

NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS AS REMEDY ACTORS IN THE CONTEXT OF BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

SUMMARY REPORT FROM THREE NHRI EXCHANGE SESSIONS ON REMEDY MECHANISMS IN AFRICA

Acknowledgments:

This webinar series was held as part of "Implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights as part of the 2030 Agenda" programme made possible thanks to the support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

The summary report from the sessions, and the desktop research were compiled by Laura Dugardin, Salma Houerbi and Mercy Obonyo. We would like to thank the participants for sharing their insights and expertise. The event was held under the Chatham House Rule and the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) does not necessarily adhere to any of the views expressed by participants.

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Graphic Design: Anna Thorslund **Cover image:** Ade, Unsplash **e-ISBN:** 978-87-7570-111-7

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACHPR African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
ACRWC African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

AfCHPR African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights

AfDB African Development Bank

AU African Union

BHR Business & Human Rights

DIHR Danish Institute for Human Rights

IAM Independent Accountability Mechanism

NANHRI Network of African National Human Rights Institutions

NCP National Contact Point for the OECD Guidelines

NGO Non-governmental organisation
NHRIs National Human Rights Institutions

OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

UNGPs United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

UPR Universal Periodic Review

1 INTRODUCTION

This report documents outcomes from three learning sessions on remedy mechanisms for business and human rights related cases in Africa organised by the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI) and the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) between April and May 2022.

The learning sessions, targeting national human rights institutions (NHRIs), aimed at promoting existing remedy mechanisms for cases of business-related human rights abuse. The sessions focussed on the following select remedy mechanisms:

- 1. National Contact Points for the OECD Guidelines for multinational enterprises (NCPs)
- 2. Independent accountability mechanisms (IAMs) for projects funded by multilateral development banks
- 3. African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR)

The three learning sessions were open to NANHRI members and held in virtual and/ or hybrid format under the Chatham House Rule. Each session convened three guest experts from academia and civil society and was facilitated by NANHRI and DIHR. The sessions lasted two hours and alternated between theory and practice. At first, experts would present the mechanism in question, followed by a Q&A conversation with additional guests focusing on sharing practical insights and experience on the use of the mechanism in question. In the final plenary discussion session, all participants strategised collectively on how African NHRIs can best contribute to remedy and synergies with further remedy mechanisms. (See Annex A for the annotated agenda and specific objectives of each session).

The webinars were an opportunity to reflect on African NHRIs' role in advancing remedy in the area of business and human rights (BHR) and allowed for the identification of tangible opportunities for enhancing NHRI engagement with each remedy mechanism.

The purpose of this summary report is to serve as a resource document for those who participated in the webinars. More broadly, it seeks to contribute to the dissemination of business-related remedy avenues in the context of the African region and allow for reflection on the role of African NHRIs as remedy enablers for cases of business-related human rights harm.

This report is divided in three chapters. Each chapter introduces the mechanism in question, highlights how it handles BHR cases, and expands on how NHRIs can further engage with the remedy mechanism based on the outcomes of each learning session.

2 CONTEXT

Access to effective remedy for individuals and communities affected by business-related human rights abuses constitutes one of the three pillars of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs).² Yet, effective access to remedy remains a key gap in BHR, and victims of business-related human rights abuses continue to struggle to obtain remedies for the harm they have suffered.³

As autonomous and independent institutions, NHRIs have the mandate to promote and protect human rights.⁴ The UNGPs state that while judicial mechanisms are "at the core of ensuring access to remedy", non-judicial mechanisms such as NHRIs have "an essential role in complementing and supplementing judicial mechanisms".⁵

The Edinburgh Declaration adopted at the 10th international conference of the International Coordinating Committee of NHRIs (now the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions) further outlines the potential of NHRIs in improving access to effective remedy for business-related human rights abuses. The Declaration articulates that as part of an ecosystem of players with potential to facilitate remedy, NHRIs can enable remedy both directly (e.g., by handling complaints concerning human rights abuses by companies) and indirectly (e.g., by raising awareness, building capacity, assisting affected rights-holders, interacting with other remedy enablers and collaborating with other remedy mechanisms).

