

Annex I

Concept Note

2025 Asia Inclusive and Responsible Business (IRB) Forum

Tuesday 11 February – Wednesday 12 February 2025

Bangkok, Thailand

Organizers: Oxfam in Asia and Sal Forest Co. Ltd.

Background

Asia is the fastest-growing region in the world, and the private sector clearly plays a critical role in developing Asian economies. Yet it is also a contributor to the compounding crises of increasing inequality, climate change, and environmental destruction. The private sector can, however, be a powerful force for change when people and the planet are put at the heart of business practices, eventually promoting sustainable development, and reducing inequalities.

To encourage adoption of Inclusive and Responsible business (IRB), Oxfam in Asia organized the first ever Asia IRB Forum just under two years ago, in February 2023. This event brought together the private sector, civil society organizations (CSOs), and other key stakeholders for an exchange and learning journey towards business models that champion social and environmental sustainability and contribute to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely: SDG 8, on decent work and economic growth; SDG 5, on gender equality; SDG 12, on sustainable consumption and production patterns; and SDG 17, on partnerships to achieve the SDGs.

The 2023 Asia IRB Forum was well received and provided a space to listen, discuss, and brainstorm on opportunities and challenges. The dialogues and interaction between private sector companies of different sizes, from micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) to large multinational corporations (MNCs), and diverse civic actors, proved particularly valuable. The following insights emerged from the 2023 Asia IRB Forum.

- **The business case for inclusive and responsible business:** Adopting IRB practices can result in commercial success for businesses.
- **It is possible to adopt and implement inclusive and responsible business:** Businesses of various sizes have successfully adhered to IRB practices.
- **We must go beyond business as usual:** Inclusive and responsible business is no longer a ‘nice to have’, but is an essential, and we must go beyond surface-level actions.
- **Who is involved in a successful inclusive and responsible business model?** An inclusive ecosystem of stakeholders that encourages and incentivizes positive social outcomes is required for businesses to successfully adopt IRB practices, rather than attempting to do so alone.
- **Governments must strengthen regulatory mechanisms and adopt policies that support inclusive and responsible business outcomes.**

The 2025 Asia IRB Forum aims to continue the conversations and connections that began two years ago, and to keep up the momentum, as part of the longer-term drive for adoption of IRB.

Objectives of the 2025 Asia IRB Forum:

1. To provide an updated picture and information regarding the state of IRB in Asia, recent developments, challenges, successes, trends, and innovations, emphasizing the values of IRB and the need for a fairer, more inclusive, and more responsible economy.
2. To nurture the momentum for IRB created by the 2023 Asia IRB Forum, and renew the connections and networks already established.
3. To profile and publicize the progress and successes already achieved in promoting IRB models by Oxfam and its partners through their programs, in Asia and beyond.
4. To facilitate a space for dialogue and exchange with private sector actors, regarding their experience in adopting inclusive and responsible business practice, identifying challenges, opportunities, and benefit from collaborating with civil society groups.
5. To learn about the mechanism of mandatory human rights due diligence (HRDD) and its impacts on business in Asia.

Expected outcomes:

- Updated knowledge on the state of IRB in Asia, recent developments, challenges, successes, trends, and innovations, and invigorated relationships and networks to support the spread of adoption of IRB.
- Improved understanding of key regulation that supports the development of IRB (in Asia, the European Union, United States of America, and other important markets).
- Enhanced knowhow and capability of Oxfam staff and partner organizations on private sector engagement and the realization of IRB models and practices.
- Strengthened Private Sector Engagement (PSE) community of practices of Oxfam in Asia in connection with other regions.
- Profiles of Oxfam and partners' initiatives and successful examples of adoption of the IRB model within the confederation and for external stakeholders.
- Appreciation of IRB models at different scales, including small businesses and women-led businesses, together with creation of avenues for future collaboration and learning among these alternate business models and enterprises.

Tentative Program

Day 1 - 11 February 2025 [Public Forum]

Morning

- Opening talk series: Future of IRB
- Panelist discussion + interactive participation from speakers from the floor.

Afternoon

- Parallel sessions: 4 thematic breakout rooms
 1. Walk the talk: paving the way for HRDD commitment and actions in Asia
 2. Addressing gender inequality and unpaid care work in supply chains
 3. Enabling living incomes and living wages in global supply chains
 4. Partnerships for a circular economy
- Plenary discussion: report back and cross-sharing & closing of Day 1
- Market visit & Networking drink reception

Day 2 - 12th February 2025 [Public Forum]

Morning

- Interactive plenary: Making IRB the norm: Recommendations for Effective IRB
- Facilitated Individual Consulting: Solving Challenges Together

Afternoon

- Drive through actions workshops:
 - Room I: Going beyond sustainability and inclusion.
 - Room II: Getting started on HREDD.
- Plenary discussion: report back and cross-sharing

Expected Audience: 120 people

Governmental agencies, embassies, multistakeholder platforms, CSOs/NGOs UN agencies, regional development programs, donors, Oxfam affiliates and countries, Oxfam partners, private sector (MNCs, MSMEs, buyers, investors, associations), farmers/workers organization, trade unions etc.
