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Corporate Human Rights Policies in Thailand: Trends, Gaps, and Implications for Sustainable Business

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates how leading Thai corporations integrate Business and Human Rights (BHR) principles into their policies and decision-making processes. It addresses the gap between global frameworks, particularly the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), and localized corporate practices in Thailand. The research focuses on identifying key human rights themes in corporate disclosures and assessing the extent to which these considerations are embedded in core business strategies**.** **Design/methodology/approach:** The study adopts a qualitative research design using systematic content analysis and photo voice technique. Data were collected from annual, sustainability, and integrated reports of the top ten companies listed on the Stock Exchange of Thailand (2024). At the second stage, migrant workers engaged in the photovoice session. Photos taken by the participants together with their narratives were used at this stage. The analysis involved document review, inductive coding, and thematic categorization, with inter-coder validation to enhance reliability. **Findings:** Six dominant themes emerge: (1) labor rights and workplace dignity; (2) protection of vulnerable groups; (3) environmental justice; (4) ethical supply chain practices; (5) accountability and grievance mechanisms; and (6) human rights due diligence (HRDD) and stakeholder engagement. While companies show increasing alignment with global standards, implementation remains uneven, with gaps between policy commitments and operational practices. **Research limitations/implications:** The study is limited to large listed firms and relies on publicly disclosed data, which may not fully reflect actual practices. Future research should incorporate primary data and extend to SMEs and high-risk sectors. **Practical implications:** The findings suggest that companies should strengthen HRDD processes, deepen stakeholder engagement, and integrate human rights into strategic decision-making to move beyond compliance-based approaches. **Originality/value:** This study provides empirical insights into BHR practices in an emerging economy, highlighting Thailand as a critical case. It contributes to the literature by revealing the gap between formal commitments and substantive implementation in corporate human rights governance.

Keywords: Business and Human Rights, UNGPs, Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD), Sustainable Business, Thailand, Corporate Governance

Introduction

Businesses have an important role to play in promoting respect for human rights beyond legal obligations and including active, moral and social responsibility within their operational spheres. (O'Brien and Dhanarajan, 2016). On the normative and legal level the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) offer global international standards around addressing both these issues. The UNGPs present a three-pronged framework which includes the state obligation to uphold human rights, corporate responsibility concerning respect for those rights and an imperative to make it easier for affected people and communities to access remedy. This framework emphasizes that accountability cannot be based on symbolic gestures alone but rather on attending to both procedures (e.g. grievance) and substantive results, including meaningful remediation (Baaij, 2022). The UNGPs are also increasingly associated with the evolving regulatory environment, emerging treaty processes and national law, thus emphasizing the necessary coherence and alignment between legal/policy devices. Within this framework, access to remedy rises as the cornerstone of a governance model, not only for justice but for the legitimacy of corporate practice governance structures.

BHR is even more relevant as human rights increasingly intersect with environmental sustainability, climate change, and gender disparities. There is now general acceptance that environmental damage and social problems related to business activities (pollution and climate change) are fundamental to human rights (health, livelihood, participation). Consequently, integrated strategies that link BHR and environmental governance are emerging. These will align with corporate social responsibility efforts, human rights due diligence processes, and regulatory frameworks to address environmental risk and ensure communities have access to necessary support. This convergence signals an overall shift toward sustainable business practices, where business must not only be profitable but also promote social equity and ecological integrity.

From a practical and political point of view, implementing National Action Plans (NAPs) on business and human rights shows how states are trying to translate international norms into domestic policy. These initiatives signal political commitment and contribute to policy coherence, yet their effectiveness in terms of tangible protections and remedies remains uneven. The grievance protocols established under the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and through National Contact Points are just a few of the mechanisms to mitigate corporate harm without courts. These are especially applicable in cases where courts are not available or where judicial remedies are not in place to resolve disputes and to remedy corporate wrongdoing.

Literature Review

The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) have significantly shaped how businesses—particularly multinational corporations—understand and address human rights. Central to these principles is the expectation that firms conduct human rights due diligence (HRDD) across their supply chains. This process involves

identifying actual and potential human rights impacts, with an emphasis on transparency, traceability, and stakeholder engagement (Midwinter, 2019). Due to late adoption of UNGPs and BHR in Thailand, most local Thai companies struggle with BHR issues and practices. Only big corporates or those listed in the stock exchange market of Thailand (SET) understand the importance of UNGPs, linkages among BHR issues, and their impact on individual employees, their families, and their communities (Baum & Hoi, 2019). Indeed, the UNGPs provide a structured framework that requires firms to institutionalize human rights policies, conduct ongoing risk and impact assessments, establish effective remediation mechanisms, and implement monitoring and reporting systems. In this sense, HRDD functions as both a procedural and substantive instrument, linking internal corporate processes with externally observable accountability outcomes.

Governmental stakeholders play a key role in encouraging business organisations to align with the UNGPs on business and human rights. This entails facilitating a holistic and forward-leaning HRDD approach whereby enterprises integrate the consideration of human rights in their overall policies, practices, and embedded in their day-to-day operations (Bray & Crockett, 2012). Rather than treating human rights as a peripheral compliance issue, businesses are increasingly expected to embed these principles across the entire value chain, from procurement and supplier management to risk assessment and stakeholder engagement.

