



Priorities and Perspectives for the 2026 UN Forum on Business and Human Rights

Summary of Consultations with Business,
Civil Society, and Consultancies

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Section I: Executive Summary

This report synthesizes findings from stakeholder consultations held in April 2026 in preparation for the 2026 UN Responsible Business and Human Rights Forum, Asia-Pacific. In total, five separate online consultations were conducted with representatives from three stakeholder groups – businesses, civil society, and consultancies. Together, these sessions engaged participants from across the Asia-Pacific region and produced a rich body of feedback on thematic priorities, operational preferences, and programme design for the Forum.

This report will be published alongside the call for session proposals on 30 April 2026 and will directly inform programme design and the proposal review process.

The consultations across business, civil society, and consultancies point to a clear and consistent direction for the 2026 Forum. Stakeholders widely recognize that the region has made important progress at the level of policy and regulation, particularly with the expansion of human rights due diligence frameworks and National Action Plans. However, the dominant challenge now lies in implementation – translating commitments into practice, demonstrating tangible impact, and ensuring accountability on the ground. Across all groups, participants emphasized persistent gaps in deep-tier supply chains, weak access to remedy, and the absence of effective, trusted stakeholder engagement. While the theme of “Building Resilience, Advancing Rights” resonates, there is a strong expectation that resilience must go beyond managing crises to addressing structural risks and power imbalances, ensuring that businesses actively embed human rights into systems and decision making. At the same time, stakeholders highlighted the need for the Forum itself to evolve – from a space primarily for dialogue and exchange to one that actively supports problem solving, practical learning, and collaboration. This includes a clear shift toward case-based and interactive formats, stronger representation of businesses, workers, and communities, and the creation of safe but honest spaces for engagement.

Overall, the message is unequivocal: the Forum remains a valued regional platform, but its continued relevance will depend on its ability to drive implementation, deepen inclusion, and deliver concrete, practice-oriented outcomes.

The Forum theme – Building Resilience, Advancing Rights – resonated across all groups; however, across consultations, “resilience” is interpreted in different ways. There is

strong convergence in viewing resilience as the ability for businesses, supply chains, and communities to maintain respect for human rights in the face of growing pressures – from geopolitical shifts and climate impacts to market and regulatory changes. At the same time, participants – particularly from civil society and consultancies – encouraged a more careful framing, noting that resilience should not be seen only as the ability to manage disruption, but also as an opportunity to strengthen underlying systems. This includes ensuring that responses to crises do not inadvertently shift risks onto workers or vulnerable groups, and that business efforts are supported by stronger governance, accountability, and collaboration across stakeholders. Taken together, this suggests an important direction for the Forum: to frame resilience not only in terms of adaptation, but as a pathway to more robust, inclusive, and accountable business practices that can sustain both operations and rights over time.

Business participants focused on sustaining human rights commitments amid geopolitical volatility, regulatory complexity, and economic pressure. Civil society framed resilience in terms of protecting rights holders – including communities, workers, and human rights defenders – and stressed that advancing rights requires accountability, not performative compliance. Consultancies highlighted the persistent gap between policy and practice, emphasizing that resilience depends on embedding human rights into core business operations rather than treating them as risk mitigation.

Across all groups, a consistent call emerged: less theory, more practice. Stakeholders want the Forum to move from awareness and commitment to implementation – with concrete tools, honest case studies, and

session formats that enable genuine dialogue rather than one-way presentation. On operational preferences, there was strong and consistent demand for interactive workshops over panel discussions, closed-door safe spaces for honest peer exchange, and sessions grounded in real case studies.

Shared priorities across all groups

- Translating policy commitments into operational practice
- Ensuring grievance mechanisms deliver measurable outcomes
- Navigating evolving regulatory frameworks (e.g. EU CSDDD, UFLPA, emerging national laws)
- Strengthening SME inclusion and deep-tier supply chain due diligence
- Advancing meaningful multistakeholder engagement, including addressing trust deficits, power imbalances, and barriers to collaboration
- Prioritizing interactive, workshop-based formats

