

## Evolving Paths of Business and Human Rights – A Snapshot of the Second Business and Human Rights Research Summit

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As the field of business and human rights matures and research projects become more nuanced, the need to draw together different threads and collaborate between disciplines becomes greater.

Building on the successful outcome of the [2016](#) event, the Second Business and Human Rights Young Researchers Summit took place on 6-8<sup>th</sup> April in St Gallen, Switzerland. New participants, new contributions, yet the same drive: setting up an interdisciplinary discussion among a group of emerging scholars in the business and human rights discipline.

Thanks to the well-established partnership between the [Institute of Business Ethics at the University of St Gallen](#), the [NYU Stern Center for Business and Human Rights](#) and the [Business and Human Rights Journal](#), fifteen PhD and postdoctoral scholars from different regions of the world gathered together to share and discuss their research projects.

Ranging from economics to law, social science and humanities to business management, the works presented touched upon key issues in the field, such as regional perspectives to corporate liability, human rights due diligence vis-à-vis corporate practices, as well as paradigms of shared responsibility between States and economic actors.

The debate, enriched by the interactive format of the seminar, yielded a long list of insights and challenges. Space constraints only allow us to name a few:

- There is a need for a more effective dialogue between economic actors and the normative structures that support them at the international, regional and domestic level. What kind of models of business-State partnership can be conducive to an effective redistribution of responsibility, while avoiding a dangerous volatility of the content of human rights?
- Multi-stakeholder engagement serves as a legitimizing force, but all actors need to be “visible” in the process of standard-setting and enforcement. This is even more the case when it comes to companies operating in conflicted-affected regions, or in particular contexts such as that of mega-sporting events.
- Effective implementation and compliance mechanisms require a systemic approach to legal dilemmas such as the one of jurisdiction, as well as more emphasis on regulation aimed at prevention of corporate-related human rights violations and good governance policies. They may also require the re-conceptualization of certain legal approaches, for example a corporate obligation to rescue, applicable to pharmaceutical companies when they causally contribute to the harm from which ‘rescue’ is needed.

- Specific focus on the response to Rana Plaza’s disaster in two of the presentations ignited debate – just a few days before the fourth anniversary of the factory’s collapse – on the “Accord” and the “Alliance”, offering potential explanations for their lack of effectiveness.
- There remain certain thorny issues, for example what role, if any, there is for human rights due diligence when a consulted community outright rejects a proposed corporate venture such as a mine? Is it a fitting ‘tool’ in these circumstances or one that can only be used for arguably unethical ends – namely to seek to change the community’s mind?
- With the intrinsic interdisciplinary features of the business and human rights field come the challenges of different terminology – and criteria – across actors and disciplines.

The Summit provided a unique chance to boost interdisciplinary approaches through a process of critically appraising and reflecting upon the work of other emerging scholars in this field.

We believe that this second Summit already marks what can be considered a meaningful trend in this challenging – yet fascinating – discipline, and one that we are sure will continue through future Summits and the ongoing collaborations of Summit participants.