Studies by Davis (2012) and Barnes (2018) confirm that the concept of HRDD is commonly defined as the central mechanism in which firms identify, prevent, mitigate against, and consider adverse human rights impacts arising from their activities and along the value chain. HRDD has become framed within today's BHR discourse as an enduring and ongoing structural process that influences corporate governance and decision-making, rather than a marginal compliance exercise.

This positioning rests on a strong foundation in the UNGPs on Business and Human Rights in which due diligence is described as one of the essential aspects within the corporate responsibility to respect human rights in Pillar II. The literature also emphasises that HRDD needs to be risk-based and contextually relevant by nature. Instead of trying to conform to the same standard, however, the firms should customize their due diligence procedures according to their size, sectoral exposure, geographic context, and the complexity of their value chains.

This has resulted in a growing focus on tiered due diligence models that go beyond merely first-tier suppliers to deeper levels of subcontractors, informal actors, and high-risk nodes within global production networks (Bright et, 2020). This broader perspective mirrors a wider understanding that significant human rights risks are typically hidden more subtly in some places in the value chain and that enhanced mapping, stakeholder engagement, and traceability are now essential.

Such a broadened focus indicates an increasing awareness that significant human rights risks frequently exist in the less apparent areas of the value chain. This reality calls for enhanced mapping, stakeholder involvement, and traceability systems. As a result, HRDD is transitioning

from a compliance-based tool centered on individual firms to a governance framework that emphasizes networks and tackles systemic risks inherent in global business activities.

BHR Framework in the Thai Business Context

Thailand's engagement in the BHR framework reflects the recognition around the world that human rights are essential to sustainable business. Adopted in 2011, the UNGPs emphasize that states owe it to their citizens to preserve human rights, and that human rights must be respected by business. It is a view expressed by some authors that stress the obligations of both state and corporate actors at play in the BHR realm (Bianchi & Landman, 2024; Davis, 2012; Barnes, 2018). Integrating the above principles into Thai national strategies is very essential because Thailand is on their way to ratification of universal international human rights treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CED), to ensure they are aligned with human rights norms (Laikram & Pathak, 2022). A complex interconnectivity of Thai state factors; economic development (noted in this context), socio-cultural, and legal context affects the business and human rights environment. Employment practices in Thai family-owned enterprises were largely different from that of Western "best practices," and the professionalization of Thai family enterprises has generally taken place in large, publicly held corporations and multinational subsidiaries (Lawler et al., 1997).

While Thailand has made strides in embedding BHR principles into its policy landscape, significant challenges remain. Research indicates that businesses often struggle to integrate human rights considerations into their operations due to financial constraints, lack of technological resources, and insufficient regulatory enforcement (Jeewanthi, 2017; Janjirawatna et al., 2023). For example, inefficiencies in corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices have been observed, with reports highlighting gaps in implementing adequate human rights due diligence, raising concerns over business models that prioritize profit over human rights impacts (Ramasastry, 2015).

The Thai context is unique, as many businesses operate in traditional sectors that may not fully recognize the complexities of the interactions between economic activities and human rights (Janjirawatna et al., 2023). Instances have shown that while corporations seek profitability, neglecting human rights considerations can lead to negative consequences for both communities and the environment, challenging traditional notions of success (Jägers, 2021). Existing studies also suggest a growing discourse advocating for binding legal regulations to enforce human rights responsibilities on corporations, which some argue should take precedence over voluntary compliance seen in CSR efforts (Joseph & Kyriakakis, 2023).

In addressing the complexities of BHR, scholars propose a multi-faceted approach where local governance plays a crucial role in promoting adherence to BHR principles. This approach emphasizes the need for collaboration between public and private sectors to create a comprehensive legal framework that not only addresses potential human rights violations but also encourages businesses to proactively assess and mitigate their impacts on local communities (Luthfan, 2019).

Key research questions for this paper include:
1) What key human rights themes are reflected in the corporate policies of leading Thai companies?
2) To what extent are human rights considerations integrated into core business decision-making?

Method

This study is a qualitative, multi-method research procedure for Business and Human Rights (BHR) in Thailand by integrating corporate-level analysis and worker-focused perspectives. The qualitative approach is appropriate as it allows us to explore meanings, practices, and lived experiences of human rights in business contexts in a more holistic way to understand them deeper. The research is conducted in two phases: (1) document and secondary data analysis of corporate disclosures, and (2) participatory photovoice investigation to gain workers' perceptions in the construction sector.

Step 1: Document and Secondary Data Analysis

Companies and Reports. The first step is to select the top 10 companies listed on the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) in 2024. Companies have been chosen based on three criteria: (1) market capitalization of large economic and societal value; (2) publicly available annual, sustainability, or integrated reports; and (3) mention of human rights, ESG, or sustainability practices. This sampling strategy ensures that the analysis covers the top companies with a wealth of disclosure practices and well-known stakeholders.

Data Sources

The study will rely on secondary data from annual reports, stand-alone sustainability reports, and integrated reports published in 2024. Corporate disclosures are well-known in the literature as an important tool to examine a firm's commitment to BHR as they demonstrate governance structures, risk management systems, and public accountability mechanisms (e.g., Xu et al., 2024). Such documents may contain curated narratives, but they can be a useful starting point to understand how companies manage and communicate human rights responsibilities.

Content Analysis Procedure

The qualitative content analysis was done in a systematic way. All reports were first reviewed in full to ensure familiarization with the data. The relevant sections around human rights, labor practices, environmental management, stakeholder engagement, and grievance mechanisms were then selected and extracted. We used an inductive–deductive coding approach as a first step. The categories of coding were developed from preexisting frameworks and principles, especially the UNGPs, and are open to new themes from the data to be developed based on the data. Codes were modified in a process to account for explicit commitments (e.g., human rights policies, due diligence processes) and implicit practices (e.g., public safety, privacy, community involvement). In order to increase the accuracy and credibility of analyses, we independently coded some of the reports with two researchers. There was a discussion of coding discrepancies and how to address them, and the coding methodology was subsequently altered to be consistent with the results. The process also contributes to reliability and reduces the misinterpretation problem.

This study adopts a qualitative, multi-method research design to examine Business and Human Rights (BHR) practices in Thailand by integrating corporate-level analysis with worker-centered perspectives. A qualitative approach is appropriate as it enables an in-depth exploration of meanings, practices, and lived experiences associated with human rights in business contexts. The study is conducted in two sequential and complementary steps: (1) document and secondary data analysis of corporate disclosures, and (2) a participatory photovoice inquiry to capture workers' perspectives in the construction sector.

Analytical Framework

The analysis identifies dominant themes across the dataset, examining how human rights are framed and operationalized in corporate disclosures. Findings are organized into five overarching categories: (1) labor rights and workplace dignity, (2) protection of vulnerable groups, (3) environmental justice, (4) ethical business conduct, and (5) accountability. This framework enables systematic comparison across firms and provides insights into prevailing BHR practices in Thailand.

Step 2: Photovoice: Workers' Perspectives in the Construction Sector

To complement corporate disclosures and address their limitations, the second phase employs photovoice, a participatory visual methodology that centers the lived experiences of workers (Wang & Burris, 1997). This approach is particularly suitable for BHR research, as it allows marginalized or underrepresented groups to articulate their perspectives on rights, dignity, and workplace conditions. Photovoice is a qualitative approach in the social sciences that uses photographsas central tools for data collection and analysis, helping researchers examine how teachers make meaning of their work (Ramos,2025). Photography also captures moments from the work conditions, relationship at work, and other human rights issues.

Participant Selection

Four construction workers were purposively selected from different construction sites in Thailand. The construction sector was chosen due to its well-documented exposure to human rights risks, including occupational safety, labor precarity, and migrant worker vulnerability. Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

(1) direct involvement in construction work (e.g., laborers, technicians, or site workers);
(2) diversity in gender, employment status (e.g., full-time, subcontracted), and background (including migrant workers where possible); and
(3) willingness and ability to participate in a multi-stage, reflective research process.
Although the sample size is small, it aligns with photovoice methodology, which prioritizes depth, reflexivity, and participant engagement over generalizability.

Data Collection

Participants were invited to take photographs over a defined period that represents their everyday work experiences and human rights-related issues. These could include images reflecting safety conditions, living environments, access to facilities, or interactions at the workplace. Following the photo-taking phase, each participant engaged in a semi-structured interview to discuss their images. These interviews provided narrative context and enabled

participants to articulate the meanings, emotions, and concerns associated with their photographs.

Photovoice Data Analysis: The SHOWED Model

Data from the photovoice phase—including photographs and interview transcripts—were analyzed using thematic analysis guided by the **SHOWED model** (Wang, 1999), a widely used framework in participatory research. The model structures reflection through the following questions:

- S (What do you See here?)
- H (What is really Happening here?)
- O (How does this relate to Our lives?)
- W (Why does this situation exist?)
- E (How could this image Educate others?)
- D (What can we Do about it?)

During interviews, participants were guided through these questions to facilitate critical reflection on their photographs. This process encouraged deeper analysis of structural issues, such as power relations, workplace inequality, and access to rights.

The resulting narratives and visual data were coded and organized into themes, focusing on key BHR dimensions such as workplace safety, dignity, access to basic services, discrimination, and grievance mechanisms. The SHOWED framework also enabled the identification of action-oriented insights, linking personal experiences to broader systemic and policy implications.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval, from Mahidol University's Ethics Committee, was obtained prior to data collection. Participants provided informed consent and were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage. The study strictly maintained anonymity and confidentiality, particularly given the potential vulnerability of workers in the construction sector. Care was taken to avoid capturing identifiable individuals or sensitive company information in photographs.

