GLOBALIZATION HAS LED to economic growth but has entailed human rights abuses at work in many places. For example, research has shown that in some countries, workers are paid below the minimum wage, are exposed to hazardous working conditions, and have little power to speak up against human rights abuses such as intimidation, threats, and sexual harassment.

To address these issues, Social Accountability International (SAI), in partnership with the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR), created Pillars in Practice (PIP), a program funded by the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights & Labor. PIP was designed to advance the use of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) to RESPECT human rights, PROTECT human rights and remedies, human rights abuses; and to contribute to the social and economic sustainability of the garment, agricultural, and mining industries in Bangladesh, Nicaragua, and Zimbabwe.

From September 2012 to September 2014, SAI and DIHR ran PIP with local partners—CISD, Center for International Employment and Labour Rights (CIEL) in Bangladesh; Unión Nicaragüense para la Libertad Sindical (UNLS) in Nicaragua; and ZELA (Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers Association) in Zimbabwe. The project successfully built the skills of the local partners to promote and assist in the implementation of the UNGPs by business and government actors in their respective countries. Through PIP, the local partners created awareness, sparked dialogue and promoted organized growth.

In Nicaragua, a number of small producers want to improve working conditions and extend their trade union representation to negotiate with companies on the UNGPs framework, initiating a new dialogue within a participatory process. In line with the UNGPs, they reached out to the local partners, inviting government representatives to the meetings to discuss human rights abuses. In Zimbabwe, a micro-small producer with a business and a strong trade union representation recently built capacity to protect human rights and pry for remedies. In Bangladesh, a textile factory initiated a new dialogue with the community, and the company developed an initiative to invite local consortium representatives to the factory. While the local factory representatives have learned how to protect against human rights abuses and seek remedies where necessary, the community was more open to addressing human rights and seeking remedies. In Nicaragua, the banana workers union in Nicaragua invited government representatives to the meetings; creating two new tools where human rights abuses are discussed and dealt with from the framework of the UNGPs.