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International Laws Regulating Human Rights in Business Operations in Uganda: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract :

The intersection of business and human rights is a critical global issue, especially in developing countries, where corporate activities often affect vulnerable communities. In Uganda, despite participation in international human rights instruments, the enforcement of these standards within business practices remains inconsistent. Previous studies have examined legal frameworks or corporate accountability separately, leaving an empirical gap in understanding how legal and socio-economic factors simultaneously influence human rights implementation. Addressing the gap, this study examines the effectiveness of international human rights laws in regulating corporate conduct and identifying key enforcement barriers. Employing a mixed-method approach, the research combines doctrinal legal analysis with empirical survey data from 302 participants across Uganda's four regions. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, while legal materials were interpreted through normative-qualitative analysis. The findings reveal high public awareness of international standards, particularly concerning labor protection and access to justice. However, enforcement remains constrained by constitutional limitations, poverty, corruption, and limited legal awareness. The study concludes that strengthening domestication of international law, improving access to justice, and expanding public awareness are crucial for enhancing corporate accountability. Methodologically, the study makes a contribution by integrating doctrinal and empirical analysis to advance business and human rights governance in developing contexts.

Keywords: *International, Laws, Human Rights, Business*

Abstrak:

Persinggungan antara operasi bisnis dan hak asasi manusia menimbulkan tantangan kritis di Uganda, di mana kerangka hukum dan hambatan sosial-ekonomi menghambat implementasi efektif hukum HAM internasional. Meskipun Uganda berkomitmen terhadap hukum ini, masih terdapat kesenjangan dalam pemahaman mengenai pengaruh norma budaya dan hambatan sistemik terhadap penegakannya. Studi ini mengkaji efektivitas implementasi hukum HAM internasional dalam aktivitas bisnis di Uganda dan mengidentifikasi hambatan hukum dan sosial-ekonomi utama. Pendekatan metode campuran digunakan, menggabungkan analisis doktrinal terhadap instrumen hukum internasional dan nasional dengan data non-doktrinal yang dikumpulkan melalui 302 kuesioner terstruktur yang disebar di berbagai wilayah Uganda. Data dianalisis menggunakan teknik deskriptif dan analitis. Meskipun 80,8% responden mengakui bahwa hukum internasional cukup mengatur HAM dalam bisnis, hambatan signifikan teridentifikasi: keterbatasan konstitusional (80,4%), korupsi (64,9%), kemiskinan (76,3%), dan akses terhadap keadilan yang tidak memadai

(59,8%). Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa perlindungan HAM yang efektif dalam sektor bisnis Uganda memerlukan domestikasi hukum internasional, peningkatan penyadaran masyarakat, perbaikan akses keadilan, dan kolaborasi internasional yang kuat untuk mengatasi hambatan hukum dan sosial-ekonomi yang ada.
Kata Kunci: *International Law, Hak asasi manusia, Bisnis*

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Introduction

In recent years, the intersection between human rights and business practices has gained significant attention, particularly in regions where corporate operations impact social and economic rights (O'Brien et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2022). Uganda's active engagement in international human rights law, coupled with its growing number of corporate entities, underscores the critical need for effective human rights protections within business environments (Mujuzi, 2024). However, despite Uganda's commitment to these frameworks, various legal and socio-economic barriers have hindered the implementation of international human rights standards in business practices (Akwaji et al., 2024; Kinyera, 2023). For instance, Uganda's constitution limits the direct applicability of international laws without parliamentary approval, reducing their legal enforceability and often rendering them as non-binding principles. Additionally, socio-economic factors such as poverty, corporate influence, and corruption further obstruct the realization of human rights in the corporate sector, as evidenced by landmark cases illustrating these challenges. Thus, understanding the obstacles facing Uganda's adherence to international human rights laws in the business sector is crucial for fostering accountability and economic growth.