Findings

Analysis of Human Rights Policies

Theme 1: Labor Rights and Workplace Dignity

Labour rights and workplace dignity are a core focus of BHR in Thailand. From a compliance-based perspective towards a more rights-based and sustainable perspective in workforce management. Based on the data, Thai companies have come to realise that respect for labor rights is not only required for law/ethics but also strategically important in order to maintain high sustained performance of business in the long run. This new perspective marries labour protection with broader sustainability ideas, including decent work, social equity, and responsible supply chain management. And the key to this is the deep and strong corporate commitment to eradicate forced labor, child labor and human trafficking. Such issues are expressed by numerous companies in various sectors and are a sign of concern and alignment with international standards to use more precisely the UNGPs and ILO Conventions.

Companies argue that employment should be voluntary, document retention should be banned and vulnerable groups such as migrant workers and minors should be protected. So the persistence of exploitation in sectors such as fishing, agriculture, and manufacturing indicates a clear disconnect between policy commitment and practice-based approaches. This gap highlights a major challenge for sustainable business development in Thailand. Non-discrimination and inclusion seem to be core dimensions of workplace dignity, so we are more likely to see diversity not as a human rights issue but as a key aspect of organisational sustainability. Companies also take a zero-tolerance approach to harassment and extend protection to contractors and suppliers, suggesting that the company as a whole does not feel comfortable with workers being taken into account in their role in the labour system. But gender, ethnicity, religion and social class still shape workplace conditions in Thailand in a structural manner.

From a sustainability perspective, it demonstrates that equity and inclusion in companies is part and parcel of corporate culture, not just a matter of compliance, or a compliance issue. The data, however, also show a growing focus on fair remuneration and a new ideology of living wages. At some companies, minimum wage is a good thing, but others are moving toward a more progressive approach to provide workers with a living standard. It is part of a larger shift of economic activity from shareholder to workforce where the future of business is dependent on the employees' and their lives. Long working hours, wage inequality and precarious work conditions due to labour force-induced long working hours and precarious living conditions for migrant labor in Thailand have also restricted and hampered the achievement of these objectives. Solutions to solving these problems will be required to enable sustainable business that can reconcile profit-making and social justice.

Employee health and safety and workplace health are also being re-framed under this theme to cover not just regulatory compliance, but also physical and psychological aspects of health and safety. The fact that mental health matters are taken into account and not only care and safety but this new development also shows that companies are beginning to embrace working with a new mindset- in which they should start considering the implications of their own attitudes and behaviors on the health and well-being of workers, in today's fast pace and work world. Proactively recognising risk in high-risk industries also signals a shift toward risk prophylaxis and resilience management, which are fundamental to long-term business. Freedom of association and collective bargaining are emerging aspects of Thai corporate life. In the past, it has been a little less common, but workers' rights to organise and to talk to their employers are being recognised. Welfare committees and grievance channels are being institutionalized to give employees a voice and a way forward. The full realization of their rights is still hampered by legal limitations, especially on migrant workers. The need to align national regulatory bodies with international human rights standards is one of the main challenges to building credible and inclusive sustainability systems.

Theme 2: Protection of Vulnerable Groups and Environment in the Supply Chain

It is highlighted that the theme of Protection of Vulnerable Groups in the Supply Chain is an important extension of the BHR practice in Thailand, as businesses in the country increasingly realize the notion that responsibility extends from the employees to their networks of stakeholders operating on the global and regional value chain. Whereas the traditional BHR perspective in Thailand has been primarily grounded in internal labor practices, the data

reveal significant shifts to a more holistic (and sustainability-oriented) approach, as businesses come to recognize the important involvement of workers in protecting and promoting the rights and welfare of the many populations affected by their operations, products and alliances in society.

This theme encompasses an increasing and more interconnected concept of vulnerability. Thai companies are now explicitly listing a variety of vulnerable populations, including women, children, migrant workers, indigenous communities, LGBTQI+ individuals, persons with disabilities, pregnant workers and the elderly. This more expansive framing corresponds to the recognition that vulnerability is not fixed, it is influenced by intersecting social, economic and legal disparities. In practice, this has resulted in the implementation of more inclusive policies and specifically designed protections in supply chains — especially in sectors that are primarily dependent on outsourcing labor and cross-border production. But, with some progress being made, structural roadblocks -- including language, cultural and legal divides -- particularly as they relate to migrant laborers have proven to be obstacles for the effectiveness of such protections.

The challenges of such barriers are not just a policy issue, but also a long-term investment in capacity-building, stakeholder engagement and systemic change in efforts to dismantle and mitigate said barriers. Within a larger picture, the inclusion of LGBTQ+ rights also reflects an important and relatively recent development on Thai corporate human rights practice. Firms are increasingly making sexual orientation and gender identity as a key to equality in workplace and non-discrimination policies: in general, no-discrimination is being used to apply to all employees directly or indirectly in the workplace and within a company's value chain, from direct employment to supply chain. This transition is not only consistent with the best international practice in human rights practice, but is also more indicative of the changing social fabric of Thailand, where the concept of diversity and inclusion has become increasingly visible in public and business discussions in our society. In a few of the world's most influential companies, inclusive practices move beyond writing official and policy statements to diversity training,

This reflects a wider scope of operationalization of these pledges through the adoption of several implementation and monitoring frameworks that are grounded in a more formal approach towards human rights due diligence as it is being developed. Businesses have to address realization of these commitments by implementing a series of mechanisms for operationalizing and monitoring them so as to enable them to be considered as part of their strategic investment in human rights due diligence. Risk based assessments are utilized more and more to determine human rights impacts at various stages of supply chain and supplier codes of conduct, certification of suppliers are used to monitor and enforce compliance.

