

Multi-stakeholder Asia consultation on applying a gender lens to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

Session 1 | Concept Note

Intersectionality of discrimination against women: role of states, businesses and civil society

Day: 20 February 2018

Time: 1200 - 1300

Objective: To analyse the impact of intersectionality on women's rights, particularly in the context of businesses, and their operations; and identify the role various stakeholders can play in ensuring gender norms do not impact women's rights.

Background

The risks and impact of businesses on women's rights is rooted in social norms, and interlocked system of power based on gender, class, race, caste, ethnicity, religion etc. Discrimination against women often starts at birth, gender lines are drawn early, and exclusions for women continue throughout adulthood. Among other vital dimensions, these discriminatory practices are based on, age, race, nationality, marital status, maternity and so on. Often, all these are treated like discrete identities – as though they never overlap when discrimination occurs. In reality, it is these multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that results in denial of women's rights at workplace, and through businesses' sphere of influence. Therefore, any discussion on embedding a gender lens to the business and human rights agenda must be located in the context of gender norms, structural inequalities and unequal power relations.

The intersection of age, race, class, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation often lead to additional layers of vulnerabilities for women belonging to certain groups. Racially and ethnically marginalized women, worldwide, are more likely to be a part of the informal economy without any security or social benefits. Women belonging to indigenous communities are also affected adversely by development projects given they are disproportionately represented among the poor, may not own land and are less likely to be consulted on projects affecting their livelihoods. In India, for example, women belonging to lower castes are overrepresented in precarious working conditions that resemble forms of bonded labour.

It is in this background that this session will analyze the impact of intersectionality, that is consequence of two or more combined grounds of discrimination against women in the context of businesses and their operations. The session also aims to seek recommendations from various stakeholders to discuss the role that states, businesses and civil society could play in ensuring that gender norms do not impact women at workplaces, and beyond.

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