Specific priorities by stakeholder group

Business	Civil Society	Consultancies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operationalizing HRDD for SMEs and deep-tier supply chains • Human rights risks in AI and digital technologies • Meaningful multi-stakeholder and civil society dialogue • Internal buy-in and leadership engagement • Regulatory navigation: understanding and implementing evolving mandatory HRDD frameworks (EU CSDDD, UFLPA, and emerging national laws) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of human rights defenders and civic space • Worker voice, freedom of association, and collective bargaining • Ensuring mHRDD legislation is centered on affected communities • Just transition and climate-related rights (esp. women in garment/textile sectors) • SLAPP threats and state complicity in BHR violations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operationalizing HRDD: moving clients from policy to practice, with credible impact measurement and functional grievance mechanisms • Industry-level collaboration and removing anti-trust barriers • Responsible disengagement under economic/geopolitical stress • Credible impact measurement and functional grievance mechanisms • Greater brand presence and consultancy roles as implementation partners

Section 2: Context and Background

About the UNRBHR Forum

The UN Responsible Business and Human Rights Forum is the Asia-Pacific region's leading annual platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue on business and human rights (BHR) and the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). The Forum is held annually, bringing together governments, civil society organizations, human rights defenders, trade unions, academia, national human rights institutions, businesses, industry associations, and the media.

The Forum is co-organized by UNDP, ILO, UNICEF, UN Women, UNEP, OHCHR and IOM, in collaboration with the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights. Now in its eighth edition, it serves as the primary regional space for stocktaking, peer learning, and dialogue on responsible business conduct in Asia-Pacific.

The 2026 forum

The 2026 Forum is planned for 15-17 September 2026 at the UN Conference Centre in Bangkok, Thailand. As in past years, there will be a call for session proposals, which is scheduled to open on 30 April 2026. Proposals will be reviewed by a dedicated committee comprised of members of the co-organizing organizations, which will review proposals against priorities informed by past forums, feedback received, and this consultation report.

How 2025 consultation feedback shaped the 2025 Forum

In 2025, feedback from pre-forum consultations played a critical role in ensuring the Forum responds to needs on the ground, serves the interests of the participants in attendance and continues to be fit for purpose in advancing discussion and action on business and human rights in the region. In particular it was used as follows:

- Informed the 4 sub-themes
 - Policy Coherence and Regulatory Evolution

- Markets, Finance and Supply Chains
- Inclusion, Protection, and Participation
- Sustainability and Transitions
- Used input on session format and length to design the agenda
- Developed concept note reflecting diverse BHR stakeholder contexts
- Prioritized pressing issues, including regulatory and security developments
- Designed focused, organic sessions to enable deeper, actionable discussions
- Shifted to a more participant-driven approach aligned with needs and priorities
- Introduced interactive, creative, and experimental session formats

Based on feedback from the 2025 forum, priorities for the Secretariat and the co-organizers are as follows:

- **Plan earlier and communicate clearly**
Advance timelines for proposals, speakers, visas, and schedule publication
- **Curate for depth, while managing volume**
Fewer sessions, clearer thematic clustering, stronger focus on implementation and case-sharing
- **Make the Forum more interactive**
Dedicated discussion time, more working formats, and space for community and peer exchange
- **Strengthen multi-stakeholder balance**
Broaden representation beyond UN; increase participation from business, trade unions, and rights-holders
- **Enhance networking as a core function**
Structured networking opportunities, improved breaks, and tools for pairing and collaboration

About the 2026 consultation process

In April 2026, the Forum co-organizers conducted a series of online consultations with three distinct stakeholder groups:

business, civil society, and consultancies. Each session followed a common structure comprising a plenary discussion on the Forum theme, breakout discussions on thematic and operational questions, and live polling via Mentimeter to capture immediate, anonymized responses from all participants.

The business track comprised two sessions held on 7 and 8 April 2026, which were attended by 89 participants. The civil society track comprised two sessions on 6 and 10 April 2026, which were attended by 124 participants. Both were attended by civil society organizations from across Asia-Pacific, spanning labor rights, child rights, environmental justice, human rights defenders, migrant worker advocacy, and digital rights. The consultancy track comprised one session held on 9 April 2026, attended by approximately 52 participants from consultancy firms, law firms, and advisory organizations operating across the Asia-Pacific region.

Participants represented a diverse range of sectors, geographies, and organization types across the Asia-Pacific region.