However, significant challenges remain for NHRIs to reach their full potential as actors in the ecosystem of remedy: From resources and internal capacity to the limited awareness and inaccessibility of some other remedial mechanisms.⁶

In the African context, a survey conducted by NANHRI and DIHR in 2021 showed that while NHRIs are keen on enhancing their role as remedy enablers for cases of business-related human rights abuse, they remain under-resourced and unfamiliar with many of the existing BHR remedy mechanisms.⁷ As such, non-state-based mechanisms such as company-level grievance mechanisms or multi-stakeholder initiatives remain underutilised, and little known among the NHRIs.

3 SESSION 1: THE OECD NATIONAL CONTACT POINTS FOR RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS CONDUCT AS MECHANISMS FOR REMEDY

3.1 THE MANDATE OF NCPS

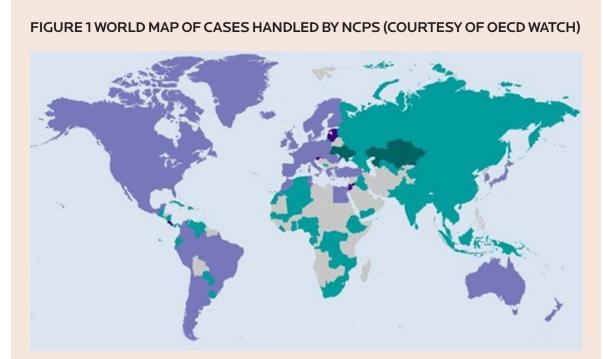
Set up with the aim of monitoring compliance with the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (OECD Guidelines), NCPs are non-judicial remedy mechanisms set up by more than 50 governments.⁸ They have a dual role to "assist enterprises and their stakeholders to take appropriate measures to further the observance of the [OECD] Guidelines" and to facilitate non-judicial dispute resolution in the case of specific instances.⁹ NCPs are therefore a platform for mediation and conciliation to resolve specific instances when companies fail to implement the OECD Guidelines.

All governments adhering to the OECD Guidelines have the legal obligation to set up an NCP. Currently, 34 OECD countries and 12 non-OECD countries adhere to the OECD Guidelines.¹⁰ In the African region, NCPs have been established in Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia.¹¹

3.2 COMPLAINTS-HANDLING PROCESS & TRENDS IN AFRICA

Two conditions determine the possibility to access an NCP for dispute resolution. First, the issue in question must be covered by the OECD Guidelines.¹² Second, the company concerned must either operate or be headquartered in an OECD state.¹³ Practically, this means that complainants from non-adhering countries, may access the NCP of an OECD Guidelines-adhering country if the company is headquartered or operating there.

As of April 2022, OECD cases related to the African region have mostly concerned land rights, health and safety, and bribery.¹⁴ Sectors where the most cases have been reported are the oil & gas and the agriculture sectors.¹⁵ Complaints received involve allegations from companies operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, followed by Cameroon, Nigeria and Zambia.¹⁶



To date over 360 cases have been by National Contact Points (NCP), addressing impacts from business in over 100 countries and territories.

- Both Adherents to the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and host countries of business operations in NCP cases (i.e. countries where the impact arose)
- Adherent to the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises
- Countries in the orocess of adhering to the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises
- Host countries of business operations in NCP cases

As articulated in the OECD Guidelines, there are three stages in the handling of an NCP complaint¹⁷: The first step is an initial assessment where the NCP committee decides whether the issues raised merit further examination. During this phase, they will determine admissibility of the case then draft an initial assessment containing the reasons for accepting or rejecting the complaint and outlining the next phases of the complaints-handling. The parties will be invited to submit proposals for factual corrections or other written comments to the draft Initial Assessment.¹⁸

The second step involves mediation or examination, where the NCP offers a forum for discussion and assists the parties in dealing with the issues raised. If mediation is successful, the process concludes with a Final Statement from the NCP presenting the facts and relevant aspects of the OECD Guidelines, the agreed-upon solution and any agreements regarding monitoring or supervision. If mediation does not succeed, the NCP will draw up a final statement including recommendations to the company, and the complainant.¹⁹

