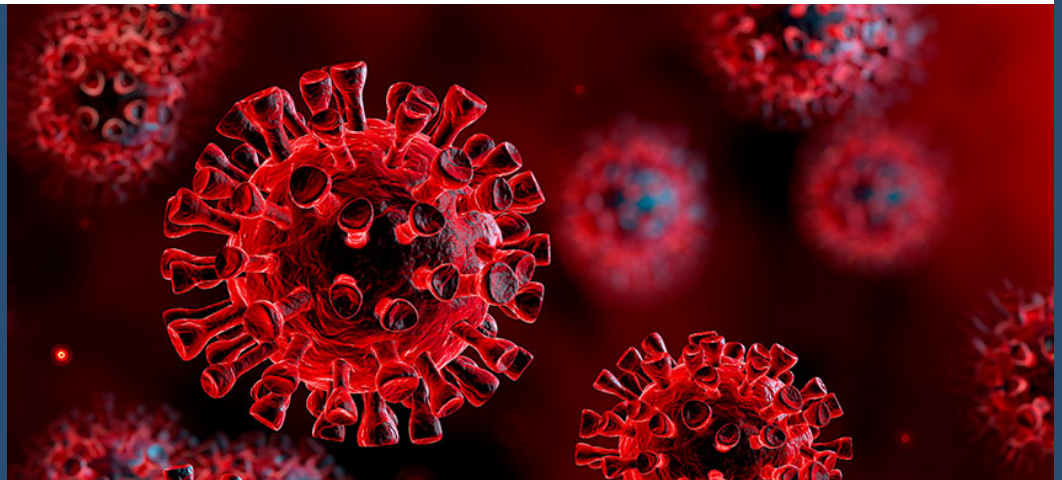# Five Principles for Responsible Business Coalitions to Tackle COVID-19 in Africa

UN GLOBAL COMPACT

Network Kenya

A responsible business coalition offers us the potential to lay the foundation for a safer, healthier and more resilient Kenya

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused major disruption, damage and loss in the lives of millions around the world. For Africa, the situation is no different and is further hampered by inadequate and constrained healthcare systems, densely populated urban centers and insufficient infrastructure. Since the first cases across Africa were reported, governments have started taking decisive action via sweeping measures to close schools, businesses, limit public gathering and enforcing lockdowns and running massive public health campaigns.

Business has also heeded the call and is stepping up to the challenge by forming coalitions that are mobilizing resources to support efforts by governments to fight the pandemic. With so many stakeholders working towards the same goal of managing the crisis, business has the opportunity to come together in an unprecedented fashion and respond to COVID-19 with effective solutions to support those most in need.

Across Africa, companies are joining business coalitions and donating millions to support the COVID-19 response and deliver to those most vulnerable in the region. Global Compact Network Kenya supports the efforts of the private sector to be a meaningful actor in the fight against COVID-19 in Africa. However, it is important that companies look beyond simple financial contributions and take an active role in ensuring that these business coalitions are doing the needful in addressing the greatest impacts of the crisis and reaching the most vulnerable.

Through our Network's operations, we are working with companies across the country to safeguard lives and livelihoods of the people of Kenya as well as increasing

what can be learned from this crisis. To ensure this is done effectively, we believe that a responsible business coalition on COVID-19 must incorporate the following measures to ensure inclusive and sustainable response to the crisis:

Coalitions must pay special attention to offer protections and support workers in the informal economy

It is important for business coalitions to recognize that those in the informal economy will be more devastated by the measures to combat COVID-19 than the virus itself. Lockdowns and the shuttering of business and social activity for weeks to months on end will have the most negative effect on those that survive on daily income. Business coalitions should create makeshift social safety nets for these workers, especially the women who make up the majority of the informal employment sector in Africa, by directing coalition funding to the provision of free access to basic healthcare and hygiene, food and nutrition; and personal protective equipment (PPE) to out of work informal employees and those still forced to work during this time in order to survive.

Additionally, coalition members can capitalize on the skills of informal workers when repurposing business functions for use in health and emergency services. For example, companies can hire informal textile and garment workers or distributors to create and sell face masks and other PPE. Companies engaged in meal distribution programs for the poor can utilize informal food producers and vendors to distribute daily meals to those in need.

Recognize and Address the Many Ways Women are Disproportionately Impacted by the Crisis

Business coalitions should ensure that a portion of funding is being directed to provide healthcare and hygiene support to those most vulnerable which will directly impact women who are disproportionately represented in these sectors and take on these responsibilities in the household. Coalition funding can also be used to offset the disproportionate financial burden women face in health emergencies by creating sub-funds specific to supporting women-owned businesses, female entrepreneurs and funds to go towards in-kind childcare contributions such as diapers and formula rather than cash.

Finally, as women receive the brunt of the negative impacts of employee reductions during times of crisis and are terminated from employment at higher rates than men, more likely to be in unstable employment and are hired during crisis times at lower rates than men, it is important for coalition businesses to support women in their core operations by avoiding unconscious gender bias in their employment policies.

Recognize that Human Rights is at the Heart of Any Successful Business Response

All companies as part of any successful and responsible business coalition should commit to and apply the Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact to their actions and ensure a principles-based approach to the crisis. This means that businesses everywhere – regardless of country or size – have a responsibility to support the workers and communities they rely on to operate. For every company, whether they are signatories to the UN Global Compact or not, the Ten Principles can provide ideas and inspiration during these uncertain times of how to respond.

For business coalitions, a human rights-based approach involves recognizing the specific and unique needs of vulnerable groups based on their gender, age, location and industry. It is to ensure that the needs of the most marginalized are given appropriate attention and responding to all workers and business partners with flexibility and compassion.

Collaborate and Communicate Openly with Community Stakeholders

No business coalition should just be for business only but rather inclusive of other stakeholders, particularly those that can ensure that the coalition is identifying and prioritizing the most vulnerable and in need of support. Coalitions should be Multistakeholder platforms that bring in civil society and work with Governments. Beyond these critical partners, coalitions should look towards more innovative approaches and invite others to join that business may not normally engage with, such as faith-based organizations, refugee agencies and other groups that regularly work in areas most in need or at risk to COVID-19 such as informal settlements, refugee camps and townships.

Partnering with key community stakeholders will also ensure greater accountability for business coalitions.

Ensure Transparency and Accountability in management of resources

A responsible business coalition builds trust with the community through consistent and transparent communications and policies. Especially when mobilizing resources, it is important for business coalitions to be proactive in their response to accountability inquiries, ensuring effective management of resources and transparent communications and accounting as to how those in need are benefitting from coalition efforts.

Conclusion

To tackle the epidemic in Kenya, business has the opportunity to connect and jointly address the human, health and economic costs of COVID-19. A responsible business coalition offers us the potential to lay the foundation for a safer, healthier and more resilient Kenya setting a precedent for how we as a nation manage such emergencies in the future. If they recognize that humanity's values and business values are one in the same, business coalitions have the human, financial and technological capital to come out stronger than before the crisis. Now is the time for companies across Kenya to step up and show true leadership in the face of a previously unimaginable crisis.