

MARS & VERITÉ PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

Collaborating for Impact

In April 2017, Verité and Mars, Incorporated formed a long-term, strategic partnership to foster insights, convene dialogue and take action in global supply chains, furthering a common goal of advancing respect for human rights worldwide and improving the lives of vulnerable workers. In its first two years, this unique collaboration has strengthened Mars strategies and programs, built awareness and capability across Mars, and deepened stakeholder dialogues.

Mars – a private, family-owned business operating across more than 80 countries – has long been focused on addressing social and environmental issues through the way it does business. To scale its impact and generate innovative new solutions to these challenges, Mars launched its Sustainable in a Generation Plan in 2017. Within this plan, key priorities include advancing respect for human rights, increasing incomes and unlocking opportunities for women. Its Thriving People ambition outlines a goal to meaningfully improve the lives of one million people in its value chain.



“This is an innovative way of working in partnership. It presents an opportunity for us to scale up and expand the best practice opportunities we’ve developed. Through our work with Mars, we’re driving insights that will help us to identify and activate new solutions.”

Shawn MacDonald,
CEO, Verité

To deliver on this ambition, Mars sought uncommon partnerships that could help establish new ways of approaching complex challenges, deepen its internal expertise and scale impact. Verité, a leading nonprofit labor rights organization focused on promoting safe, fair and legal working conditions around the world, emerged as an ideal partner. Verité and Mars share common goals – advancing respect for human rights in supply chains, raising awareness of business and human rights challenges and inspiring action across sectors. The collaboration combines Verité’s expertise in identifying and addressing serious human rights issues in global supply chains with Mars’ strong principles and programs.

Our hope is that together, Mars and Verité can accomplish far more to improve lives and advance respect for human rights than either organization could individually. For Verité, forming a strategic partnership with a consumer goods company as large and complex as Mars represents an opportunity to achieve impact on a global scale, across a range of critically important supply chains. As a leader in assessing, addressing and eliminating the root causes of unsafe, unfair and unlawful labor in global supply chains, Verité brings more than 20 years of expertise to the work it is doing with Mars. For Mars, this strategic partnership has deepened its global human rights programs, enabling the design and activation of programs focused on driving meaningful improvements in workers lives throughout supply chains and generating new insights to fuel further progress.



“Mars and Verité share the belief that everyone touched by our business should be treated with fairness, dignity and respect. Through our collaboration we are testing new approaches, challenging old assumptions and pushing our thinking about what’s possible when it comes to business action on human rights.”

Marika McCauley-Sine,
Vice President, Global Sustainability,
Mars

What makes the partnership unique is the depth and breadth of collaboration – spanning numerous projects, issues and areas across the company and its supply chains. The partnership is meant to bolster and strengthen the entire Mars human rights program. Verité provides strategic guidance on Mars’ global human rights policy, programs and practice as it relates to Mars’ work on human rights within the company, with its first-tier suppliers, and in its extended supply chains. Mars has identified forced labor and child labor as the human rights issues that may pose the most severe risk to people in its supply chains, and the collaboration with Verité places special emphasis on these topics.

The nature of the partnership has fostered relationships based on trust and candor, allowing Mars and Verité to work with open and transparent communication – even on the most complex and difficult topics. The organizations have become valued thought partners, co-creators and sounding boards as they navigate the complex human rights landscape together.

With numerous projects underway and more on the horizon, Mars and Verité are encouraged by the initial phase of their collaboration, but know more work is needed to drive the wide-reaching impact for which they both strive. To reach joint goals, the work has been organized in three distinct pillars – **Action**, **Insights** and **Dialogue**.

ACTION

At the core of the partnership is open, ongoing collaboration on Mars’ global approach to human rights. Verité has provided in-depth guidance and feedback, pushing Mars to be ever more ambitious in its goals and offering strategic counsel across Mars’ three core human rights programs: Responsible Workplace, which applies to company operations; Next Generation Supplier, which applies to first tier suppliers; and Human Rights in Sustainable Sourcing, which applies across its extended supply chain.



Responsible Workplace

Mars’ Responsible Workplace program aims to ensure that the human rights of all workers in its workplaces are respected. Mars engages independent auditors with expertise in labor issues to assess human rights performance in all its workplaces, addressing any non-compliances that are identified. Verité advised on the design and execution of this program, and provided specialized training to deepen the impact of the program at specific facilities.



Next Generation Supplier

Verité’s deep experience assisting companies to identify, address, and prevent human rights risk in their supply chains has helped Mars to enhance its approach to working with its first-tier suppliers on human rights. Verité has been a strategic advisor to Mars as it has revised its Responsible Sourcing program and launched its new Next Generation Supply program, which emphasizes risk-based prioritizing, in-depth collaboration with suppliers, and a focus on systemic change and engagement of workers.