How this report will be used

This report is one of the primary inputs into the design of the 2026 Forum programme. Findings will directly inform concept note development and identification of sub-thematic tracks, the proposal review process, and decisions on session formats and programme structure. This continues a practice established in 2025, when consultation feedback similarly shaped the programme.

Timeline, capacity and proposed session types

Capacity

The 2026 Forum will take place over three days, a change from the four-day format of previous editions. This reflects the financial and human resource constraints facing the UN system and partner organizations more broadly, and the programme will be designed accordingly.

With a shorter programme, the total number of sessions will be reduced compared to prior years. The balance of session formats will also shape what is possible: a programme weighted toward longer 60- and 90-minute sessions accommodates fewer slots overall than one with more 30- and 45-minute sessions. Proposers should be aware that competition for slots will be higher than in previous years, and that the Secretariat may reach out to propose collaboration between submitters working on similar or overlapping themes to maximize inclusion and diversity of session topics, formats, and stakeholder perspectives.

To make the most of the convening opportunity, affiliated events are encouraged on the Monday before and the Friday following the Forum. These events are independently organized but may be listed on the Forum website and included in promotional materials.

Indicative Timeline

The following outlines key milestones in the lead-up to the 2026 Forum.

- April – Consultations, call for session proposals
- May-June – Concept note with sub-thematic tracks, registration opens, session proposal review and decision, programme design
- July – Agenda announced

Proposed session types

Proposed session types in the 2026 Forum have been matched to time allocations deliberately. This reflects an effort to align format with feasibility – ensuring that the length of a session matches what can realistically and meaningfully be done within it. A 90-minute slot, for example, will only be allocated to proposals that are genuinely workshop-style: interactive, facilitated, and participant-driven. Panels or presentations submitted under the 90-minute format will not be accepted as-is and may be asked to reformat or resubmit under a shorter slot.

Proposers should also be aware that the total number of available session slots – and therefore the number of organizations that can be directly engaged in the programme – varies depending on the mix of session lengths. A programme with more 90-minute sessions has fewer slots overall than one weighted toward 30- or 60-minute sessions. Where similar proposals are received, the Secretariat may invite organizations to collaborate on a joint session rather than run parallel ones.

Time	Description
30 minutes	Case studies, spotlight conversations, research presentations, moderator with a maximum of two speakers
60 minutes	Traditional panel format with a maximum of 4 speakers and a moderator. Each speaker provides short opening remarks, followed by moderated discussion and audience Q&A. Best suited for sessions that benefit from multiple viewpoints on a shared theme.
90 minutes	Interactive, hands-on workshop designed to build skills, co-develop tools or strategies, or engage in problem-solving. Ideal for capacity-building or action-oriented dialogue. Should include active facilitation and participant involvement with no panel.

Section 3: Reflections on the theme, ‘Building Resilience, Advancing Rights’

Participants across all three groups were invited to share what the theme – Building Resilience, Advancing Rights – means to them in the context of business and human rights in Asia-Pacific. Their responses reveal both shared concerns and distinct emphases, which should inform how the Forum structures its thematic tracks.

Civil society

Civil society participants brought a distinctly rights holder-centered reading of the theme, framing resilience in terms of people and movements: the resilience of communities facing corporate harm, of human rights defenders under pressure, and of organizations navigating shrinking civic space and funding cuts. While there was recognition that resilience relates to the ability to anticipate, absorb, and adapt to shocks, participants emphasized that this must be understood in terms of whether people and systems can sustain rights under pressure, not only whether systems continue to function.

- Protection of human rights defenders and their communities – framed as a precondition for any meaningful resilience
- Worker power and voice – freedom of association, collective bargaining, and meaningful participation in due diligence processes
- Migrant workers and crisis preparedness – lack of systems to protect migrant workers during conflicts (e.g. the Middle East situation) cited as a critical gap
- Just transition for working women – linking climate adaptation to labor rights, particularly for women in garment and textile sectors
- Building grassroots-led movements for mandatory HRDD legislation, and resisting corporate capture and impunity
- Concern that ‘resilience’ could be co-opted to mean continuity for

business rather than greater power for rights holders

At the same time, participants expressed concern that resilience could be interpreted narrowly as business continuity or risk management, rather than as a pathway to strengthen accountability and rights protection. There was a clear call to ensure that resilience is anchored in power, participation, and protection, rather than shifting the burden of adaptation onto workers and communities.

