

Podcast Transcript: “Organising for Change: KIOS & UCCA on Corporate Responsibility”

Anne: Hello listeners, and welcome to our podcast! Today is the 26th of February, and we are broadcasting from the KIOS office in Helsinki. I'm Anne, your host for today, and I'm joined here with my fellow students, Amanda, Hanna, Pauline and Viivi. We are all taking the course Sustainable Organising in Times of Crisis at the Hanken Business School.

We are delighted to introduce our two amazing guests today: Maarit and Joseph. Thank you both so much for taking the time to join us today. Welcome, Maarit and Joseph. So to start off, could you both say hello to our listeners and tell us about your role in the organisations that you represent?

Maarit: Hello everybody, and thank you so much for the interest towards our work. And for the invitation. So my name is Maarit Roström and I am working as a Senior Grantee Advisor at KIOS Foundation.

Joseph: Thank you Maarit. Hello, listeners. My name is Joseph Byomuhangyi. I coordinate the Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability, which is a civil society consortium here in Uganda that brings together currently 25 organisations across our country to do work on issues of business and human rights and also pursue corporate accountability.

Thank you so much for the interest you have in the business and human rights work here in South Africa.

Anne: Let's start by talking a bit about KIOS and why we chose it for our podcast. We are truly inspired by the important work that KIOS does. It is a perfect example of an organisation working towards sustainability in our time. KIOS also focuses on human rights with key areas such as non-discrimination, gender equality and democracy. The KIOS Foundation collaborates with and funds around 30 NGOs fighting for these rights in East Africa and South Asia. Maarit, could you tell us a little bit about yourself and your role at KIOS?

Maarit: So, KIOS is a human right donor, and my work as a grantee advisor includes basically the funding and other support that we give to the grantee organisations in East Africa and South Asia. We are a human rights donor and as such, we give direct funding to the local human rights organisations in the regions mentioned in East Africa and South Asia. What is quite special about our work is that it is planned and implemented by the local organisations, they are called the KIOS grantees to us, and of course, UCCA is one of the grantees that we have in our East Africa work, and the organisations we work with they have strong ownership of the work and the trust among the local communities they work in.

They also focus on defending the rights of the most marginalized people in their nations and contexts, aiming for sustainable change, which basically means stronger democracy and rule of law in the countries they work with. For example, so that the people are aware of their rights and the people who hold power positions also promote and protect the rights of all the citizens in the countries. We have three focus areas: non-discrimination and gender equality, democratic rights and rule of law, and responsible business, environment and human rights. As Joseph mentioned already, we work through capacity building. We give mentoring and coaching to the grantees that we work with when needed. We also do some small advocacy and communications work here in Finland and abroad.

Anne: Thank you Maarit.

Joseph, it is lovely to have you with us today as well. You work with the Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability, also shortly known as UCCA. Could you tell us more about what you do?

Joseph: Thank you so much. For the listeners to our podcast, the Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability brings together civil society organisations across my country to pursue corporate accountability, to advance respect for human rights by businesses and also ensure that victims of corporate human rights abuses access remedy. We do this through advocacy.

The first focus of our advocacy is around strengthening legal and policy frameworks when it comes to regulation of corporate actors under international human rights law. This we have done from the grassroots at the lowest government structures to have ordinances developed at

the local government level to deal with challenges like child labour in the plantation agriculture sector.

We've also worked to strengthen legal and policy frameworks at the national level. We have seen amendments of mining and minerals policy and law to include the principles of free, prior and informed consent, because we believe they give the host communities better protection when it comes to giving up their land for the minerals they host to be exploited by companies. They need to be involved in that process. Applying the principles of free, prior and informed consent is one of the best ways to be able to get their participation in this development aspect.

We have also gone ahead to work with the government of Uganda to develop and now implement the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights. That is really a domestication of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which have a three-pillar framework: the state duty to protect, the company responsibility to respect, and access to effective remedy. Those three pillars are the drivers of the business and human rights discussion. We work with the state to ensure that we have capacity to protect the host communities. They have the capacity to protect workers, but also those in the value and supply chains of various businesses against corporate human rights abuses.

Then we go ahead to work with companies to ensure that they respect the rights of the communities hosting them, where they are business enterprises operating, respect the rights of the people they employ, especially on issues of occupational health and safety, giving their workers contracts, ensuring that they are able to get paid leave.

If the state or the companies fail on their obligations, we support the victims of corporate human rights abuses to obtain effective remedy either through judicial or non-judicial mechanisms.

Secondly, we work so much to strengthen and increase knowledge and awareness of economic and social rights. We want to empower communities by knowing that these are their human rights. They should be able to demand for them to be respected. They should be able to push for them to be realised in all aspects, on the part of the state, but also the part of the company.

That's the bulk of the work that we do. Every morning I wake up from my home to come to work and do the coordination of work of the Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability, working with our members across the country to meet the needs of the communities they serve at the district level.

Anne: Thank you so much Joseph for that interesting introduction. As we have Maarit from KIOS here today, could you Joseph tell us how meaningful the cooperation with KIOS has been for you?

Joseph: Thank you so much.

For all the work that the Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability has been able to do, we have gotten funding support from the Finnish human rights NGO, which is the KIOS Foundation.

With funding from KIOS, we are able to have a secretariat with internet and we are able to do the coordination and communication.

We are also able to support the victims of corporate human rights abuses to go through the processes of accessing remedy. With funding support from KIOS, we have been able to publish literature both in English and in local languages, to increase the knowledge base and fill the knowledge gap people have on human rights issues in our country.

The KIOS Foundation has enabled the consortium to actualise its mission and pursue corporate accountability here in Uganda, and also add our voices to the larger Global South when it comes to speaking on issues of human rights abuses, especially in the supply chains. The cooperation with KIOS Foundation has been immense in terms of funding, but also linking us to various actors when we are pursuing remedies for victims of corporate human rights abuses, particularly the Nordic Development Fund and other actors in the European Union.

Anne: This has all been very inspiring to hear, and it's clear that you are making an important impact.

Our discussion has highlighted the importance of collaboration and the impact of dedicated organisations in making a difference.

At this point, we want to say a big thank you to both of you, Joseph and Maarit, for being part of this podcast. You have given us valuable insights into your work, and I'm sure we all have a lot of takeaways from this.

Thank you and goodbye.

Maarit: Thank you very much.

Joseph: Thank you and goodbye.