

CONCEPT NOTE FOR 2nd EAST AFRICA BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE AND WORKSHOP 2026

“Beyond Compliance: Strengthening Accountable and Rights-Centred Supply Chains in East & Horn of Africa”

Nairobi, Kenya: 10-11 June

Context & Background

In East African and the Horn of Africa, significant investment are attracted, driven by its strategic location, structural reforms that create more enabling business environments, and targeted investment strategies. The region also possesses substantial natural resources essential to global food production and energy transitions, as well as expanding trade relations with the European Union and other global markets. In 2025, it saw a record-high Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflow, with land-based investments accounting for the majority, and a GDP growth predicted at almost 6%. Despite this growth, business environments across the region remain highly diverse, with several countries affected by protracted conflict, political instability, and humanitarian crises. These conditions heighten human rights risks and make responsible business conduct more urgent and complex. Global geopolitical instability is also disrupting value chains, creating additional risks for private sector actors, states, and rights holders. This is particularly relevant for land-based investments, where multiple subsectors are documented as having high risks of actual and potential human rights abuses. In this context, new approaches to business that place environmental and social sustainability at the core of operations hold the potential to create significant positive ripple effects for workers, communities, consumers, the climate, and the environment.

In 2023, the first East Africa Business and Human Rights conference addressed the “Opportunities to Integrate Human and Environmental Rights into Land Based Investments” looking at documented and potential human rights violations in the agricultural and extractive sectors, which still provide the main sources of incomes in the region. Three years on, the Responsible Business Conduct (RBC) landscape has evolved considerably, both in the region and in response to global regulatory shifts. Furthermore, the region has positioned itself as a continental front-runner in advancing the business and human rights agenda, particularly through the adoption of National Action Plans (NAPs) on Business and Human Rights. Kenya and Uganda were early adopters, while Nigeria, Liberia and Ghana joined in that order. Beyond adoption of NAPs, we have seen varying efforts by different Africa governments on BHR in Africa. For example, Tanzania committed to the NAP development process, while Zambia organized the multistakeholder dialogue on the NAP process in 2023. Malawi, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, and Rwanda have made tangible progress toward adoption.

Externally, greater clarity has emerged around European sustainability and due diligence regulations, alongside growing interest from European and other international investors seeking partnerships in the greater East Africa, as evident from the European Union’s Global Gateway strategy. These developments have elevated RBC on corporate and policy agendas, particularly in export-oriented sectors. However, much of the momentum remains compliance-driven, focused on meeting buyer requirements, regulatory expectations, and audit standards. While emerging EU frameworks reference comprehensive instruments such as the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) and the OECD Guidelines for

Multinational Enterprises, implementation in practice is often centered on risk management and legal preparedness rather than structural transformation and clear impacts.

To ensure that trade and investment genuinely respect human rights, environmental sustainability, and the realities of climate vulnerability and conflict-affected settings, the region must move from regulatory alignment toward a smarter mix of measures that rebalances power, strengthens accountability, and advances meaningful rights realization across value chains. Building on the lessons learned from 2023, this year's dialogue and workshop will reflect the progress made during and since the convening in Kampala. It will be an opportunity to present concrete business models that center rights holders in supply chains across land-based investments in the region, ensure compliance to relevant legal and guiding frameworks and possess transformational opportunities to benefit businesses, people and the planet.

Objectives of the Conference

- i. To assess and catalyse progress on adopting and implementing Business and Human Rights frameworks on national and regional (EAC, AU) level focused on measurable and concrete action under the three UNGP pillars. The dialogue and workshop will focus on different avenues including NAPs, other BHR-related policies, EU regulation and trade deals relevant to the region.
- ii. To encourage peer-learning and multistakeholder dialogue amongst governments, national human rights institutions (NHRIs), businesses and civil society organisations (CSOs), human rights defenders (HRDs), trade unions and academia.
- iii. To present evidence from sector specific issues in land-based investments, including agri-production, extractives and energy infrastructure as well as tools and positive experiences and opportunities to improve responsible business conduct that benefits businesses and rights holders, emphasising 'the business case of human rights'.
- iv. To advance practical models and tools for due diligence (including heightened due diligence) that highlight the lived challenges of producers, communities and consumers and that strengthens protection of most-at-risk groups such as HRDs, women and children.

About the conference

The conference will be held in Nairobi, Kenya, for two days (per invitation). It will consist of plenary discussions and workshop sessions to allow for country and sector specific technical deep dives and planning.

The participants will be decision makers and technical representatives of government, national human rights institutions, private sector companies and associations, civil society and human rights defenders' groups, and academia. The format primarily prioritise in-person participation, but plenary sessions will be livestreamed.