3.3 BENEFITS & CHALLENGES OF FILING A COMPLAINT THROUGH THE NCP

The benefits and challenges of filing a complaint through the NCP were extensively discussed during the learning session. According to a key expert who intervened during the session, there exists many advantages to filing an NCP complaint:

First and foremost, the OECD Guidelines have a broad territorial and sectorial coverage, which means that it is possible to file complaints on a wide variety of issues in several global regions. According to the same speaker, the NCPs complaint process can be comparatively less costly than a judicial avenue and may turn out to be faster than state-based mechanisms. Another participating speaker explained that the in many countries, the NCP complaint process provides a unique platform for dialogue between communities, complainant and company through mediation.

However, several challenges impeding the effectiveness of NCPs were also raised during the discussion. A participating NHRI representative signaled that not all NCPs are functionally equivalent, which results in their varying efficiency. The expert speaker also added that several NCPs have inadequate resources, resulting in low visibility and poor structure and procedures. This may lead to a lack of transparency and poor follow-up on cases. Finally, another panel speaker also mentioned that NCPs face a challenge when implementing the OECD Guidelines given their weak enforcement capabilities, leaving them often with unimplemented decisions.

3.4 STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE NCP MECHANISM

During the Q&A discussion, participants agreed that the decision to file a complaint through an NCP ultimately depends on the aim and the strategy of the complainant. As highlighted by the expert speaker, while it has been challenging for victims to obtain financial compensation through the NCP mechanism, the mechanism has successfully demonstrated a company behaviour change by means of dialogue and company awareness.

During the learning session, participants exchanged tips and strategies on how a complainant may maximise leveraging on the NCP mechanism to obtain remedy in cases of business-related human rights abuse. These are summarised below:

- Thoroughly research the structure and the governance of the NCP prior to filing a complaint. Many tools are accessible online to help (e.g., OECD Watch);
- Make the complaint public, and enhance media outreach so that companies feel pressured to act;
- Consider lodging complaints to various mechanisms simultaneously, whenever possible;
- Consider lodging NCP complaints against the same company in different countries, and coordinating with other complainants across borders, for cases of multinationals; and
- Consider lodging complaints against several companies at the same time in one country, if a pattern of abuse relative to a specific sector has been documented.

3.5 OPPORTUNITIES FOR NHRIS TO ENGAGE WITH THE NCP MECHANISM

Participating NANHRI members discussed the potential for NHRIs and NCPs to identify synergies and opportunities for promoting business respect for human rights in line with the OECD Guidelines and the UNGPs. A speaker explained that while NCPs are not judicial bodies, they have a function to address non-observance of the OECD Guidelines when issues are raised: There is therefore an in interest for both mechanisms to be aware of each other's mandate and exploring coordination. The same speaker recalled that the OECD and GANHRI have an ongoing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to that end.²⁰ Participants highlighted that both entities may benefit from broader expertise and knowledge sharing on thematic issues or due diligence. This is in line with an MoU recently signed by GANHRI and the OECD.

HOW CAN AFRICAN NHRIS ENGAGE WITH NCPS?

- NHRIs may consider filing complaints themselves.
- NHRIs can support communities to know more about the OECD Guidelines and to engage with stakeholders, e.g., connect them to tools or give advice, help communities communicate with NCP structures etc.
- NHRIs can seek a more active involvement in the structure or advisory work for NCPs.
- NHRIs can establish a dialogue with an NCP about responsible business conduct (especially relevant in a country with a lot of foreign investment).

4 SESSION 2: INSIGHTS INTO INDEPENDENT ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS FOR PROJECTS FUNDED BY MULTILATERAL DEVELOPMENT BANKS

4.1 THE MANDATE OF IAMS

As in other regions, state entities and private companies in the African region are key recipients of development finance funds channelled through development finance institutions and multilateral development banks.²¹ Despite having due diligence processes in place, development finance institutions and multilateral development banks invest in projects that become associated with adverse social and environmental impacts.

