



**Submission from Value Added in Africa
to Irish Aid/Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade**

**Submission on developing a National Plan on the
UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights**

26 February 2015

1. General

Value Added in Africa (VAA) welcomes the initiative being led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to consult on the establishment of a National Plan for Ireland on the UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights, and we warmly welcome the opportunity to make a submission.

2. Introduction to Value Added in Africa

VAA's strategic plan holds the **vision** of a future where African communities thrive, sustained by value-added processing of their natural resources. They will take their places as equals in the international community and international businesses and citizens will understand and relate to Africa in a way that moves beyond aid.

VAA's **mission** is to create a marketplace for African value added goods so as to generate employment opportunities for African communities to earn their own livelihoods through

1. building their capacity to market their products internationally,
2. building the market for African-made products in Europe
3. fostering sustainable trade relationships between European buyers and African producers
4. And education and advocacy to increase access to markets.

VAA works towards achieving this mission through engagement with a 520+ cohort of African SMEs, building their success, and disseminating their experiences among their peers to aid replication and scale. VAA also works with retailers and buyers based in Europe, enabling them to source and stock quality African finished products.

1.1 Third level business education

Based on our direct experience of engaging with European suppliers and African producers VAA has identified education of third level business students as a priority and a key driver for change. In 2012, in partnership with UCD School of Business and with the support of Irish Aid, Trócaire and Concern, VAA established the *Proudly Made in Africa* Fellowship in Business and Development in 2012. Since then the Fellowship has worked in 10 business schools and has reached 7,000 third level business students. The rationale for VAA's decision to engage in third level business education is outlined below.

Today's business students are the business leaders and decision makers of tomorrow, however third level business courses in the main do not cover business' role in sustainable development, nor the changing reality of business in Africa today. Very little consideration of Africa as an emerging business region is found, even in International Business Courses in Irish business schools¹.

The **Principles for Responsible Management Education**² (PRME) initiative, arising from the United Nations Global Compact aims to address this issue, and has been adopted by 500+ business colleges worldwide since 2008 (in Ireland: University College Dublin, Dublin City University and the University of Limerick). The first PRME principle states *"We will develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy"*.

However, there is a steep hill to climb. Business students display scant knowledge or awareness of Africa as a business region or how to make a contribution to sustainable development through business³.

A baseline survey carried out by VAA in 2013 found 83 per cent of Irish business students unable to name an Irish company operating in Africa. The study found 58 per cent business students rated their knowledge on business and development as 'poor', while at the same time they presented high levels of interest in learning about business in Africa (91 per cent) and about business' role in creating positive social change (95 per cent)⁴.

Irish Aid in its **Development Education Strategy** recognises the critical role of education in fostering active citizenship and a commitment to sustainable development: *"Every person in Ireland will have access to educational opportunities to understand their rights and responsibilities as global citizens as well as their potential to effect change for a more just and equal world"*. This view is echoed by other international agencies and movements including UNESCO (2012)⁵, the UN's Global Education First Initiative⁶ and the Global Campaign for Education⁷.

¹ *Business Education to Promote the Role of Business in Stimulating Development: A feasibility study on mainstreaming education on the role of business in development into the curriculum of Irish third level business schools*, Cowzer, O'Caomh, Pacteau, 2013

² UN Principles for Responsible Management Education www.unprme.org

³ *Knowledge and Attitudes to Business Role in Development in Africa: A Baseline Survey of Third Level Business Students in Ireland*, Value Added in Africa 2013

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ UNESCO (2012), *Shaping the Education of Tomorrow: Report on the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development*

⁶ <http://www.globaleducationfirst.org/>

⁷ <http://www.campaignforeducation.org/>

2. VAA's Recommendations on a National Plan on Business and Human Rights for Ireland

Drawing on a unique set of engagement and learning from its work with (a) African SME sector and European based retailers and (b) the *Proudly Made in Africa* Fellowship in Business and Development which is working across Ireland's third level business education sector, VAA proposes the following for consideration when developing the National Plan on Business and Human Rights:

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights – Ensuring Policy Coherence (p10):

“States, when acting as members of multilateral institutions that deal with business-related issues, should:

(c) Draw on the Guiding Principles to promote shared understanding and advance international cooperation in the management of business and human rights challenges”.

Specific Recommendation #1:

That the National Plan on Business and Human Rights for Ireland should include explicit recognition of the role third level business education can play as a means to build common and shared understanding of business leaders' and companies role in promoting and protecting human rights.

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights – General State Regulatory and Policy Functions (p4):

“In meeting their duty to protect, States should: (c) Provide effective guidance to business enterprises on how to respect human rights throughout their operations”.

Specific Recommendation #2:

That the State could help to meet this commitment by supporting and promoting education on Business and Human Rights as a component of third level business education. This can be realised through *inter alia*: building lecturer capacity on the subject matter, focused research projects, the development of modules, visits and exchanges, the development of case studies (for example on business challenges such as Human Rights due diligence and procurement policies).

3. Conclusion

The likely advancement of holding private and public sector organisations to account in terms of their role in human rights means that upcoming and current business leaders must benefit from robust and practice based education on the ethics and rules of engagement on business and human rights.

Doing so would build on the successful development education curricula that currently apply at primary and secondary levels. However at third level, education for sustainable

development is highly streamlined, leaving a stark gap in the education of future business leaders being educated in Ireland's third level business schools.

Ireland can achieve policy coherence and make a substantial impact by ensuring the National Plan incorporates a direct commitment to an investment in third level business education for business and human rights.

Appendix: VAA Key Information

Name of Organisation: Value Added in Africa, 133 Capel St, Dublin 1

CEO: Conall O'Caomh

Tel: 01 804 4730

E-mail: conall@valueaddedinafrica.org

Charity Reference Number: CHY 18389

Website: www.proudlymadeinafrica.org