

The 2022 Annual Report of the Leadership Initiative for Transformation and Empowerment (LITE-Africa) on the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights

Introduction

This report highlights the activities of the Leadership Initiative for Transformation and Empowerment (LITE-Africa) on the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights, demonstrating her commitment to implementing the VPs. LITE-Africa through its programmes and activities has enhanced the promotion of the VPs, created awareness and engaged critical stakeholders within the three pillars of the initiative. These activities are geared towards strengthening the implementation of the VPs, promoting adherence to the principles and sensitising exploration host community members on their rights and how to engage with companies operating in their domain. LITE-Africa also engages stakeholders in the Nigerian government to facilitate Nigeria's membership of the Voluntary Principles Initiative (VPI). LITE-Africa has collaborated with members of the corporate pillar to train company staff, private security personnel and Government Security Forces deployed to their facility on the VPs. This collaboration has helped these corporations to avoid incidences of human rights violations. This report highlights the progress made, challenges, lessons learnt and issues over the reporting period.

A. Commitment to the Voluntary Principles

LITE-Africa is committed to the promotion and implementation of the VPs in Nigeria through its training, outreach and sensitisation programmes. LITE-Africa participated in all the steering committee meetings, pillar meetings and Nigeria Working Group (NWG) coordination meetings in the past year where we made meaningful contributions to the growth of the VPI. The organisation as a co-chair and secretariat of the NWG coordinates the activities of the group to ensure its objective is achieved. LITE-Africa has continued to hold talks to discuss issues of the VPs with members of the three pillars of the initiative and also host cluster community leadership of the extractive industry in Nigeria. These engagements have resulted in the deployment of VPs training for personnel of the corporation, private security guards and Government Security Forces deployed to their facilities.

LITE-Africa was part of the VPI delegation to Mozambique from 7-9 November 2022. The delegation raised awareness and supported to the Mozambique In-Country Working Group and the government of Mozambique on the VPSHR. In addition, the delegation shared information on the broader context of business, security and human rights.

LITE-Africa as a member of the Steering Committee attended the VPI Steering Committee Retreat from 1-2 December 2022. The retreat discussed in detail the recommendations of the strategic review of the VPI and the next steps were outlined and agreed upon.

LITE-Africa conducted a research study on "Understanding the Unique Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Africa" in 2022. The research was conducted in five countries in Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa and South Sudan) and South America, working in collaboration with Bennett Freeman Associates. LITE-Africa worked in Africa while Bennett Freeman Associates worked in South America. The research was commissioned by the Voluntary Principles Initiative (VPI) Secretariat Canada. The focus of the research was to understand the unique risks faced by human rights defenders in order to assist companies in the natural resource and agri-food sectors to effectively respond to these risks and indicate how the business operations of such companies can create, or contribute to the creation of, an enabling environment for human rights and the rule of law. The research provided a practical guidance tool to help VPI members and non-members develop and implement concrete policies and practices to prevent such risks and strengthen positive human rights impact in the natural resource and agri-food sectors targeting Human Rights Defenders. The overall objective of the project is to assist companies in the natural resource and agri-food sectors to effectively respond to the unique risks faced by human rights defenders and indicate how the business operations of such companies can create, or contribute to the creation of, an enabling environment for human rights and the rule of law.

B. Procedures

LITE-Africa has consistently participated in the annual plenary meetings where it makes presentations on the activities of the organisation and its efforts in promoting the VPs. LITE-Africa is also a member of the VPs steering committee where it contributes to the progress and implementation of the VPs through discussion on issues of relevance to the VPs and voting on admission of new members to the VPI.

LITE-Africa also participates in open discussion and peer review of VPs implementation through participation in pillar calls, verification of would-be members, working group meetings and review of membership admission guidelines and governance rules.

C. Promotion of the Voluntary Principles

1. **Training Activities: Working with a member of the VPI corporate pillar LITE-Africa** carried out VPs training activities for the Nigerian Government Security Forces (Nigerian Police Force, Army, Navy) and Private Security Guards deployed to the company's facilities. Community leaders of the oil exploration host communities cluster were also trained on the VPs and security issues affecting their communities.
2. **Advocacy engagements with relevant government entities:** LITE-Africa as the Co-Chair of the NWG engaged with the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Justice on the efforts for Nigeria's membership of the VPI.

D. Country Implementation

LITE-Africa's approach to the VPs is a two-way approach based on the context and peculiarities of communities where we work in Nigeria as we depend on feedback from stakeholders including communities, government, and companies to support our programme design approach. LITE-Africa's strategy rest on empowering communities to demand greater accountability, strengthening civil society to engage government and oil multinational on the VPs, partnering with government to ensure compliance; and creating effective mechanisms for dialogue, joint problem solving and networking. LITE-Africa is a co-chair of the NWG where it coordinates the group's activities and helps to identify and respond to local in-country challenges related to the implementation of the Voluntary Principles through mutual solutions.

- **Training Activities:** LITE-Africa coordinates and deploys VPSHR training activities for corporate pillar members' security personnel like the Government Security Forces and Private Security Guards deployed to the company facilities. The VPSHR training design for these groups also incorporates chapter four of the Nigerian 1999 constitution as amended which deals with issues of human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- **Research study on Understanding the Unique Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Africa:** The research was conducted in five countries in Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa and South Sudan) and South America, working in collaboration with Bennett Freeman Associates. LITE-Africa worked in Africa while Bennett Freeman Associates worked in South America. The research was commissioned by the Voluntary Principles Initiative (VPI) Secretariat Canada. The focus of the research was to understand the unique risks faced by human rights defenders in order to assist companies in the natural resource and agri-food sectors to effectively respond to these risks and indicate how the business operations of such companies can create, or contribute to the creation of, an enabling environment for human rights and the rule of law. The study provided practical guidance tool to help VPI members and non-members develop and implement concrete policies and practices to prevent such risks and strengthen positive human rights impact in the natural resource and agri-food sectors targeting Human Rights Defenders.
- **Human Rights Clinic:** LITE-Africa operates a human rights clinic where citizens are encouraged to report issues of human rights violations. Most often reported cases are settled using the Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanism. The clinic has a lawyer as its coordinator.

E. Lessons and Issues

Lessons

1. **The working group approach works:** LITE-Africa believes strongly in the working group approach which has contributed immensely to the promotion of the VPs in Nigeria. The working Group approach has brought about a refreshing difference by enhancing coordination, information sharing, joint advocacy, leveraging on the collective strengths of the Group, while also providing a platform to get government entities to have a good grasp of the relevance of the VPs over time and in a respectful manner.

Issues

1. **Nigerian Government's Non-membership of the VPI:** Nigeria's non-membership of the VPA is a constraint to the nationwide implementation of the VPs, as some government entities do not openly and publicly support the VPs or their implementation.
2. **Low awareness of the VPs:** Due to the large size of the Nigerian nation with a large number of states within it, there is still low awareness of the VPs amongst communities hosting extractive and agricultural companies; amongst them non-signatory companies; private and public security forces and other stakeholders. Through the engagement of stakeholders' LITE-Africa is deploying training and sensitization to bridge the knowledge gap amongst various stakeholders.