“There is no resilience, neither nor rights, without the local CSOs involvement.”
– Civil society participant, Session II

“Building resilience means ensuring our workers – especially women in the garment sector – have safe working conditions, fair wages, and social protection during crises.”
– Civil society participant, Session II

“Resilience as developing the strategies or the capacities to anticipate, absorb, but also adapt to and recover from the disruption.”
– Civil society participant, Session II

Business

Business participants interpreted the theme through the lens of operational pressure and continuity. A strong current in both business sessions was the challenge of maintaining human rights commitments under geopolitical disruption, regulatory uncertainty, and economic stress.

- Supply chain resilience and the embedding of due diligence beyond Tier 1
- Moving from broad ESG commitments to concrete, measurable outcomes
- The role of regulation in creating a level playing field versus imposing unmanageable compliance burdens
- Digital rights, AI, and the future of work as an underexplored dimension of resilience
- Inclusive resilience – ensuring persons with

disabilities, migrant workers, and other vulnerable groups are not left behind

- The tension between naming-and-shaming approaches and collaborative, incentive-based remedy

“A stronger business model for Asia-Pacific is one where resilience is measured not only by continuity of supply, but by whether rights are protected when conditions become difficult.”

– Business participant, Session II

Consultancies

Consultancy participants brought a practitioner’s lens, with several noting the theme felt too broad or vague. When pushed to articulate what resilience means in practice, a richer set of interpretations emerged.

- Resilience as a call for businesses to actively reshape systems rather than simply endure pressures
- Accountability as the missing link – enforcement of policy, not just its existence

- The climate parallel: the theme mirrors the shift from mitigation to adaptation, and represents a counter-response to backsliding
- Greater attention needed to vulnerable groups including informal workers, migrants, women, and smallholder farmers

“Resilience in Asia-Pacific should not mean workers enduring risk, but businesses actively reshaping systems and behaviors so that human rights are protected in everyday practice.”

– Consultancy participant

Section 4: Thematic Priorities

Participants were invited to discuss three thematic questions: the most pressing issues to be prioritized at the Forum; areas of meaningful momentum in the region; and where gaps remain. Findings below synthesize responses across all consultation groups, with group-specific perspectives called out where perspectives diverge or align notably.

Most pressing issues related to the 2026 theme

When registering for the consultations, participants were asked to respond to an open-ended question on the most pressing issues. The visualization below was generated using AI to analyse the frequency of terms from the 200+ respondents. It is indicative and does not represent a comprehensive assessment of priorities.

In breakout discussions, a strong consensus emerged around the imperative to move from policy to practice. Participants expressed fatigue with frameworks and declarations unaccompanied by implementation.

Issues shared across all groups

- Operationalizing HRDD – translating due diligence obligations into practical, scalable action, especially for SMEs and

companies operating in complex multi-tier supply chains

- Grievance mechanisms – not just their existence, but whether they are effective, accessible, trusted, and capable of producing real remedy
- Forced labor in supply chains – including regulatory pressures from the US Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA), the EU Forced Labor Regulation, and emerging national frameworks
- Regulatory navigation – the growing complexity of mandatory HRDD legislation (EU CSDDD, emerging national laws in Thailand, Nepal, Indonesia) and how businesses, especially those outside Europe, understand and respond to it
- Meaningful multi-stakeholder engagement – the continued absence of genuine, trust-based dialogue between business, civil society, and rights holders
- SME support – capacity building, practical tools, and accessible guidance for smaller businesses with limited in-house expertise



Word cloud generated from open-ended registration responses (200+ participants). Indicative only.