Theme 3: Environmental Justice and Human Rights

The analysis of corporates' policies confirms that corporations have come to perceive the protection of the environment as a prerequisite for achieving human rights. This is the result of an emergence increasingly in which environmental and social values and interests are intertwined: the right to clean, healthy and sustainable environments can be understood as being as legitimate as human rights to health, livelihood and human dignity. Central to this theme is the increasing incorporation of human rights due diligence practices that embed

environmental risks. Thai firms are looking at not just operational impacts in the short term but long-term and even indirect impacts in their value chain—from initial stages, such as new investments, mergers and project financing. This suggests an evolution to a more proactive and forward-looking set of governance practices—one where the environmental impact is being viewed not only as an issue of compliance, but of violation of human rights.

In this context, regulations to avoid or reduce air, water and chemical pollution are increasingly justified in terms of safeguarding human health and that of the community. These approaches are closely related to sustainable business tenets in the context of risk management, resilience, and responsible management of natural resources. Resource efficiency and circular economy approach also strengthen the link between environmental sustainability and human rights. And these are in recognition not just of the need in cutting waste and maximizing resource productivity but also the implications of unsustainable patterns of consumption for the future and today's generations. Through circularity (in the way of reducing waste, recycling their commodities and sourcing sustainably), companies serve themselves in ensuring the balance of ecology and long-term social and economic welfare.

This is indicative of a larger recognition that environmental degradation is having a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups, exacerbating entrenched disparities and undermining inclusive development. A further element of this theme is the regard for product and service safety as part of the human rights framework. Corporations increasingly recognize the direct dangers posed by unsafe items and services, connecting consumer protection to wider rights and freedoms. This approach expands BHR beyond purely production processes to encompass the cycle of production across the goods and services life cycle, thus supporting the notion that an industry that is sustainable should be responsible, safe, quality and accountable from beginning to its end (Rao & Bernaz, 2020).

Theme 4: Ethical Business Conduct and Supply Chain Responsibility

The subject of ethical business behavior and supply chain responsibility highlights a significant advancement in the realm of BHR initiatives in Thailand. Companies are progressively acknowledging that ethical conduct should extend beyond their internal operations to include the entire value chain.

This subject highlights a transition from fragmented compliance frameworks to holistic governance models driven by sustainability, where elements such as transparency, accountability, and adherence to human rights are integral to procurement practices, partnerships, and corporate decision-making. Central to this transformation is the escalating obligation of businesses towards responsible sourcing, which is becoming a significant means for companies to implement their commitments to human rights. Thai enterprises are progressively adopting human rights due diligence (HRDD) instruments to recognize, evaluate, and address risks within their supply chains, particularly in sectors characterized by intricate labor dynamics, including agriculture, seafood processing, and manufacturing.

These initiatives align with global standards, including the UNGPs Business and Human Rights, and conventions from the International Labour Organization. They illustrate an increasing awareness that companies' product sourcing decisions can either exacerbate or alleviate

human rights violations. It confirms that Thai companies need to ensure that their business processes create sustainable value through accountability within supply chain. The processes addressed in the reports include elimination of exploitation, adherence to environmental responsibilities, and fostering social inclusion.

Having said that, statistics indicate a significant inconsistency in both implementation levels and effectiveness. While many companies label themselves as "ethically conscious" suppliers, few transparently acknowledge their entanglements in contracts or supplier declarations that often paint an overly optimistic picture of actual experiences on the supply side. More advanced organizations are beginning to implement proactive measures such as independent audits, programs aimed at empowering suppliers, and accessible grievance mechanisms for employees throughout the supply chain. These strategies are particularly essential for managing risks typically overlooked in lower-tier manufacturers, who tend to have less oversight and face greater vulnerabilities.

Theme 5: Accountability, Grievance and Remediation.
The topic of accountability, grievance, and remediation plays a crucial role in the evolution of the BHR practice in Thailand. This evolution has transitioned from a framework based on voluntary corporate social responsibility to one that is more structured, enforceable, and focused on sustainability-driven corporate accountability. Rooted in the "third pillar" of the UNGPs, which emphasizes access to remedy, this theme illustrates the increasing demands for businesses to not only uphold human rights conceptually but also implement them in practice, thereby being held accountable for negative outcomes. Consequently, accountability extends beyond mere internal governance; it permeates throughout the entire value chain.

Structural enhancements are reinforcing the accountability mechanisms of Thai businesses via established governance systems and elevated supervisory structures. A number of Thai firms have integrated human rights responsibilities into the obligations at the board level, ensuring that considerations related to sustainability and human rights are woven into their corporate strategies and decision-making processes. Additionally, specialized sustainability committees are emerging, and the requirement for executive approvals on human rights initiatives indicates a clear acknowledgment that management must prioritize human rights policy at the top.

The analysis also shows that transparency is further extended into public reporting through sustainability reporting with sustainability disclosures that allow stakeholders to evaluate corporate performance and accountability. In a globalized and sustainable business perspective, governance policies and programs are necessary for such mechanisms to build trust, address long-term risks and align the conduct of enterprises with corporate behavior according to the global expectation of responsible business conduct.

This theme involves establishing grievance mechanisms that are accessible, safe and effective to raise concern for all stakeholders. To ensure inclusiveness and accessibility, data from Thai businesses in this study show the adoption of multi-channel solutions such as hotlines, e-channels, digital channels, and face-to-face reporting systems. These mechanisms are built

around various stakeholder groups, including employees and supply chain staff and local communities as well as consumers.

These issues emphasize the need to design grievance mechanisms that are not only available, but genuinely accessible and credible to all parties concerned. For such business to become sustainable, it needs to move beyond the established and formal and invest in awareness-raising, capacity building and culturally competent engagement to avoid denying any group access to remedy. Remediation procedures are themselves also being extended to a greater extent and are moving more and more towards the tenets of restorative justice. Firms now understand that correcting breaches of human rights is not only monetary remuneration but also restoration of dignity, and support to the affected people and prevention of their re-occurrence.

Theme 6 Enhancing Due Diligence and Dialogue

One of the major issues identified from the examination of current practices, among such companies, is the necessity to enhance the quality and depth of HRDD. Although many organizations have formally adopted HRDD frameworks, their effectiveness often depends on how meaningfully they are put into practice. As we learn that HRDD must move beyond procedural compliance toward a more reflective, adaptive, and participatory approach. For companies working in complex business environments like Thailand, that shift is of utmost importance if human rights commitments are to translate into meaningful impact.

One of the patterns among ten companies is that HRDD is treated as a technical exercise rather than a dynamic management process. Half of the business organizations in this study treated due diligence as checklist activities at the beginning. For them, HRDD is reduced to the completion of standardized templates, risk checklists, or compliance forms designed to demonstrate alignment with international frameworks. While such tools are useful starting points, they cannot substitute for critical analysis and contextual understanding. Human rights risks vary widely across industries, geographic locations, and organizational cultures. Consequently, HRDD cannot be implemented as a “one-size-fits-all” model. Instead, it requires companies to invest time and effort in understanding how their particular operations, supply chains, and business relationships may create or contribute to human rights impacts.

Traditional risk management approaches often rely heavily on internal assessments conducted by compliance teams or external consultants. However, many human rights risks cannot be fully understood without engaging directly with those who may be affected by business activities.

Workers, suppliers, community members, and civil society organizations often possess insights that formal assessment tools may overlook. Their lived experiences can reveal issues such as workplace discrimination, unsafe conditions, or environmental concerns that may not appear in official reports.

For this reason, proactive two-way communication must become a central element of HRDD. Rather than relying solely on periodic audits or surveys, companies need to establish ongoing channels of engagement that allow stakeholders to voice concerns, share perspectives, and

participate in problem-solving. Such dialogue not only helps organizations identify risks earlier but also builds trust and legitimacy. When stakeholders feel that their voices are heard and respected, they are more likely to cooperate in identifying practical solutions. Conversely, the absence of meaningful engagement can lead to misunderstanding, conflict, and resistance, particularly in communities affected by large-scale business operations.

Photovoice Analysis

Of all 16 photos taken by the participants, the researcher worked with the participants at the interpretation stage. The very first point we learn from the photo elucidation is regarding human rights issues at workplace. There are two images we selected that provide compelling visual evidence of labor conditions that raise substantive concerns when assessed against the UNGPs on Business and Human Rights. Interpreted through a photovoice lens, they reveal tensions between economic participation and the protection of fundamental human rights in Thai business contexts.

In both images (1 and 2), occupational safety and health risks are indicated, drawing directly on Principle 12 and Principle 23 of the UNGPs. The roadside collection of workers, many of whom are sitting on curbs without proper shelter, sanitation, or distancing. This is indicative of precarious and informal employment. The lack of visible protective equipment (beyond minimal personal gear such as helmets or reflective vests) poses a threat to employers' diligence during workplace safety. Also, the second image, showing workers in an overcrowded open truck, points to possible violations of basic safety standards. This form of transport puts workers at risk of physical injury and demonstrates employers' inability to take appropriate care of their risk exposure protocols.



Image 1: The Roadside Gathering of Migrant Workers

These images all point to workers facing substandard conditions, including in regard to dignity, rest, and mobility. The workers in the first image stand in a waiting posture, meaning they are either not working for normal pay or not guaranteed employment, such as day laborers, often linked to little protection under contract and with no social security. In the second image, tightly clustered workers indicate efficiency-driven labor practices, which are

prioritizing savings versus workers' welfare. These types of situations question the corporate responsibility for respecting the rights of human beings (as per Principle 11).

