

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

Session 2 | Concept Note

Corporate responsibility to respect rights of women workers: Integrating a gender perspective to human rights due diligence

Day: 20 February 2018

Time: 1400 - 1530

Session Concept:

The business benefits of protecting women’s rights and giving them the skills to progress are not unknown. However, ‘knowing makes no difference’ as very few businesses are taking real action to harness the potential that women workers in their supply chains. They are too often subject to discrimination, sexual harassment and other forms of workplace violence. This coupled with the lack of professional advancement opportunities available to them and their exclusion from key decision-making processes – makes the plight of these women quite challenging and poses a growing threat to sustainable global value chains and retention of a skilled labour force. To appropriately prevent, mitigate and remediate these challenges, companies must be willing to address the systemic issues of sexual harassment and abuse of women at the factory level. In line with the UN Guiding Principles, business has a responsibility to go beyond ‘doing no harm’ by addressing issues through due diligence processes that safeguard the rights of female workers in their supply chains.

To realize the ambitions of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in particular (SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls & SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries), the private sector has an important role to play —particularly in sectors, such as apparel, that employ large numbers of women all over the world.

Over the last decade, many businesses, industry coalitions, supplier groups, NGOs, unions, governments, and international coalitions have collaborated to create promising initiatives designed to improve working conditions, build skills, and promote the well-being of women workers in the supply chain. These efforts have built a collective understanding of what makes (and importantly, what doesn’t) for a decent employment opportunity. While these advances should be recognized, more needs to be done. Lack of structured human resource policies, low levels of trade union representation and limited awareness about sexual harassment are also traits that can be found particularly in the lowest tiers of global supply

chains. Addressing these systemic supply chain challenges requires intentional actions and deliberate policies.

This session will explore replicable approaches taken by companies to protect and empower women along the supply chain – and how empowering female workers and valuing their contribution, makes real business sense.

Moderator

Ms. Anisha Rajapakse, Strategy Advisor – Global Corporate Sustainability (pvt) Ltd.

Panelists

- **Mr. Ashok Yadav**, Social & Environmental Sustainability Manager, ESPRIT, India
- **Ms. Anna Lee Tuvera**, Gender Specialist, International Trade Union Confederation- Asia Pacific
- **Mr. Mohamed Zahidullah**, Head of Sustainability, DBL Group, Bangladesh