Stakeholder-specific priorities

Business	Civil Society	Consultancies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grievance mechanism effectiveness – how to measure, not just set up Forced labor compliance (EU Regulation, UFLPA Section 301 tariffs) Deep-tier supply chain visibility (Tier 2 and 3) Regulatory uncertainty: CSDDD delays and geopolitical disruption Internal buy-in persistent structural barrier to leadership engagement AI reinforcing existing biases; HRDD frameworks not keeping pace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> mHRDD legislation centered on affected communities Strategic litigation for corporate accountability Protection of human rights defenders and Indigenous Peoples (dedicated sessions, not grouped together) Land rights and FPIC in extractive sectors and Mekong dam construction Forced labor in offshore fisheries, including at recruitment stage Child protection, including voluntourism as harm Business complicity in conflict-affected contexts Wage theft in Gulf migration corridors Neglect of protection concerns in HRDD Crisis management and emerging risks More conversations required around strategic litigation and misuse of HRDD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translating HRDD policies into operational systems Credible impact measurement – beyond policies and trainings to actual worker outcomes Supply chain collaboration blocked by anti-trust concerns Responsible disengagement: brands exiting supplier relationships without worker safeguards Living wages and deep supply chain due diligence AI and the future of work: labor impacts and digital governance gaps

Emerging issues requiring more attention

- AI and digital rights – the human rights implications of algorithmic hiring, automated performance management, and smart city technologies
- Disability inclusion – a recurring call from participants representing employer networks and disability organizations to expand the BHR conversation beyond gender and environment
- The commercial premium of doing business responsibly – the absence of mechanisms for sharing or absorbing the costs of compliance, particularly for SMEs

Where there is meaningful momentum

Despite the weight of challenges, participants pointed to areas of genuine progress. Participants noted that progress is real but uneven – concentrated in policy architecture and larger business networks, while SMEs, Tier 2 suppliers, and operational grievance systems lag behind. One participant offered a pointed framing: the Forum’s job in 2026 is to drive progress downward.

Civil society participants were notably more cautious than business participants about the extent of progress. One participant noted that progress on labor rights remains very limited: ‘The UNGPs are not working in terms of delivery of positive rights outcomes for workers.’ This skepticism was not fatalism – it was paired with calls for the Forum to focus on what it would take to change this.

Progress shared across groups

- Expanding mandatory HRDD legislative landscape, including NAPs in several countries and draft mHRDD laws in Indonesia and Thailand
- Ethical recruitment gaining traction as mainstream expectation, not fringe concern
- Responsible procurement extending beyond Tier 1 into complex supply chains
- Growing worker rights awareness and grievance mechanism usage
- Strategic litigation: growing use of legal mechanisms to hold businesses accountable

Stakeholder-specific observations

Business	Civil Society	Consultancies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer legislation creating a level playing field (that makes the internal business case easier to make) • Indigenous Peoples exercising rights to customary land • Growing corporate demand for transparency in recruitment processes, particularly in migrant worker corridors • Worker rights awareness growing; grievance mechanism usage increasing • Due diligence practices are extending beyond Tier 1 in some companies and sectors, with links to long-term supply chain resilience • Risk-based, worker-centered due diligence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful strategic litigation (e.g. Phichit villagers vs Australian-owned gold mine) • OECD accession processes as leverage points for CSO engagement • ASEAN declarations and regional recognition of corporate due diligence • CSO pressure recognized as an engine behind regulatory and litigation momentum • Growing interest in digital rights risks as a BHR concern • Business-CSO engagement – some progress in dialogue, though cautious optimism only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just transitions gaining traction across sectors • Collective industry action in agribusiness and palm oil cited as a model for shared cost and responsibility • Australian Modern Slavery Act functioning as a regional lever • Climate displacement gaining recognition as a human rights issue • More nuanced brand understanding, moving beyond certification • Growing collaboration between consultancies – less IP protectionism • Gender and inclusion more visible; growing openness to evidence, learning, and impact evaluation among clients • Regulations driving Asia-based export-oriented companies to begin building HRDD systems

Where gaps remain

Participants were forthcoming about where progress is stalling or where the BHR agenda remains structurally incomplete. Gaps identified by business participants clustered around implementation, inclusion, and accountability.