In terms of the UNGPs' "Protect, Respect, and Remedy" framework, there does seem to be a lack of protection and remedy mechanisms. If the Thai state can protect labor rights as it has a duty, normalization of their use here suggests regulatory or enforcement limitations. Even more critically, there is no evident means of access to grievance mechanisms for workers (Principle 29). The pictures do not show any institutions to make safe or possible reports.

The visual narratives also represent a wider phenomenon of structural vulnerability among the labor population – and it could be that migrant workers are vulnerable to several simultaneous forms of oppression, whether in their legal, linguistic, or economic lives. This emphasizes the importance of the human rights due diligence process (Principle 17), which is seen to be hardly adhered to in these circumstances.



Image 2: On the Way to Work

A second concern arising from the examination of pictures three and four is the state of living standards. Both photographs further deepen the empirical context of this photovoice enquiry by emphasizing the living circumstances of migrant workers as an under-represented and potentially under-reported aspect of business-related human rights consequences (see images 3 and 4). Read in light of the UNGPs on Business and Human Rights, these images demonstrate systemic shortfalls across the pillars of "protect, respect and remedy," most especially in the domain of decent housing, environmental health, and human dignity.

The pictures suggest poor and insecure living conditions have a direct connection with corporate responsibility under Principles 11 and 12. The building itself is reminiscent of a dormitory, made of corrugated metal sheets, with overcrowding and weak private areas, indicating either employer-provided or employer-mediated housing that does not live up to standards. The makeshift cooking, utilities, and minimal ventilation in the building give rise to sanitation, fire, and long-term health concerns. Housing may commonly be regarded as

extraneous to essential business operations, however the UNGPs would have made it a point to provide a liability of this kind as they relate to employment relationships.

There are obvious environmental and health risks embedded in these living arrangements. Household waste accumulation, stagnant water, and failure to introduce formal waste management units point to environmental hazards. Both conditions could lead to communicable diseases and undermine workers' right to the highest possible standard of health that is attainable. According to Human Rights Due Diligence (Principle 17), these hazards indicate inadequate identification and mitigation of environmental impacts that alter workers' daily lives.



Image 3: Living Condition (1)

In fact, both images raise hidden issues of safety and susceptibility to harm, such as exposure to violence or exploitation. The unsecured and open nature of the housing structures, as well as their look of informality, may make workers more vulnerable to theft or harassment or risks of gender-based violence, often worsened in such communities that lack formal legal protection as migrant workers. The high prevalence of children in such environments increases worries about intergenerational vulnerability and access to fundamental rights such as education and safe development.

Referring to the "protect, respect and remedy" structure, the visual data indicates a poor match between all three pillars. The state's responsibility to protect seems limited by the normalization of informal settlements enmeshed in labor supply chains. At the managerial level, the duty to respect human rights is not properly codified, especially applying due diligence outside the employment sphere to living conditions. Specifically there is no clear visible evidence of accessible grievance or remedy mechanisms (Principle 29) as well as there being little or no way for workers to report unsafe or undignified living conditions.

These images illustrate how systemic marginalization of migrant labor is embedded in business ecosystems in Thailand. The spatial segregations and material deprivation shown here mirror wider patterns of exclusion in which workers indispensable to economic productivity are pushed to the periphery when it comes to protection of collective rights. Such concerns drive forces on firms to rethink the human right – and to move it from being simply a question of workplace compliance to an interconnected account of workers' lives.



Image 4: Living Condition (2)

In sum, the photographs reveal significant misalignments with the UNGPs, particularly regarding adequate living standards, work environment, occupational health and safety, environmental health, and access to remedy. They call for a more holistic and enforceable approach to human rights due diligence that encompasses both working and living conditions within business operations and supply chains.

Discussions

This paper investigates how Thai businesses are implementing BHR, interpreted with a view to the UNGPs on Business and Human Rights, concentrating on working conditions, the supply chain, environmental fairness, and stakeholders. Building on qualitative studies, using secondary data and photovoice evidence, this study identifies a marked shift in Thai corporate practice—i.e., away from a 'compliance based' approach, towards more integrated, sustainability-oriented models of human rights governance. These shifts, however, are uneven, and a gap in the policy on paper and in practice persists, especially for migrant and vulnerable workers.

More generally, Thai businesses are showing signs of increasing alignment with the standard expectations of the UNGPs in general, and particularly under the "respect" category. Organizations have seen some evidence of tangible progress to formalize commitments to eliminate forced labor, child labor and human trafficking as well as ensuring that nondiscrimination, diversity, and inclusivity are incorporated into companies' corporate practices. These moves signal a maturity in corporate consciousness, where human rights are no longer just tangential, but rather part and parcel of long-term value enhancement and viability. Likewise, the integration of human rights in supply chains, via supplier codes of conduct, ESG screening, and risk-based audits, indicates a broader and much recognized of broader corporate responsibility within intricate business systems. Despite these developments, empirical evidence indicates that companies in Thailand remain in, or at least a "compliance-plus" phase of BHR involvement. That is, much enterprises go beyond minimum legal obligations, they often adopt procedural tools such as audits and checklists, and policy statements – that may not adequately reflect or incorporate the structural and contextual nature of human rights risk. This limitation is particularly noticeable in industries

with high levels of informal work, subcontracting, and international migration, in which vulnerabilities are rooted and are hard to identify through traditional monitoring tools.

