDEMIC BUT ALSO PROMOTE THE TYPE OF SYSTEMIC CHANGE REQUIRED TO TACKLE GLOBAL PROBLEMS.**

## **2 TO PROMOTE SYSTEMIC CHANGES, COMPANIES MUST GO BEYOND PHILANTHROPY**

Paul Ellingstad explained that the pandemic has accelerated digital transformations in the world of work, and that the consequences could lead to even more inequality between high- and low-skilled workers as well as between urban and rural areas. In order to avoid such a fate, it is critical that companies, governments, and NGOs work together and build partnerships that offer upskilling and reskilling opportunities to everyone, from teenagers finishing high school to those already in the second half of their careers.

**IT IS CRITICAL THAT COMPANIES, GOVERNMENTS, AND NGOS WORK TOGETHER AND BUILD PARTNERSHIPS THAT OFFER UPSKILLING AND RESKILLING OPPORTUNITIES TO EVERYONE, FROM TEENAGERS FINISHING HIGH SCHOOL TO THOSE ALREADY IN THE SECOND HALF OF THEIR CAREERS.**

Ruth Mhlanga added that collaborative initiatives can be extremely powerful in helping companies to embed social values and inclusionary policies across their operations and throughout their supply chains. In her view, collaborations between businesses, civil society actors, advocacy groups, and governments can enable good working practices that align with human rights make it possible for living wages to be established as standards for whole sectors. This is how systemic change starts to take hold.

## **3 COMPANIES MAY FACE CHALLENGES WHEN TRYING TO DO THE RIGHT THING**

Speakers acknowledged companies face many practical difficulties when trying to turn commitments into actions. For instance, the shareholder value model which most multinational corporations adhere to requires the construction of business cases and cost-benefit analyses that are not easily aligned with embedding social values into corporate strategies. A company planning to monitor human rights practices across supply chains may not be able to immediately accrue the financial return of such a plan. Besides, small and medium enterprises may lack the knowledge and resources to undertake serious social impact evaluations. Therefore, our speakers agreed that cultural change is needed in the business world. To rebuild better, companies must do the right thing even when it does not further profit motives or dividend obligations. Committed employers and employees, cross-sector partnerships, and cooperation between businesses and governments are key instruments to deliver the systemic change that we want.

### **RESOURCES**

- [COVID-19 and its economic toll on women: The story behind the numbers](#)
- [Unilever: Planet & Society](#)
- [Promoting Human Rights in Global Supply Chains](#)
- [AB Inbev: Making an impact where it matters](#)
- [Pearson: Sustainable Business Plan 2030](#)