Implementation gaps shared across groups

- The enforcement gap – new regulations exist, but enforcement remains weak in high-risk or governance-poor contexts
- Regulatory compliance does not guarantee real-world improvement – social audits continue to fail
- Policy-to-practice chasm – businesses/clients have policies but struggle to implement grievance mechanisms and remedy processes

- Digital and AI governance vacuum – movement on policy but not in practice
- MSMEs engagement in the BHR agenda/systems limited and lacking incentives

Stakeholder-specific gaps

Business	Civil Society	Consultancies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forced labor in Tier 2/3 and domestic supply chains • EFFECTIVE grievance mechanisms (emphasis participants' own) – setting them up is not enough • Lack of multi-stakeholder collaboration and investor engagement • SME capacity: limited in-house expertise and no shared business case support • Disability inclusion and digital inclusion largely absent from BHR discourse • No mechanisms to share the commercial premium of responsible business • Enforcement: new regulations exist but implementation is weak • To include affected stakeholder groups such as communities, rights holders, informal workers that face actual challenges in the policy conversations such as NAP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRD protection and SLAPPs – broader concern about legal systems being used to suppress communities • Insufficient labor rights obligations – freedom of association and collective bargaining inadequately protected • Lack of worker and union voice in Forum discussions and HRDD processes • SMEs: either unable or unwilling to implement HRDD – and rarely reached by frameworks or support • Supply chain traceability with weak oversight • CSO capacity: technical and financial constraints limit monitoring ability • Hospitality, natural conservation, and tourism overlooked as BHR risk sectors • Purchasing practices of brands directly linked to human rights violations in supply chains – under-discussed at the Forum level • Language and translation barriers limiting inclusive Forum participation • Lack of clarity on meaningful stakeholder engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fragmented consultancy methodologies – not sharing approaches reduces collective impact • Limited reach into lower-tier supply chains (Tier 3–4), informal sector, and agriculture • Audits not designed to detect forced labor; compromised by political interference • Anti-trust concerns blocking industry-level collaboration that clients want but cannot access • Brands underrepresented at the Forum; sessions too often favor UN/NGO/CSO perspectives • Systemic corruption preventing effective action on root causes (e.g. recruitment markets) • Insufficient meaningful worker and community engagement in HRDD processes • MSMEs almost entirely outside BHR systems • Disconnect between public and private sector needs and priorities • Naming and shaming approaches: too much focus on public criticism, insufficient support for businesses to actually improve

Section 4: Operational Preferences – How Stakeholders Want to Engage

What brings participants back

Business	Civil Society	Consultancies
Peer learning – honest exchange with other companies on regulatory navigation and what has and has not worked	Raising issues affecting communities – the Forum as a platform to hold duty-bearers accountable	Networking and knowledge exchange with peers; exploring collaboration for clients
Civil society engagement – the Bangkok forum valued precisely because CSOs are present	Forum as a bridge between lived experience and high-level policy – rights holders as speakers, not just subject matter (could also be strengthened)	Understanding brand challenges – but brands are frequently absent, which is a major drawback
Safe closed-door spaces to share difficulties without reputational risk	Cross-country learning and network-building for regional solidarity	Strong call to actively welcome and incentivize brand participation
Staying current on regulatory developments and early signals on policy direction	Constructive, dialogue-oriented engagement with business actors genuinely valuable	Forum should position consultancies as implementation and research partners, not just attendees
Access to practical tools, case studies, and implementation guidance that can be taken back to operations	Collective outputs – calls for solidarity statements or other tangible deliverables	Potential space to facilitate consultancy collaboration and methodology sharing
Connecting with potential collaboration partners working on complementary initiatives	Staying current on regulatory developments – particularly evolving mHRDD laws in Thailand, Korea, and Indonesia	

Barriers and what would increase engagement

Business	Civil Society	Consultancies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of tough questions: businesses reluctant when facing public scrutiny without perfect answers • Cost and access: sponsorship/ subsidy packages for SMEs explicitly requested • Jargon and complexity: HRDD frameworks remain inaccessible to many businesses • Concern that reduced civil society participation in the face of funding cuts could diminish the Forum's core value for business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More community representatives on panels – people with lived experience, not just expert CSOs • More government and C-suite participation – civil society wants to engage duty bearers • Stronger curation to ensure businesses attending are genuinely engaged, not participating for reputational cover • Financial support for underrepresented communities and those most directly impacted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frustration that brand-led sessions are often rejected in favor of UN/ NGO/CSO content • More social and networking events – side events often better attended by private sector • Stronger upfront business case to help private sector staff secure travel approvals • Desire for the Forum to facilitate consultancy collaboration and methodology sharing • Forum should position consultancies as implementation and research partners, not just attendees