IAMs were therefore created to hold development finance institutions, multilateral development banks as well as their clients accountable for potential harm caused by such projects.²² An IAM is an independent process for addressing complaints and resolving disputes about the negative social and environmental impacts of a project receiving funding from the financial institution.²³ An IAM serves to formally collect, evaluate and resolve community complaints related to the investments and projects funded by the multilateral development bank. Usually, IAMs have established procedures to resolve grievances and provide remedy when investments and projects cause harm.

To do so, IAMs fulfill three main functions: (1) problem-solving through mediation; (2) compliance review through investigation; and (3) advisory services by generating internal learning.²⁴ The advisory function should derive thematic and systemic lessons from trends in the mechanism's caseload, in both compliance and dispute resolution, and other sources in order to provide guidance to the financial institution's leadership on improving the institution's social and environmental performance. The advisory function helps to embed an institutional culture of continuous learning and improvement of policy and practices. IAMs also play a role in monitoring remediation agreements and the relevant bank's follow-up on the latter.²⁵

4.2 CHALLENGES & ADVANTAGES OF FILING A COMPLAINT THROUGH IAMS

The benefits and challenges of filing a complaint through IAMs were extensively discussed during the learning session on IAMs.

One speaker highlighted that while IAMs commit to align with the effectiveness criteria of remedy mechanism set by the UNGPs, they still have varying levels of efficiency. The same speaker further added they while IAMs do not make judgements on states or on private sector organisations, their mandate allows them to judge the relevant bank's behaviour towards human rights.

The Q&A discussion was an opportunity for participants and guest speakers to note the various advantages of filing a complaint through IAMs:

- IAMs stand outside the formal court proceeding, thus providing some flexibility and a collaborative approach to dispute resolution;
- If implemented effectively, IAMs can be accessible. They are less costly for all parties and have the potential to deliver more timely resolutions to community grievances that may otherwise lead to litigation or further harm;
- IAMs are sources of knowledge and learning for investors. Through the complaint process, impact investors may remediate problems in an investment's design, implementation, and prevent these from occurring in future investments; and
- IAMs focus not only on remediation but also on the prevention of human rights abuses. They present an opportunity to avoid future harm.

However, it was also noted by participants that IAMs carry shortcomings, both in the complaint-handling process and in the implementation of remedy, including:

- Stakeholders generally and rights-holders particularly may be unfamiliar with the
 existence of IAMs. In the Africa region, as in other regions, local communities do
 not know about IAMs or do not know how to access them. Additionally, it can be
 difficult for affected communities to trace a project to a specific development bank,
 and to identify the relevant IAM;
- There may be a lack of overall institutional support for the complaints process.
 While the IAM is an independent process, bank management does not always take actions on the IAM's findings and recommendations. IAMs do not provide binding decisions following compliance reviews and can therefore not ensure that remedial actions are implemented;
- IAMs vary in effectiveness. Not all IAMs meet the effectiveness criteria as set by the UNGPs (i.e., legitimate, accessible, predictable, transparent, rights compatible, source of continuous learning, based on engagement and dialogue); and
- IAMs may lack dedicated human and financial resources, and this may impact the outcome and the effectiveness of the mechanism. There may not be available resources to handle complaints in different languages.

4.3 OPPORTUNITIES FOR NHRIS TO ENGAGE WITH IAMS

Participating NANHRI members attending the learning session agreed that NHRIs carry a unique role in supporting access to remedy for business-related abuses. This role includes the interaction with a system of actors comprising the remedy ecosystem. A speaker further stressed that NHRIs may not only foster collaboration with judicial actors but can also enable remedial solutions through engaging with non-judicial mechanisms. One speaker concluded by outlining the potential for NHRIs to specifically engage with IAMs. These avenues for engagement are summarised in the table below.

HOW CAN AFRICAN NHRIS ENGAGE WITH IAMS?