The development of international human rights law, particularly in business contexts, has been the subject of considerable research, as scholars examine both the evolution and application of human rights obligations within corporate frameworks (Carroll, 2021). Existing studies highlight that while international treaties and conventions have established foundational standards, their practical enforcement often faces limitations due to socio-economic factors and constitutional constraints at national levels, particularly in African contexts (Mniwasa, 2021). For instance, while customary international law offers norms considered universally binding, enforcement mechanisms within national boundaries often lack effectiveness without formal ratification and adaptation into domestic law (Chimni, 2022). Research further explores the influence of landmark legal cases in establishing precedents for corporate accountability, yet it also reveals that judicial systems often permit companies wide discretion in employment and termination decisions (Farrington, 2021). Despite advancements, gaps remain in understanding the full impact of socio-economic factors, such as poverty and corporate influence on governance, which continue to hinder equitable enforcement of human rights within business. This study thus addresses these gaps by critically examining Uganda's regulatory frameworks and assessing the socio-economic barriers affecting the enforcement of international

human rights in corporate activities.

A key area that remains underexplored in the study of international human rights law in business activities within Uganda is the impact of cultural norms on the enforcement of these laws (Namuggala & Oosterom, 2023; Olawuyi & Abe, 2022). While existing research highlights Uganda's socio-economic constraints and constitutional limitations, limited attention has been paid to how cultural factors influence both corporate accountability and the effectiveness of human rights law enforcement (Macdonald et al., 2022; Oosterom et al., 2023). For example, cultural attitudes that prioritize loyalty to employers over legal rights may discourage employees from seeking redress, effectively undermining legal protections (Ogwang & Vanclay, 2021; Parkes et al., 2024). Similarly, cultural norms around gender roles may limit the ability of female workers to claim their rights under international human rights frameworks (Kansake et al., 2021). Moreover, regional disparities in access to justice, especially for communities in remote areas, reveal a gap in equitable human rights enforcement and accessibility (Charman & Williams, 2022). Addressing these gaps allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural barriers impacting human rights law application in Uganda's business sectors, offering new insights into enhancing compliance across diverse socio-cultural contexts.

This study is essential due to the persistent socio-economic and legal challenges in implementing international human rights laws within Uganda's business sector. Despite Uganda's commitment to these laws, constitutional limitations and insufficient enforcement mechanisms hinder their efficacy (Höglund & Schaffer, 2021). For instance, corporate actors exploit socio-economic vulnerabilities, leading to employment injustices that undermine worker rights (Joseph & Kyriakakis, 2023). Uganda's judiciary, as seen in cases like *Bank of Uganda vs. Joseph Kibuuka*, reflects inconsistencies in upholding employee rights, creating a legal landscape that leaves workers vulnerable. Furthermore, economic challenges such as corporate accountability gaps exacerbate this issue, underscoring the necessity of this research to examine the effectiveness and limitations of these human rights laws (ElKelish*, 2023; Ford et al., 2024; Joseph & Kyriakakis, 2023). Addressing these issues can contribute to a stronger legal framework that protects rights and promotes fair business practices in Uganda.

The primary objective of this research is to examine how effectively international human rights laws are implemented and enforced in business activities within Uganda. Specifically, it aims to identify key legal and socio-economic barriers that impede this process, evaluate the influence of Uganda's constitutional frameworks on human rights in business, and analyze the impact of socio-economic factors, such as poverty and corporate accountability issues, on safeguarding human rights. By analyzing relevant legal cases and Uganda's approach to business regulations, this study seeks to provide an informed understanding of whether international human rights standards in business contexts are adequately upheld.

Method

This study focuses on examining the enforcement of international human rights laws in business within Uganda, chosen due to the notable legal challenges impacting employees' rights and corporate responsibilities in this region. The investigation is motivated by Uganda's efforts to uphold international human rights standards, yet the

persistent legal gaps that limit practical enforcement warrant closer analysis (Vese, 2022). Given these dynamics, this research aims to contribute insights into Uganda's commitment to these international norms by examining the specific obstacles to their application in business contexts, thereby highlighting potential reforms for improved compliance.

