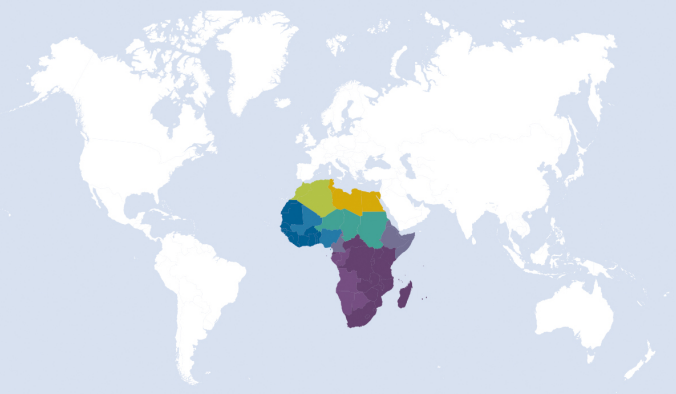


A workshop for business practitioners in Africa: Implementing the UNGPs



The [Global Business Initiative on Human Rights](#) (GBI) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) convened a workshop on 17 May 2021.

Over 20 business practitioners from a diverse range of companies in Africa came together to discuss implementing respect for human rights as envisioned by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) in the region.

Key takeaways and insights from the discussion include:

- **Human rights due diligence is becoming a matter of hard legal compliance.** Human rights-related reporting requirements have become more widespread over the past decade. However, governments are increasingly introducing legislation that requires companies to go further and implement human rights due diligence processes. The European Commission recently published the [proposal for a Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence](#), as part of a broad package of initiatives to create a more sustainable economy. France, Germany and Norway have already enacted due diligence laws, while similar initiatives are underway in a number of other European countries, and under discussion in Mexico. In parallel, the African Union (AU) continues to develop its draft policy on business and human rights, signalling that regional policymakers are also keen to promote a normative framework for the business and human rights agenda in the region. One of the central objectives of this draft policy is to foster a corporate culture of respect for human rights. As legislation continues to emerge, mandatory due diligence requirements are the direction of travel, and businesses would be well-advised to anticipate that they will become increasingly commonplace and will affect business.
- **Human rights can be both a risk and an opportunity for business.** It is important that companies go *beyond legal compliance* to address actual and potential adverse impacts to people. In terms of the key drivers for business to implement the corporate respect for human rights, implementing and failing to implement respect for human rights involves a series of risks and opportunities for business. Risks for failing to respect human rights can include loss of investment, loss of business opportunities, reduced staff retention and productivity, reputational harm, operational disruption and delay and the costs of litigation. However, companies that demonstrate strategies aligned with the corporate responsibility to respect human rights tend to enjoy opportunities including future proofing, becoming a preferred investment, employer or partner, raised productivity and efficiency, business continuity, and boosting contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). During the workshop, companies indicated that investor pressure, legal compliance, reputational risk, and wanting to do the right thing for people and communities are also drivers for business to implement the UNGPs.

- **Human rights due diligence is not one size fits all and should be tailored to fit your business.** Human rights due diligence is about identifying and mitigating risks to people. There is no “off the shelf” human rights due diligence tool. As companies develop their human rights due diligence processes, they should be aware of human rights impacts in their industry, as well as their own values as a company. Once processes are developed, integrating human rights across the company often requires internal capacity building and awareness raising, including tailored trainings across operations and the identification of human rights leaders to drive human rights throughout the company.
- **Mitigating adverse impacts requires careful consideration of the root causes, and the nature and context in which the business is operating.** The UNGPs call upon companies to identify and mitigate actual or potential adverse impacts on human rights. In order to effectively mitigate adverse impacts, companies should consult with internal and independent external experts. Effective mitigation can also require companies to explore the context of its operations. A case study exploring child labour in a company’s supply chain caused the company to consider the root causes of child labour in the geographies where they operate and how they can address these root causes as part of their mitigation strategy. Another case study involved how mitigating adverse impacts on gender equality will in turn impact traditional gender roles in the community where the company operates. As companies identify their salient human rights issues and develop their strategies for mitigation, engaging with legitimate community representatives or the communities themselves is important.

Looking ahead

This workshop was organised as part of an ongoing focus of GBI and UNDP to support practical discussions among business practitioners in Africa on implementing respect for human rights.

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