



Ethical  
Trading  
Initiative



# GAIA principles

to end gender-based violence  
and harassment in commercial  
agriculture and fisheries

**Overview**





## What GBVH means

Gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) is violence or harassment based on a person's gender or sex. This includes violence or threats of violence. Harassment is physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct directed at a person, which makes them feel uncomfortable, intimidated, offended or humiliated at work.

GBVH is a range of behaviour such as shouting, swearing at workers or teasing using sexualised language. Examples of more serious behaviour are requesting sexual favours in exchange for jobs, contract renewals or lighter duties – whether during recruitment or employment, and sexual violence.

## GBVH affects us all

GBVH is widespread and can be experienced by any person, including men, but it disproportionately affects women.

Businesses have a responsibility to ensure the safety of all their workers along with any visitors to their premises, including job seekers, temporary or sub-contracted workers. Businesses have a responsibility to ensure that no one commits GBVH while working for them, including third parties such as labour providers, security guards or recruitment agents.

***The GAIA principles are a framework to align and coordinate action to prevent and respond to GBVH in the workplace.***

GBVH not only impacts workers; it impacts businesses. GBVH harms workforce productivity by creating insecurity, discord, and high turnover. In contrast, a workforce that feels comfortable and respected is more productive and stable. Businesses can also suffer reputational damage, legal repercussions from incidents, and associated financial costs from responding to cases and setting things right – remediation.

## Principles created together

The GAIA principles are a framework to align and coordinate action to prevent and respond to GBVH in the workplace. They have been developed with a range of representatives from business and civil society (including trade unions and non-governmental organisations), government and multilateral institutions and initiatives based on their experience addressing GBVH.



# GAIA principles



1. All forms of gender-based violence and harassment are prohibited



2. Businesses commit to prevent GBVH and ensure their business partners do the same



3. Senior leadership considers the GBVH risk implications of all decisions to ensure workplaces are equal, respectful and free from GBVH



4. Policies and procedures are created and implemented to prevent GBVH in the workplace



5. Responsible purchasing practices enable action on root causes of GBVH and support sustainable production



6. Workers are employed in decent work through transparent decision making



7. Businesses enable workers to exercise their rights to and responsibilities in a GBVH-free workplace



8. All workers trust they can report GBVH confidentially or anonymously, without fear of retaliation



9. Businesses provide remedy of GBVH and hold perpetrators accountable



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





## The GAIA principles apply to all businesses in their own operations and the supply chain

Businesses should refer to these principles when recruiting and employing workers and when purchasing goods and services from other businesses to ensure everyone is on the same page and understands what is needed to address GBVH.

### What it will take to make change

The principles describe the outcome businesses should strive for in their operations and supply chain. They are rooted in **freedom of association**, align with international standards and emphasise collective action.

### To be confident you are making real change, work with the experts

Businesses should address GBVH together with workers and their representatives/trade unions. Workers understand the risks they face best. Because their jobs depend on businesses' success, they are motivated and constructive partners.

- Organised workers, with strong representation and leadership from women, are able to work with businesses to identify specific measures to prevent GBVH and can create safer workplaces through policies, procedures and collective bargaining agreements (CBAs).

GBVH can be very complex and challenging to address – GBVH specialists, trade unions, women's rights organisations and other NGOs have the knowledge and skill set to support victims and survivors that businesses might lack.



## Actions should be:

- ▶ Prioritised according to the **most significant risk or impact of GBVH across businesses' operations and supply chains**.
- ▶ Based on **meaningful stakeholder engagement** with those who are affected and at risk of GBVH – workers, women especially, and their representatives – and individuals and organisations with expertise. This includes centring the needs and wishes of **victims and survivors throughout the process**.
- ▶ Directed towards **prevention, focus on perpetrators and the root causes of GBVH**. This includes addressing underlying norms, beliefs and attitudes, power disparities created by workplace structures, and the vulnerabilities caused by low pay and limited, insecure work, driven by supply chain and market dynamics.

## Principles for alignment, discussion and action

We all want safe and respectful working conditions for ourselves and others. The principles should stimulate discussion and reflection between businesses and their partners (suppliers, buyers, sub-contractors, third parties etc) about how to prevent GBVH in the workplace.

This requires a collective effort, including fairly sharing costs and resources. Businesses can use these principles to coordinate their actions, combine resources and avoid duplication.

For example, producers and growers can use these to identify and ask for the support they need from retailers and suppliers to prevent GBVH and coordinate efforts with shared labour providers to improve grievance mechanisms.



***This requires a collective effort, including fairly sharing costs and resources.***

For example, retailers and suppliers can identify opportunities to scale trainings and support for their partners across a region or sector. Retailers can review the risks to sub-contracted workers in their own warehouses and align messaging to their common business partners and pool resources to support prevention and remediation efforts.

## Create space for transparency

- ▶ Businesses should support partners in their journey to improve their practices. Honest disclosures of challenges by businesses committed to tackling GBVH and its root causes should be met with support from their partners.
- ▶ Workers, trade unions and other civil society organisations can use these principles as a basis to engage businesses about solutions.
- ▶ Businesses can demonstrate their commitment to preventing GBVH and creating safer workplaces through transparency to workers, their partners and the public. Deliberately creating space and signalling readiness for dialogue enables accountability, further collaboration and progress.