- Pursue shared cases of investigations: When applicable, IAMs focal points could draw on the existing investigations conducted by NHRIs.
- NHRIs can engage in the review process of IAMs, e.g., by advocating for further integration of human rights standards and principles within the policies of such mechanisms.
- NHRIs can highlight community concerns and specific impacts of bank-financed projects in their annual reports.
- NHRIs can help in investigation and follow-up on remedies where the government is the perpetrator of the human rights violations.
- NHRIs can build awareness regarding IAMs in local communities, e.g., NHRIs can translate relevant documentation for communities.
- IAMs could forward complaints received about states that are being financed by the multilateral development funds to corresponding NHRIs for them to take the case at national level if their mandate allows it.

5 REGIONAL MECHANISM FOR REMEDY: THE AFRICAN COURT ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS

5.1 THE MANDATE OF THE AFCHPR

The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR) is an organ of the AU, created in 1998 pursuant to Article 1 of the Protocol to the African Charter.²⁶ The AfCHPR's function is to tackle all cases and disputes related to the interpretation of the African Charter and any other relevant human rights instruments.²⁷

As provided by the Article 5 of the Protocol of the African Charter, a complaint may be lodged against a State which is a party to the African Charter, by an African intergovernmental organisation (including the African Commission), an individual or by any non-governmental organisation with observer status before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.²⁸ The complaint is followed by written, and if necessary, oral proceedings.

The AfCHPR may deliver an advisory opinion, a litigation decision, an attempt to settle a dispute amicably or a judgement. The judgements issued are binding, have fixed delays and are also being monitored by the Council of Ministers of the African Union.²⁹

Articles 21, 22 and 24 of the African Charter underscore peoples' rights to freely dispose of wealth and natural resources, economic, social and cultural development, especially in the face of international monopolies and economic exploitation.³⁰ Many soft law instruments relating to BHR have been developed based on the principles of Articles 21, 22 and 24. The jurisprudence of the AfCHPR also include cases related to BHR and serve in business-related cases and dispute settlements.

5.2 CHALLENGES RELATING TO THE FUNCTIONING OF THE AFCHPR

The learning session was an opportunity for participants to reflect and share insights on the challenges and opportunities to utilise the AfCHPR as a remedy avenue for BHR matters.

During the session, a panel speaker remarked that the AfCHPR faces a set of challenges in the effective implementation of its decisions. According to the speaker, only 7% of its decisions are complied with by member states. Another speaker noted that the AfCHPR currently lacks inspection systems and effective due diligence. They further highlighted the narrow jurisdiction of the AfCHPR as a main obstacle to its well-functioning: Only 31 out of 55 African Union member states have ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.³¹ Only 8 states – Benin, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Cote divoire, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Tanzania and Tunisia –have authorized

the AfCHPR to hear complaints presented by individuals and non-governmental organizations with observer status before the African Commission. Another speaker mentioned that the lack of resources limit the performance of the AfCHPR.

Finally, participating NHRIs reiterated the need to increase legal aid to enable victims to access the AfCHPR.

5.3 OPPORTUNITIES FOR NHRIS TO ENGAGE WITH THE AFCHPR

HOW CAN AFRICAN NHRIS ENGAGE WITH THE AFCHPR?

- Lodge or facilitate cases and complaints with the AfCHPR where strategic in order to achieve redress for abuses of human rights in the context of business activities.
- Facilitate citizen participation in the processes of the AfCHPR by disseminating relevant information to civil society to sensitise citizens and by supporting the appearance of stakeholder groups before the AfCHPR.
- Produce preliminary assessment reports. NHRIs can decide to investigate or assess a complaint and come with a preliminary assessment report in front or the AfCHPR.
- To cope with the challenge of low compliance rates with the AfCHPR's decisions, NHRIs can use their advisory mandates to advocate for enhanced state recognition of the competency of the AfCHPR.
- NHRIs can use their mandate to monitor and promote the implementation of decisions at national level.
- NHRIs can use their mandate to take part in the African Peer Review Mechanism
 or the Universal Periodic Review processes and take the opportunity to point out
 issues related to BHR in their national contexts.

