



# GAIA principles: Case studies of good practice

## **Principle 10. Businesses are accountable for GBVH and learn from GBVH risks and reports.**

*As part of their responsibility to prevent GBVH and conduct GRHRDD, businesses are accountable to workers and stakeholders, including boards and shareholders, for their actions and impacts. This includes transparently reporting about own operations and due diligence with supply chain partners. GBVH is complex. Businesses may not get things completely right the first time - seek lessons to improve and share these insights with other stakeholders.*

## **A private sector approach for addressing sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH)<sup>1</sup> in the tea industry**

In 2024, the Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP) led and commissioned [a study](#) to learn from the experiences of three tea-producing companies that had faced public exposure of systemic SEAH in their workplaces. Rather than responding defensively, these three companies chose to participate openly in the research - reflecting on what went wrong, what had been effective – and what had not - in their respective responses, and what the wider industry could learn from their experiences. The project was undertaken by Claire Lynch Consulting (CLC) and Partner Africa, and resulted in a report with actionable insights for industry stakeholders on preventing and addressing SEAH.

The study used a participatory, multi-method approach centred on extensive dialogue with the three participating companies, supported by stakeholder engagement across the industry, document review, and targeted desk research. Critically, the research did not set out to validate or endorse any single company's approach as a model. Instead, through honest reflection on what worked and what did not across all three cases, the study distilled findings about good

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<sup>1</sup> Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH) are interconnected forms of gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) that occur along a continuum of sexual violence. Sexual Exploitation is the abuse of power or vulnerability for sexual purposes, such as making sexual activity a condition for employment or benefits. Sexual Abuse refers to actual or threatened sexual intrusion through force or coercion, including rape and sexual assault. Sexual Harassment involves unwelcome sexual conduct that creates a hostile or degrading environment, including gestures, comments, or inappropriate materials.

practice, lessons learned, and recommendations to address gaps in industry knowledge and practice.

### **What did the research find about why SEAH persists?**

The research identified causes at three interconnected levels:

- Individual behaviour (abuse of power by those in authority);
- Organisational environment (weak policies, ineffective grievance mechanisms, lack of accountability); and
- Supply chain and societal context (economic pressures, worker vulnerability, harmful gender norms).

This complexity explains why prior isolated interventions had not succeeded. A systemic issue requires systemic interventions.

### **What were the findings?**

Analysis of the three case studies identified ten critical success factors for effective crisis response when SEAH is exposed:

1. **Visible leadership & governance** – Clear commitment from senior management with a robust governance structure to drive accountability;
2. **Immediate victim-survivor support** – Access to medical, legal, and psychosocial support;
3. **Safeguarding actions** – Measures to protect all workers and minimise risk of reoccurrence;
4. **Fair and swift disciplinary action** – Appropriate investigation and accountability for those responsible;
5. **Independent assessments** – External experts engaged to conduct investigations to determine extent, causes, and impacts;
6. **Comprehensive remediation** – Effective remedy that restores victim-survivors to their rightful status and prevents future harm; including long-term supports as needed;
7. **Planning & implementing actions** – Structured action plans addressing root causes, with clear timelines and responsibilities;
8. **Ongoing monitoring, evaluation & reporting** – Regular tracking and communicating of progress and effectiveness;
9. **Worker engagement & communication** – Ongoing, transparent two-way communication to build or rebuild trust with the workforce;
10. **Stakeholder collaboration** – Proactive collaboration with buyers, industry bodies, unions, and civil society.

These factors are also applicable to businesses facing other sensitive human rights allegations. Beyond crisis response, **the research emphasises that these elements should become embedded in ongoing gender-responsive human rights due diligence (GR-HRDD)** — shifting from reactive to proactive management of SEAH risks.

### **What were the 10 key lessons and areas of change that businesses need to focus on?**

1. **Traditional compliance approaches are insufficient** – Policies, audits, and certifications alone cannot uncover or prevent SEAH; proactive gender-responsive human rights due diligence (GRHRDD) is essential.
2. **Survivor-centred approach is essential** – Victim-survivors must be at the core of response mechanisms.
3. **Addressing power imbalances is key** – SEAH thrives in workplaces with unchecked managerial authority.
4. **Change requires long-term commitment** – Organisational transformation takes a minimum of 3–5 years.
5. **Worker trust & communication matter** – Employers must foster open, transparent engagement.
6. **Impact measurement is crucial** – Companies must track quantitative and qualitative SEAH data to understand effectiveness and enable evidence-based decisions.
7. **Buyers must use their influence responsibly** - The buyer-supplier relationship can either support or undermine efforts to address SEAH.
8. **Commercial decisions create vulnerability** – Low wages, precarious employment, and job insecurity increase workers' vulnerability to SEAH. Pricing pressures across the supply chain directly contribute to these conditions.
9. **Responsibility is shared across the supply chain** – SEAH is an industry-wide issue, requiring collective action.
10. **Expertise & resources must be prioritised** – Companies need specialised support to ensure good practice in SEAH training, policies and interventions.

GAIA Principle 10 acknowledges that businesses may not get things completely right the first time - what matters is accountability, transparency, and a commitment to learn, improve, and share those lessons. This project demonstrates Principle 10 in action - transparency, collaboration, and shared learning across the tea supply chain. By bringing together diverse opinions and sharing lessons publicly, the research aimed to help make tea estates more dignified and equitable workplaces for the many women they employ.

Many stakeholders from this research contributed to the development of the GAIA principles, thus ensuring others could benefit from their experience.

*Acknowledgement: The content of this case study has been reproduced with permission from a [study](#) carried out by Partner Africa and Claire Lynch Consulting, commissioned by the Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP), for the purposes of demonstrating practices that exemplify the GAIA principles.*