The photovoice findings provide an important counterpoint to formal corporate narratives. Photos showing precarious roadside work, unsafe transport and inadequate living conditions also demonstrate a glaring disconnect between business and on-the-ground realities. Such visual information highlights and reinforces the existence of occupational safety risks, poor housing, environmental hazards, and less access to remedy, all of which represent immediate challenges to the operationalization of the UNGPs along with all three pillars.

Indeed, the lack of a visible and credible grievance mechanism for migrant workers represents a fundamental weakness of the "remedy" pillar, and there are questions concerning the inclusivity and effectiveness of existing accountability systems. From a theoretical viewpoint, these findings make a direct contribution to BHR literature, as they demonstrate how human rights risks become entrenched and complex as they are placed into socio-economic and institutional contexts. In Thailand, regulation mechanisms, cultural practices, and labor market configurations, particularly affecting migrant workers, govern the manifestation of risks and business responses. This implies that BHR cannot only be perceived as firm level responsibility, however, should be seen as a multi-level governance challenge, which can be effectively addressed on the part of corporations, governments and civil society.

Conclusions

There is a strong need to further analyze the depth and the quality of all the HRDD, which is widely regarded in theory, but is adopted relatively loosely and lacks proper sensitivity to the local context. To do so, Thai companies must involves regularly conducting impact assessments that are not limited to the workplace, but involve effects on housing quality, community and the environment. Crucially HRDD should not be seen as a one-off compliance exercise for HRDD but rather as a continuous learning cycle that fits into core business strategy**.**

It is important for Thai firms to institutionalize significant stakeholder engagement as an integral part of BHR practice. Findings from this study show that numerous human rights risks are invisible unless they have actual conversation with affected parties (and particularly migrant workers and vulnerable populations). Companies therefore need to enable participatory, trust-building and co-creation of solutions through lasting, two-way communication channels. That means not only engaging with stakeholders, but empowering them for decision-making. Such engagements can be further legitimized and optimized through partnerships with civil society organizations, labor unions, and community groups.

The photovoice findings demonstrate the detrimental impact that bad housing, poor sanitation, and bad environment on basic human rights issues, even on the basis of a level of compliance for work environment. As per the UNGPs companies should acknowledge that responsibility covers everything on which those relations of employment are inextricably linked. This involves establishing clear standards for worker accommodation, continual monitoring, and working with suppliers and local authorities to ensure compliance with these standards. The necessity of incorporating living conditions into HRDD frameworks will add to the breadth of workers' well-being.

Results from the first stage indicate: Thai corporates have begun to expand effective grievance and remedy services to vulnerable groups. As formal channels are now very common among those in the corporate world, access to and credibility over them remain scarce. In order to overcome this dilemma, Thai firms must create grievance systems that are culturally acceptable, multilingual and open to non-formal employees. Confidentiality, no retaliation, and prompt resolution are also critical in building trust. Indeed, organizations should make more comprehensive decisions on remediation, taking into account not just compensation but also dignity and prevention. The integrity of these processes can be further strengthened through collaboration with external actors, including NGOs and independent mediators.

Environmental justice can and should be integrated into Thai businesses' BHR. The results indicate that environmental risks (e.g., pollution, resource consumption and dangerous living conditions) are closely related to the results of human rights. Companies must therefore include environmental and human rights due diligence, acknowledging that damage to ecosystems often entails damage to affected communities. This can be done through preventive actions, by leveraging circular economy and making sure that at-risk communities are meaningfully participatory in decision-making processes, especially for high-impact projects.

Lastly, to confront the BHR challenges in Thailand we need to shift the focus to collective and systemic approach. Single companies, however crucial, can't solve the structural challenges of labor informality, regulatory gaps and supply chain opacity on their own. Cross-sector cooperation, multi-stakeholder projects and public-private partnerships will be necessary to provide enabling settings for responsible business behavior. In this context, Thai business can advance from reactive risk management to proactive leadership of creating an environment where risk-based and rights-respecting markets are sustainable.

Although Thai organizations have come a long way to align with international practices, the ongoing existence of human rights risks, especially among migrant and vulnerable workers, calls for a more profound and profound change. BHR progress in Thailand will involve further developing from a compliance standpoint to one which is more encompassing, participatory and contextually sensitive towards embedding the principles of protection, respect, and remedy into corporate life at a comprehensive, inclusive level where these do not become a luxury or as a "side" in mainstream practice. And it is only by doing that that businesses can actually work to advance sustainable development and human rights of all the actors at play.

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