Building Supplier Capability on Human Rights Due Diligence

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The importance of HRDD awareness and training

Our supply chain is made up of thousands of businesses, many of which are, directly or indirectly, subject to evolving regulations and buyer expectations around Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD). Yet some – particularly those operating further down those supply chains – lack access to resources needed to improve their capability to manage HRDD at the scale that is required. Addressing this challenge requires more than action from Unilever alone, but rather coordinated, sector-wide efforts.

This is why Unilever is a member of AIM-Progress, a member-led forum of leading consumer goods companies advancing human rights in supply chains. Through AIM-Progress, member companies come together to jointly fund, co-design, and facilitate delivery of structured capability-building programmes for suppliers around the world. Together, through shared investment and consistent, market-specific delivery, real and lasting progress is possible.

Industry Collaboration at Scale

Unilever is one of the sponsors of the supplier capability building programmes in four locations: India, Malaysia, Thailand, and South Africa. In addition, programmes in China, Egypt, and the United States are in development.

On average, 65% of participating suppliers had received no prior external human rights training before joining – underscoring both the scale of the challenge and the urgency of collaborative action. Each programme is delivered through local partners with deep expertise in the relevant legal, social, and cultural context, including International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Embode, Partner Africa and Center for Responsible Business (CRB). This partnership model ensures that training is not a generic compliance exercise, but a grounded, locally relevant learning experience that suppliers can actually apply in their own operations and supply chains.

More than 170 Unilever suppliers across Thailand, Malaysia, India and South Africa have been involved over the 2024/25 and 2025/26 cycles. The training is structured as a multi-year journey, progressively building supplier capability from introducing key frameworks including the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) through to rolling out formal due diligence processes and working with suppliers' own supply chains on specific issues.

Where Suppliers Start: Baseline Findings

Baseline data collected across the four active markets reveals a consistent picture: most participating suppliers were at an early stage of HRDD. In India, over 80% of suppliers fall into the two lowest maturity levels for responsible sourcing programmes. The equivalent figures are 67% in Malaysia, 66% in South Africa and 77% in Thailand.

These figures underscore why training is such an important aspect of due diligence. Whilst suppliers are often required to carry out social audits, they lack broader awareness of the proactive, ongoing human rights due diligence process, which audits are assessing.

What Changes After Training: Endline Results

Results from completed cohorts show consistent and meaningful improvements in both knowledge and – crucially – clear intent to act. For example in India and Thailand, 100% of participants said the training improved their understanding of HRDD and relevant legislation. In India, the biggest gains were in preventing and mitigating human rights risks in their own operations, with a 38% knowledge gain on the topic of Business & Human Rights.

Participants also described concrete plans to apply what they had learned. For example in India, 44% planned to share knowledge with others – within their company or with business partners.

Across all cohorts, suppliers remain least confident on HRDD legislation and access to remedy – an insight that will shape future programme design.

The Case for Continued Collaboration

The AIM-Progress Supplier Capability Building programmes demonstrate what is possible when leading companies act together. Through shared investment, consistent methodology, and trusted local delivery partners, it is possible to reach suppliers who would otherwise remain without support – and to see real, measurable change in how human rights are understood and managed across global supply chains.

For Unilever, participation in these programmes is an expression of our broader commitment: that doing business responsibly means supporting the people and businesses in our supply chains, not just holding them to account. Industry collaboration is central to delivering this.

Data: AIM-Progress Supplier Capability Building programme evaluation (www.aim-progress.com).