6 CONCLUSION & TAKE-HOME POINTS

While there is potential for key state-based judicial and non-judicial mechanisms to form the foundations of the wider system of remedy for business-related human rights abuse, this warrants enhanced efforts of dissemination of the existing mechanisms, across state actors and between the mechanisms themselves. International development actors could play a key role in promoting and facilitating this engagement between remedy ecosystem actors and ensure that the various complaints-handling and/or dispute resolution options and mechanisms are diffused in different contexts.

Efforts are needed to increase the awareness of individuals and communities affected by business-related human rights abuses of the existing pathways to remedy. Information regarding the various complaints-handling and/or dispute resolution options should be made available to rights-holders in a manner that is readily understandable by them.

Considering their broad mandate and proximity to communities, African NHRIs are well positioned to facilitate remedy in the context of business-related human rights harm. The learning sessions and this summary report highlighted ways African NHRIs could indirectly enhance their role in remedy provision by positioning themselves in connection with a multitude of other actors – including those of facilitating and promoting non-judicial mechanisms, mediating between actors, obtaining and disseminating information, etc.

As such, there is still ample opportunity to further explore, in practice and research, how African NHRIs can maximise their full potential as remedy actors in BHR.

ANNEX A: AGENDA OF THE LEARNING SESSIONS

Learning session	Session objectives	Speaking organisations
Introducing the OECD National Contact Points for Responsible Business Conduct as mechanisms for remedy	 To build collective understanding of National Contact Points (NCPs) as potential agents for remedy provision To gain knowledge and insights on ways to interact with NCPs To understand benefits, requirements, and challenges for engaging with NCPs mechanisms 	 OECD watch Sherpa
Insights into independent accountability mechanisms for projects funded by multilateral development banks	 To gain awareness of relevant independent accountability mechanisms of multilateral development banks (AfDB To understand the benefits, substantive and procedural requirements, and limitations of such independent accountability mechanisms To reflect on how NHRIs may interact with these mechanisms when monitoring cases of business-related human rights abuse 	 Accountability Counsel African Development Bank Independent Recourse Mechanism
Accountability and Remedy for BHR Violations in Africa: A Focus on Judicial and Quasi-judicial Bodies	 Get an introduction to the ACHPR mechanism Gain insights on opportunities available to engage on business and human rights (BHR) at the African Union (AU) level Understand requirements and challenges for NHRIs to engage with the ACHPR complaint mechanism 	 OHCHR African Commission of Human and Peoples and Rights African Court on Human and Peoples Rights African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance, Tanzania Ivory Coast Human Rights Commission

ENDNOTES

- 1 Ibid.
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2011). Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework, HR/PUB/11/04
- 3 See Access to Remedy Project OHCHR (2014) OHCHR | OHCHR Accountability and Remedy Project: Improving accountability and access to remedy in cases of business involvement in human rights abuses
- 4 UNGA (1993). Principles Relating to the Status and Functioning of National Institutions for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights ("Paris Principles"). Resolution 48/134, UN Doc. A/RES/48/134.
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2011). Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework, HR/PUB/11/04 p.30 GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf (ohchr.org)
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- 7 NANHRI and the DIHR (2021) "NANHRI Member Survey on Business and Human Rights & Sustainable Oceans" NANHRI-Member-Survey-on-Business-and-Human-Rights-Sustainable-Oceans.pdf
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- 9 OECD (2019). Guide for National Contact Points on Structures and Activities, OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. P. 4
- 10 See OECD Watch NCPs Archive OECD Watch
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 OECD (2019). Guide for National Contact Points on Structures and Activities, OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 See. <u>Database of specific instances Organisation for Economic Co-operation and</u> Development (oecd.org)
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 See fig 1
- 17 OECD (2019) Guide for National Contact Points on Structures and Activities, OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 GANHRI & OECD (2017) Memorandum of understanding between the OECD and GANHRI ganhri_oecd_mou_2017.pdf (humanrights.dk)
- 21 Multilateral development banks are supranational institutions set up by sovereign states, which are their shareholders. Their remits reflect the development aid and cooperation policies established by these states. See here
- 22 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6M80kOcMw94
- 23 OHCHR (2022) "Remedy in Development Finance; Guidance and Practice"

Accessible Here

- 24 Ibid.
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