“Businesses are afraid of tough questions – there’s no perfect answer, but that’s the reality. That’s exactly why the conversation needs to happen.”
– Business participant, Session II

“Cost-sharing would be a good place to start. We would love our SME suppliers to be able to join the forum.”
– Business participant, Session I

Session formats and approaches: what works, what doesn't, what's requested

Endorsed across all groups

- Interactive workshops: small-group, hands-on sessions focused on practical problem solving
- Closed-door sessions: safe spaces for stakeholder groups, including companies and rights holders to share candidly
- Case study-based sessions: honest, warts-and-all examples from companies sharing both successes and failures
- Roundtables and peer-learning circles: structured peer exchange with facilitation

Stakeholder-specific format preferences

Business	Civil Society	Consultancies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debate formats – cited as memorable and impactful; dynamic formats make content stick • 30-minute spotlight sessions for regulatory updates and focused topics • Business school-style case workshops with a real company present • Technology showcases in topic-specific areas • Multi-stakeholder sessions with government and C-suite engagement (WEF-style cited) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storytelling sessions – centering voices of those most affected, not token inclusion but genuine powershifting • Flipped conference formats – attendees come prepared; sessions facilitate exchange rather than transmission • Debate and role play for dynamic, adversarial exchange • 90-minute fireside chats/panels for deeper dialogue (higher CSO appetite for longer formats than business) • Local side events connected to the theme for those unable to attend in person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study structure: problem → approach → outcome → impact • Speed networking or speed-dating formats between brands, consultancies, and public sector • Blended sessions mixing businesses and CSOs in the same panel or room • Short plenaries combined with breakout workshops and curated peer-to-peer discussions • Pre-Forum momentum events (e.g. competitions with winners sponsored to attend)

What participants want less of (across all groups)

- Traditional panel discussions with sequential presentations
- Theory-heavy content not grounded in practice
- Sessions that identify problems without producing solutions or next steps

“MORE WORKSHOPS AND LESS PANELS.”

– Business participant, Session II

“Every session must be able to name its output in ten words before it starts – not its theme, not its objective, but its output: the thing that will exist after the session that did not exist before.”

– Business participant, Session II

Session length preferences

Participants were asked their preferred session length both as a participant and as a session organizer. Findings across all groups are presented below.

	Business	Civil Society	Consultancies
As a participant (top preference in Menti)	60 minutes	60 minutes	60 minutes
As a participant (2nd preference in Menti)	45 minutes	45 minutes	45 minutes
Notable appetite for longer formats	Minimal	90 minutes (stronger than other groups)	75 minutes (tied 2nd)
Short formats (30 min)	Spotlight sessions supported	Some support	No support recorded
As a session organizer (top)	45 and 60 min (equal)	60 minutes	45–60 minutes

Section 5: Areas of Convergence and Divergence

This section draws together analytical observations on where the three consultation groups aligned and where perspectives diverged. It is intended to support programme designers, session organizers and other decision makers in weighing feedback and understanding underlying tensions.

Where groups converged

Strong Cross-Group Consensus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The policy-to-practice gap – business, civil society, and consultancies all identified the chasm between policy commitments and operational reality as the defining challenge, though framing differed (implementation complexity vs. enforcement failure vs. client difficulty translating HRDD into systems). • Grievance mechanisms – all three groups named this as a priority, emphasizing not just existence but effectiveness, accessibility, and trustworthiness. • Interactive session formats over panels – demand for workshops, case studies, roundtables, and structured peer exchange was consistent across all groups. • 60-minute sessions as the preferred anchor, with 45 minutes as a secondary preference. • Private sector underrepresentation at the Forum – raised most explicitly by consultancies but echoed by business and civil society participants. • SME and lower-tier supply chain gaps – all groups noted that the BHR agenda reaches large companies and Tier 1 suppliers far more effectively than SMEs and informal or lower-tier settings.