# Summary

## Key resources on GAIA

- ▶ GAIA principles in full
- ▶ Frequently asked questions

[Find out more](#)



## 1 All forms of gender-based violence and harassment are prohibited

These are a range of behaviours directed at a person based on their sex or gender, including violence or threats of violence, and any physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct, which makes them feel uncomfortable, intimidated, offended or humiliated in their work environment or activities linked to work.

Anyone working for or linked to the business should be clear that GBVH committed to or by them will not be tolerated. Everyone is protected including job seekers, seasonal/casual and permanent workers, migrant workers and contract workers.

- ▶ Proactively engage with workers in conversations about GBVH to ensure their understanding is aligned with business policy and vice versa. Build a culture of prevention and respect based on shared values of dignity, equality and fairness. Encourage open dialogue and safe reporting spaces through regular awareness-raising and training activities.



## 2 Businesses commit to prevent GBVH and ensure their business partners do the same

They conduct gender-responsive human rights due diligence, promote collaboration and share responsibility, risks and costs fairly.

By virtue of their business relationships, businesses have a responsibility to collaborate with their partners to address GBVH by providing support, training and sharing resources, including funding if required.

- ▶ Embed GBVH-related policies and two-way expectations in contracts, requiring partners to cascade equivalent standards across to their partners. Coordinate with other businesses to align efforts and with workers, trade unions and NGOs.



## 3 Senior leadership considers GBVH risk implications of all decisions to ensure workplaces are equal, respectful and free from GBVH

They consider the impact of business activities in own operations and the supply chain.

No matter the size of the business or location in the supply chain (e.g. as producers, suppliers, buyers, contractors), owners and senior management are responsible for addressing GBVH.

- ▶ Integrate the management of GBVH as a risk to workers' human rights and to the business into decision making, with the resources (human and financial) to do this.



## 4 Policies and procedures are created and implemented to prevent GBVH in the workplace

Policies and procedures need to be clear about what makes for acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in the workplace, how GBVH will be prevented, how it can be reported and how it will be handled in a sensitive, safe and fair manner to the victim, survivor and alleged perpetrator.

- ▶ Include workers and their representatives/trade unions in the design and development of policies and procedures and engage with them about how implementation is going. Regularly train all workers, including management, on these policies and procedures.



## 5 Responsible purchasing practices enable action on root causes of GBVH and support sustainable production

Responsible purchasing practices – including forecasting, contracts, ordering, lead times, pricing and payment terms – should support partners to manage operations sustainably, enable decent work and investment in prevention.

- ▶ Assess if commercial practices, including prices, support partners to provide decent working conditions – living wages and job security – and meet social and environmental standards. Recognise and support partners that are transparent and committed to addressing GBVH.



## 6 Workers are employed in decent work through transparent decision making

GBVH risk increases when job stability and pay are insufficient to meet workers' needs.

- ▶ Offer jobs with fair pay based on engagement with workers and their representatives/trade unions. Recruit directly and offer secure work as much as possible. Ensure accountability and oversight of decisions related to workers' pay and working conditions, reducing the opportunity for individuals to abuse their power and authority. Engage with third parties like labour providers and contractors to ensure they uphold GBVH prevention responsibilities.



## 7 Businesses enable workers to exercise their rights to and responsibilities in a GBVH-free workplace

Preventing GBVH requires a strong culture of fairness, equality and zero tolerance in the workplace. Workers should understand their rights and specific workplace policies and feel empowered to report inappropriate behaviour whether directed at them or others, as active bystanders.

- ▶ Ensure all workers are informed and trained on their labour rights and management is equipped for effective social dialogue and collective bargaining. Advance gender equality through inclusive practices and create a safe space for all workers, especially men and those in authority, to un-pack beliefs, attitudes and norms that contribute to GBVH.





## 8 All workers trust that they can report GBVH confidentially or anonymously, without fear of retaliation

Workers should know that reports are managed with respect, sensitivity and fairness to build their trust in grievance mechanisms.

- ▶ Ensure multiple channels for reporting to a trained case handler who is independent from the influence of alleged perpetrators and business priorities. Treat all reports seriously and clearly explain each step to the person making a report and obtain their consent before proceeding to prevent unintended harm.



## 9 Businesses provide remedy of GBVH and hold perpetrators accountable

**They take a victim and survivor centred approach and use fair disciplinary procedures with perpetrators.**

Remediation should aim to restore the victim or survivor to the position they would have been in if GBVH had never happened.

- ▶ Actions should be guided by the needs, safety, and wishes of victims and survivors. Hold perpetrators accountable no matter their position, and take responsibility for any gaps or areas that need improvement in the business.



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

Businesses are accountable for reporting on how they have met their responsibility to address GBVH.

- ▶ Regularly monitor and evaluate prevention and response efforts with workers and their representatives/trade unions. Transparently report on progress, share challenges and lessons with partners and identify opportunities for collaboration to find solutions to root causes of GBVH.



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ETI is a leading alliance of NGOs, trade unions, and companies advancing human rights in supply chains.

Our vision is of a world of work that protects human rights, ensures dignity for all, provides opportunity and is free of exploitation and abuse.



**Ethical Trading Initiative**

LHBO4 Kennington Business Park  
1-3 Brixton Rd, London SW9 6DE  
United Kingdom



+44 (0)20 7841 4350



[ethicaltrade.org](https://ethicaltrade.org)



[info@eti.org.uk](mailto:info@eti.org.uk)



LinkedIn