“Verité brings deep expertise to complex human rights challenges facing Mars and others operating in global supply chains. We’re committed to moving beyond incremental improvements to unlock systemic changes that benefit people and the planet. Our long-term collaboration with Verité is a critical element in our broader efforts to transform supply chains.”
Barry Parkin, Chief Procurement & Sustainability Officer, Mars

Human Rights in Sustainable Sourcing



Verité has been instrumental in supporting the design of Mars’ approach to human rights in extended supply chains. Mars developed its CARE Framework (Commit, Assess, Respond and Engage) in 2015 as a practical way to help its internal teams to understand and activate the core concepts in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Raw material sourcing teams within Mars use this tool to develop human rights action plans that outline their strategy to address some of the most salient issues for vulnerable people in its supply chains. Verité served as a thought partner in developing the CARE Framework and practitioner guidance, and provides technical input, research support and feedback as teams develop their plans.

Examples of this collaboration include working together in priority raw material supply chains such as cocoa, palm oil and fish. Working together on these ingredients – from in-depth insight visits to cocoa communities in Côte d’Ivoire, to targeted training for Mars Associates in Thailand, and the multi-year implementation of a palm oil collaboration in Malaysia – Mars and Verité are beginning to learn what can best fuel change and to take action that positively impacts vulnerable people.



Cocoa: Verité and Mars have worked to better understand the persistent complex challenges facing the cocoa sector in Côte d’Ivoire, including engaging with suppliers, NGO partners, industry coalitions and others to identify new ways to deliver better results. Verité also recently published new research on forced labor risks in the sector, with the support of the International Cocoa Initiative, to identify specific areas of risk and to make recommendations for companies, governments and others on taking action. Verité is also serving as a key strategic advisor on elements of the new Cocoa for Generations strategy at Mars.



Fish: Verité is leading several efforts to reduce forced labor risks to workers in the Thai fish sector, including through research, training and advocacy within the Seafood Taskforce. This Taskforce brings Mars and others in industry together with civil society to develop and activate new ways to improve respect for rights in the sector. With Mars, Verité provides strategic guidance and technical input on the activation of the Mars’ [Thai Fish Human Rights Action Plan](#), as well as perspective on Mars’ overall fish strategy during an expert stakeholder consultation held in 2018.



Palm Oil: Mars and Verité work together to develop and activate human rights strategies and plans related to palm oil. Mars is supporting an innovative collaboration of Verité and palm oil supplier Wilmar, which aims to explore how businesses across the palm oil supply chain can better understand, address and prevent human rights risks. As part of this initiative, Verité is providing extensive consultation to Wilmar, including assessment of their current systems, customized training and delivery of concrete actions to strengthen existing policies and practices. The aim is that this collaboration not only delivers results across Wilmar’s supply chain, but that it also identifies practical and impactful steps that others across the sector can take to advance respect for human rights improvements at an industry level.

INSIGHTS & DIALOGUE

Through this partnership, Mars and Verité hope to fuel a new dialogue across sectors about the most challenging human rights issues, encouraging new perspectives on ways business can catalyze improvements in the lives of vulnerable people touched by global supply chains. Together, the organizations seek to shed light on deeply systemic issues and to explore progress and challenges with a diverse range of stakeholders and industry peers.



In 2017, Mars and Verité led a panel at the [Skoll World Forum](#) in the UK that examined partnerships between social entrepreneurs and global corporations. They also convened a group of thought leaders, together with Oxfam America during UN Week to explore linkages between advancing respect for human rights, increasing incomes and unlocking opportunities for women.

In 2018, Mars and Verité [facilitated a debate](#) at the UN Forum on Business & Human Rights in Geneva on actions businesses can take to more effectively address forced labor risks in global supply chains. The convening generated provocative dialogue and surfaced new ideas on how to drive breakthrough result by addressing root causes rather than symptoms, promoting greater transparency and collaboration, influencing governments to enforce existing laws, establishing new rules where needed, or remove existing regulations that put vulnerable people at risk.

REFLECTIONS

Collaboration on human rights across sectors can often be difficult, particularly given the global span of organizations and the fast pace and deep complexity of the issues. Mars and Verité have reflected on some of what they've learned in this first phase of their work together.

- **Appetite for honest, action-oriented discussion:** There is significant interest from businesses, government and civil society to speak openly about what is working and what isn't, even on the most difficult issues. Mars and Verité are eager to convene more conversations that create this space and push for progress.
- **Building the tools we need:** There are not many off-the-shelf, practical resources that businesses can apply to address human rights topics in a variety of supply chain contexts. Mars and Verité have found themselves testing and breaking new ground where there is not always a clear path forward.
- **Getting to know each other:** Mars and Verité have different cultures and ways of communicating. Investing the time to deeply understand both organization's respective styles has been key to learning how to best work together and make the most of their unique strengths.
- **Setting up for success:** Designing the partnership to include both the global Mars team and the individual business segments across Mars has been particularly powerful. Mars and Verité are accomplishing more with this matrixed structure than they could have with a project-based approach.

As the partnership develops in the years to come, Mars and Verité will continue to work together to better understand challenges and solutions in specific supply chains, develop and implement global approaches and initiate new research and dialogue. By doing so, they hope to advance their common goals of advancing respect for rights and delivering meaningful improvement for vulnerable people.



"Our partnership has already begun to drive new insights and exposed us both to new perspectives on tackling supply chain challenges. Together, we are pushing the thinking on what leadership in the human rights space looks like."

Elizabeth Garland,
Senior Director, Verité