Where groups diverged

Issue	Business	Civil Society	Consultancies
Framing of resilience	Operational continuity and maintaining rights commitments under pressure	Community and defender protection – resilience of people and movements	Accountability and enforcement; businesses actively reshaping systems
Extent of progress	Broadly optimistic, especially on regulatory momentum	Cautious – acknowledging momentum, and questioning whether it translates to improved conditions for workers	Constructively critical – sees implementation gap as the defining problem
Remedy and accountability	Focused on cost and complexity of delivery	Remedy must be real and measurable, not a communication exercise	Aligned with CSO view; adds practitioner dimension on what makes remedy functional
The role of the Forum	Valued for peer learning and CSO engagement; want more practical content	Calls for more rights-holder and community voices at the center	Most vocal about design weaknesses; wants greater presence of brands and consultancy roles

Section 6: Implications for the 2026 Forum

The following points are drawn from the consultation evidence. They are not decisions, but indications of what the evidence suggests should be prioritized, considered, and addressed in programme design for the 2026 Forum.

On programme content

- **Centre implementation over frameworks.** The clearest message from all groups is that the field has enough standards and commitments; the Forum should anchor its programme on how to operationalize them – practical tools, real case studies, and sector-specific guidance.
- **Take HRDD for SMEs seriously.** Both thematic content and operational access challenges were raised repeatedly across all groups. Include accessible, jargon-free content for companies without dedicated sustainability teams.
- **Make grievance mechanisms a flagship topic.** It emerged as the most frequently cited pressing issue, with emphasis on effectiveness and measurability – not box-ticking.
- **Raise AI and digital rights on the agenda.** Multiple participants identified this as an underexplored gap that all previous Forums have missed.
- **Broaden the inclusion lens.** Disability, migrant workers, Indigenous Peoples, and informal workers were all raised as groups inadequately represented. Actively counter the tendency to focus only on the highest-profile risk categories.
- **Give climate and just transition proper attention.** Raised consistently by civil society and consultancies as a frontier requiring BHR-specific framing.

On programme design and format

- **Reduce panels; increase workshops.** The signal is unambiguous across all groups. Where panels occur, structure them for interaction rather than sequential presentation.
- **Invest in closed-door sessions.** Protected dialogue between business and civil society was cited as one of the Forum's most distinctive and valued features. Design these explicitly into the programme for both groups.
- **Design sessions with outputs in mind.** Institutionalize the principle that every session names its output before it starts – not its theme or objective, but the thing that will exist after the session that did not exist before.
- **Build an onboarding architecture.** With two-thirds of 2025 attendees attending for the first time, include accessible, jargon-free entry points as a recurring stream – not a single orientation session.
- **Use interactive tools throughout.** Digital participation tools (Slido, Menti) were positively received and explicitly requested to enable participation across language and personality differences.

On participation and access

- **Develop an SME access pathway.** Whether through sponsorship packages, co-sponsorship by large multinationals for their suppliers, or reduced-fee tracks, access for SMEs and smaller CSOs is both a practical gap and a programme quality issue.
- **Protect civil society participation.** Business participants explicitly valued CSO engagement as a primary reason to attend. Reduced civil society presence would diminish the Forum's value for all stakeholder groups.
- **Make room for brands and reward their participation.** Create brand-led sessions,

invitational networking events, and formats that generate genuine value for private sector attendees. Explore brand sponsorship of social events as a practical mechanism.

- **Position consultancies as implementation and research partners.** Give them space to showcase approaches, facilitate inter-consultancy collaboration, and present alongside brands.
- **Address the anti-trust barrier to collaboration.** Multiple consultancy participants raised this as a structural barrier to the industry-level collaboration their clients want. The Forum could explore providing legally safe spaces for pre-competitive dialogue on shared BHR challenges.

Possible sub-thematic tracks

- **Making HRDD deliver in practice**
effective HRDD, lower tiers/SMEs, measuring impact on workers, responsible disengagement + grievance/remedy
- **Navigating the regulatory wave: Regulation, trade and geopolitics**
mHRDD, fragmentation vs coherence, trade and human rights, who shapes the rules (ensuring regulations don't repeat pattern of exploitation)
- **Power, participation, and protection**
protection of HRDs and shrinking civic space, worker voice, strategic litigation, IP rights and FPIC, migrant workers and recruitment systems
- **Emerging risks/issues or Frontier/horizon issues and transitions**
AI, digital infrastructure and smart cities; climate transition (+migration?), future of work (automation/platform economies)