

2024 African BHR Forum Session Concept-note

Dialogue on Synergies between the UNGPs on Business and Human Rights and African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

Date; 8th October 2024

Time; 9am to 11:30am

Session Organisers

- a. Network of African National Human Rights Institutions
- b. United Nations Development Programme

Background

The AfCFTA is one of the flagship projects under the AU Agenda 2063, covering trade in goods and services, investment, intellectual property rights and competition policy. The AfCFTA envisages the creation of a single market with free movement of goods, services, capital and natural persons, as a way of promoting social and economic development in Africa. The participation of NHRIs in development processes is crucial given their mandate in supporting states in delivering on their human rights obligations through, *inter alia*, monitoring, advisories and implementing activities as per the establishing laws under various thematic areas. Additionally, multi-stakeholder initiatives that bring together businesses, NHRIs, academia, media, and civil society are thus key in fostering collaborative approaches built on dialogue and trust; and provide a platform for sharing of best practices to potentially address complex human rights issues. Further, the ambitious objectives of the AfCFTA can be best realised and be sustainable when human rights and responsible business are infused so that that no one is left behind as stipulated under the African Union Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Agenda 2030. UNGPs and NAP-BHR development and implementation in the region therefore remains crucial in accelerating responsible trade and promoting a human rights-based approach to development in Africa. With the mandatory 5-year review of the AfCFTA due soon, it is important that various stakeholders consolidate experiences in the development and implementation of UNGPs in light of the AfCFTA and come up with insights and suggestion how the review process can be used to infuse responsible intra-Africa trade, human rights and sustainable development under AfCFTA. The forum will therefore provide an opportunity for various stakeholders to reflect on some of the key strengths, gaps, lessons and opportunities in the development and implementation of BHR UNGPs in relations to AfCFTA.

Objectives

- a. To assess the coherence of Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement in relation to responsible trade and human rights.
- b. Facilitate exchange and learning among participants on the implementation of BHR UNGPs exploring potential implications, challenges and opportunities for enhanced access to remedy within the implementation of AfCFTA.

- c. Facilitate a conversation among participants on opportunities and strategies to make best use of the review of the AfCFTA to infuse responsible trade and development.

Key questions for panellists and discussants

The Forum will be guided by the following key questions that will inform the sessions;

- a. Provide an overview of AfCFTA and progress in its implementation.
- b. What are the synergies between the UNGPs and AfCFTA implementation?
- c. What are the opportunities, strengths, and gaps of AfCFTA from responsible trade and human rights lens and how can they be addressed?
- d. What is the role of various stakeholders in advancing responsible trade in Africa?

Background to the discussion

The establishment of the AfCFTA offers a major vehicle for regional integration as well as transforming the economies of African countries and where mainstreaming human rights will play a critical role in promoting inclusive and sustainable development. As businesses expand and integrate across borders, especially within the AfCFTA, they must uphold their duty to respect human rights standards throughout their supply chains.

Moderator and speakers

The speakers are;

- a. Prof. Damilola- United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights
- b. Jane Nalunga- SEATINI Uganda
- c. United Nations Development Program
- d. Gilbert Sebihogo- Network of African National Human Rights Institutions
- e. Kenya Association of Manufacturers.
- f. AfCFTA Secretariat

Outcomes

- a. Participants enhance their knowledge and understanding of the AfCFTA and identify opportunities for engagement in its implementation.
- b. Enhanced capacity of participants to engage in the implementation processes of UNGPs.
- c. Enhanced capacity of participants to promote responsible trade.