

B-Tech Africa Project – Fostering responsible technology company conduct across Africa March 2024

The United Nations (UN) recognizes technology's contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the overall development efforts in Africa. At the same time, there is an understanding that the use and development of technologies at scale can have civic, social, economic, political, and environmental impacts that may sometimes be unintended or unplanned, resulting in the infringement of fundamental rights. As such, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights) plans to engage with African governments, technology companies, startups, civil society, academics and investors under the B-Tech Project to proactively pledge to and implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs).

Aim of B-Tech Africa

Under the Africa component of the B-Tech Project, UN Human Rights engages strategically with technology company operators, investors and other key digital economy stakeholders across Africa in a set of African economies and their tech hubs to create awareness of implementing the UNGPs on BHR. The project is built around the following set of key activities:

- **Part 1:** Continuous **monitoring and analysis of legislative and policy frameworks** to address technology-driven human rights harms to inform a meaningful framing for stakeholder engagement.
- **Part 2:** Strategic and impactful **policy engagement with governments and inter-governmental organizations** in the region and coherent policy responses to technology-driven adverse human rights impacts.
- **Part 3:** Dynamic **engagement on responsible business conduct**, focussing on the tech community and key stakeholders, including civil society and national human rights institutions, on the challenges and opportunities to effectively implement the UNGPs.

B-Tech Africa builds on the B-Tech Project's foundational papers (available on the [B-Tech portal](#)) and contextualizes key concepts of responsible business conduct, such as in the context of artificial intelligence. The project seeks to highlight the relevance and importance of responsible business conduct, and the UNGPs in particular, for supporting the responsible development and use of technologies in African markets.

Relevance for tech companies operating in African markets

Not only are many tech businesses operating in African economies still young, but some of them have also made it their core mission to contribute to the Sustainable Development



Agenda. A sustainable digitalization in African markets can only be achieved if it builds on corporate respect for human rights. The UNGPs set out a principled approach for all companies—regardless of industry sector, size, structure, or operating context—to conduct business responsibly, identify risks to people and take action to address them. For technology companies, this includes anticipating and addressing issues that might occur related to the use of their products and services. The UNGPs are a powerful tool for guiding technology company conduct because they are internationally agreed upon and supported by diverse stakeholders, including businesses, governments, and civil society worldwide. For entrepreneurs and executives in all parts of the tech industry, the UNGPs provide a roadmap for operationalizing respect for human rights as part of how they do business, no matter the enterprise's focus, size or complexity.

Achieved highlights of the first phase of B-Tech Africa

- [Presentation of the project at the African Business and Human Rights Forum, Accra, Ghana \(October 2022\)](#)
- [Multi-stakeholder engagement workshop at the Africa Tech Summit in Nairobi, Kenya \(February 2023\)](#)
- [High-level multi-stakeholder launch event in Cape Town, South Africa \(March 2023\)](#)
- [Expert workshop at the Forum on the Participation of NGOs in the Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights \(ACHPR\), virtual \(October 2023\)](#)
- [Expert workshop on the role of National Human Rights Institutions in protecting human rights in the African technology sector, virtual \(October 2023\)](#)
- [Expert workshop on human rights due diligence and meaningful stakeholder engagement in the African technology sector, Nairobi, Kenya \(October 2023\)](#)

Envisaged goals for the second phase of B-Tech Africa

1. Expanding the company engagement through creating a dedicated Company Community of Practice for continuous peer-learning around the uptake of the UNGPs
2. Capacity-building measures in cooperation with National Human Rights Institutions and regional civil society organizations on how to utilize the UNGPs for engaging with companies
3. Deepening the engagement with governments and inter-governmental institutions, especially on the development and implementation of national AI strategies
4. Engaging with legislators and regulators on a UNGPs-aligned approach to technology compact regulation through the UNGPs compass
5. Developing course material for established academic partners to teach responsible business conduct in the technology sector