



BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DURING AND AFTER COVID-19

THEME: PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Concept Note

Background

With coronavirus (Covid-19) hitting the globe, the government of Uganda through Presidential and Ministry of health directives put in place measures to curb down the spread of the pandemic. Significant of these was the total lock down of non-essential services in the country—in effect leading to a number of business enterprises closing up and others maintaining operations with stringent adjustments. Whereas some of the businesses have been able to maintain a workforce during the lockdown, many have had to make concessions in their operations including reduction of working hours, forced and unpaid leave and salary reductions among others. According to the Ministry of Trade about 4200 companies closed during lockdown.¹ Consequently, business relations and by extension social and economic protection for employees especially for the private sector have been greatly affected.

With the phased opening of the economy, many businesses are stretched with operation costs, rental arrears and employee relations with the reality of the new economic situation. Trade has declined as a result of the public health measures to curb the spread of the pandemic. Indeed, this has had a toll on the revenue generation in the country.² The informal sector is still greatly affected as the increased cost of production and thus grappling with continued operations. The huge impact of Covid-19 on business operations is ripe ground for businesses to lessen on the adherence to human rights standards including abuse of labour rights, environmental degradation, and unethical acts in the chain of production among others.

¹ Damalie Mukhayе, “4200 Companies Close Over COVID-19 Lockdown,” THE DAILY MONITOR, (April 22 2020) accessed at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/4-200-companies-close-over-Covid-19-lockdown/688334-5531256-n2gbmkz/index.html>

² Ali Twaha, “COVID-19: Uganda Exports Decline by 34%” THE NEW VISION, (July 06, 2020) accessed at <https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1521359/covid-19-uganda-exports-decline-34>

With the foregoing, the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) is organizing an E-Dialogue focused on the promotion of responsible business for economic recovery during and after Covid-19 with a particular emphasis on the need for an economic stimulus that protects small and medium enterprises and by extension offers labour protections to employees. The dialogue shall also interrogate the need to fast track the national action plan on business and human rights, respect for the environment in the chain of production and promote the corporate responsibility to respect human rights.

Objectives

1. To have a platform to assess how Covid-19 has affected business relations in Uganda with a focus on trade and taxation.
2. To make a case for the need to fast track the development of the national action plan on business and human rights.
3. To have a platform to assess the preparedness of the State to deal with the business and human rights situation amidst and after Covid-19.

The discussions and panelists at the E-Dialogue

The dialogue will comprise two- one and a half hour phased discussions as outlined below;

a. Phase One: Effects of Covid-19 on Trade, Taxation and Labour relations in Uganda

This panel will discuss the effects of the pandemic on labour relations, trade and revenue generation in Uganda. They will also make a case for the need for an economic stimulus package that protects the Micro Small and Medium Enterprises amidst covid-19 so as to safe guard the livelihood of the Ugandans who are largely employed in the informal sector. It will be constituted by the following speakers and Panelists;

Hon. Amelia Anne Kyambadde – Minister of Trade Industry and Cooperatives –
Key note address and opening of the E- Dialogue.

Panelists

- i. Commissioner Alex Asimwe, Directorate of Labour, Productivity and Industrial Relations – Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
- ii. Ramathan Ggoobi, Lecturer – Makerere University Business School
- iii. Ms. Angela Bageine – Chairperson- Uganda Women Entrepreneurs Association (UWEAL)

- iv. Mr. Arnold Kwesiga – Coordinator – Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability (UCCA)

b. Phase Two: Respect for human rights amidst the business recovery from effects of covid-19.

This panel will discuss the role of responsible businesses during the economic recovery including the respect for human rights standards in the business operations and supply chains, financial accountability and respect for the environment. The need to fast track the development of the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights and highlight the benefits of having this action plan in place with regard to the protection of human rights amidst business activities.

- i. Mr. Benard Mujuni – Commissioner Equity and Rights – Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development.
- ii. Ms. Ruth Sekindi – Director Monitoring and Inspection – Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC)
- iii. Mr. Matia Lwanga Bwanika – Chairperson LC5 – Wakiso District
- iv. Ms. Salima Namusobya – Executive Director – Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER)