

Taking Forward Business and Human Rights in Pakistan

24th January 2023

Kohinoor Hall, Marriott Hotel, Islamabad

Objective

The Federal Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR) and UNDP Pakistan are holding a seminar and panel discussion to identify key priorities, drivers, and recommendations for taking forward the implementation of Pakistan’s National Action Plan (NAP) on Business & Human Rights (BHR) in 2023. The NAP aims at addressing human rights risks and impacts associated with all forms of business activity and therefore a key focus of the dialogue will be the role of the private sector, and best practices such as human rights due diligence (HRDD), towards contributing to a business environment in Pakistan which respects human rights. Further, the dialogue will also seek to generate recommendations for how rights-holders, such as workers, local communities, human rights and environmental defenders, and civil society, can be included into the NAP implementation process. Finally, participants at the event will learn how multistakeholder collaboration on implementation of the NAP can help achieve shared goals by advancing human rights, building social impact, and enhancing competitiveness of Pakistani businesses in global markets which reward responsible business conduct.

Background

In September 2021, the Government of Pakistan—with MoHR as the leading entity—approved and launched the NAP on BHR, a policy document describing how Pakistan intends to promote responsible business practices across the country. The NAP is based on the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) which (i) lay out the obligation of States towards protecting human rights; (ii) clarify the responsibilities of businesses to respect human rights; and (iii) emphasise the need for effective and timely access to remedy to victims of business-related human rights violations.

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Since the adoption of the UNGPs in 2011 by the United Nations Human Rights Council, there has been growing global demand for the need for transnational efforts to advance responsible business practices aimed at protecting human rights. Several states around the world have developed and are implementing NAPs on BHR. Further, there are growing calls for the fundamental importance of HRDD as an exercise for businesses to address human rights challenges both in their operations and across their value chains. Several European states, including Norway and Germany, and the European Union as a whole—a major export market for Pakistan—have proceeded in recent years towards developing mandatory HRDD legislation, while in 2022 Japan launched HRDD guidelines for all Japanese businesses.

Being the first country in South Asia to develop and launch a NAP on BHR signalled to the international community Pakistan's commitment to the UNGPs as a framework to promote sustainable and rights-based economic development. Over the course of the first year of implementation, MoHR, in collaboration with UNDP Pakistan, has sought to raise awareness amongst key stakeholders of their responsibilities as laid out in the NAP. This has included the establishment of a Federal Steering Committee to promote inter-ministerial and inter-provincial coordination on the NAP, as well as a round of multi-stakeholder consultations in Karachi, Lahore, Quetta, Peshawar, Sialkot, and Faisalabad to obtain recommendations for streamlining its implementation in Pakistan's devolved context.

In addition to demonstrating the unique context of individual provinces relevant to implementation of the NAP, the consultative sessions highlighted the need for promoting policy coherence through collaborative initiatives and partnerships between government, private sector, civil society, workers, National Human Rights Institutions, and others. Further, during the consultations, two priority areas from the NAP were consistently highlighted as key drivers to take forward the BHR agenda in Pakistan — (1) the role of HRDD in promoting responsible business practices across value chains, and (2) the need for sustained efforts to promote anti-discrimination, equal opportunity, and inclusion of marginalised communities into economic activity. In addition, in light of the impact of the previous year's floods on the most vulnerable communities in Pakistan, the nexus between responsible business, people-centered and accountable institutions, and environmental justice were also brought to the fore.



Agenda

Time	Activity
10:30 – 11:00	Participant Registration
11:00 – 11:15	Opening Remarks Ali Raza Bhutta, Secretary, MoHR Rana Kaiser Ishaque, Assistant Resident Representative, UNDP Pakistan
11:15 – 11:30	Presentation on UNDP’s Support to Business and Human Rights in Pakistan Samad Aftab, Research Analyst, UNDP Pakistan
11:30 – 11:45	Presentation on Lessons Learnt and Recommendations from Provincial Consultations Shahzad Ahmad Khan, Director International Cooperation, MoHR
11:45 – 12:00	Presentation on Business & Human Rights Guidelines Zoha Shahid, Senior Research Associate, RSIL
12:00 – 13:00	Panel Discussion: Implementation of Pakistan’s National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights – Priorities for 2023 Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muhammad Arshad, Director General, International Cooperation, MoHR • Abia Akram, Project Director, Special Talent Exchange Program • Memosh Khawaja, President & Chief Executive Officer, Pakistan Institute of Corporate Governance • Ume Laila Azhar, Executive Director, HomeNet Pakistan • Khalida Habib, Executive Director, Securities & Exchange Commission of Pakistan • Umar Masood Ur Rahman, Vice President, Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry • Natasha Amir, Research Associate, Pakistan Textile Council Moderator: Zoha Shahid, Senior Research Associate, RSIL
13:00 – 13:15	Discussion and Q/A
13:15 – 13:30	Concluding Remarks Muhammad Arshad, Director General, International Cooperation, MoHR Malick Zulfiqar Ahmad, National Technical Advisor, UNDP Pakistan
13:30	Lunch

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