The study adopts a mixed-method approach (Nagpal et al., 2021), combining doctrinal and non-doctrinal research techniques, making it suitable for an in-depth analysis of both legal frameworks and societal perceptions. Primary data consist of international human rights laws, such as treaties and conventions, while secondary data include scholarly articles, textbooks, and policy reports that provide comprehensive insights into Uganda's human rights landscape in business. Further, data sources are selected to cover various perspectives, including questionnaires distributed to key informants and stakeholders, such as employees and corporate representatives, identified through a stratified sampling approach to ensure diverse regional representation in Uganda.

For data collection, a structured questionnaire was disseminated to participants across different Ugandan regions through digital platforms, particularly Google Forms, to maximize accessibility and reach a broad demographic. This method was supplemented by library-based research to gather extensive literature on Uganda's legal responses to human rights issues in business. Data analysis involved descriptive and analytical techniques, with quantitative responses presented in tables and charts, allowing for clearer understanding and interpretation. Finally, findings were synthesized through qualitative interpretation to draw conclusions and recommendations on improving Uganda's human rights protections in the business sector.

Results and Discussion

Result

Concerning the fact that the study focuses on a review of the implementation and enforcement of international laws regulating human rights and business in Uganda. However, the essence of this is concerning the fact that the Uganda government is committed to securing the rights of employees or individuals engaged in business activities by employer through the various international human rights laws. However, it seems to be legal challenges that may limit the implementation and enforcement of these international laws. Hence, the study adopts a hybrid or mixed method of study, involving a doctrinal and non-doctrinal method. Concerning the doctrinal method, the study relied on primary and secondary sources materials. The primary sources of material include international laws, while the secondary sources are majorly scholarly writings that include articles, textbooks, and other relevant literature. The data obtained from the primary and secondary sources were analyzed and utilize through an analytical method of study. The essence of adopting a doctrinal method of study is aimed at gathering data from existing legal and literature sources, analyzing them to achieve a logical conclusion, and establishing the findings concerning the study.

Furthermore, concerning the non-doctrinal method of study, questionnaires were distributed to respondents residing in the various regions of Uganda through the use of Google form. This is to effectively reach out to a wider audience to given an

informed response. In this regard, the respondents were identified using through a simple sampling method, given the heterogeneous nature and rich cultural diversity of Uganda. Concerning this the data obtained were presented in tabular and graphic for clarity and simplicity, the data generated were analysed and discuss using a descriptive and analytical approach.

1. Research Question One

Figure 1

Respondents identifying the region they reside in Uganda

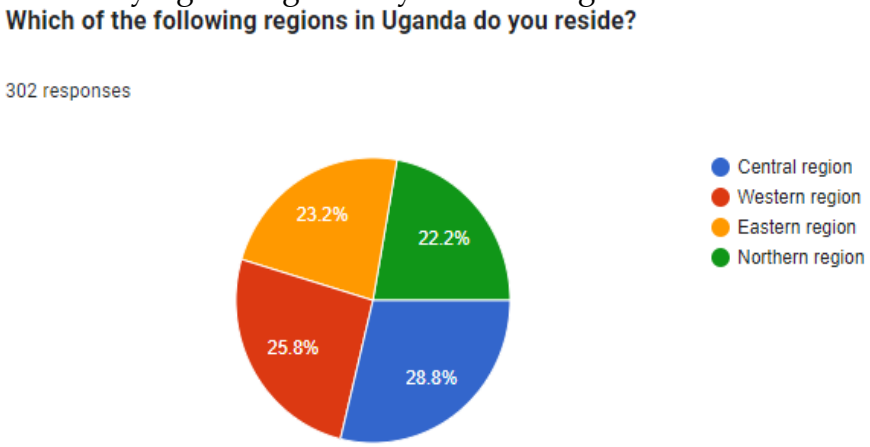


Table 1

Verification of respondent residential area in Uganda

S/N	Regions in Uganda	Responses of Respondents	Percent
1	Northern Region	67	22.2%
2	Eastern Region	70	23.2%
3	Western Region	78	25.8%
4	Central Region	87	28.8%
	TOTAL	**302**	**100%**

2. Research Question Two

Figure 2

Respondents Confirming International Laws Regulating Human Rights and Business

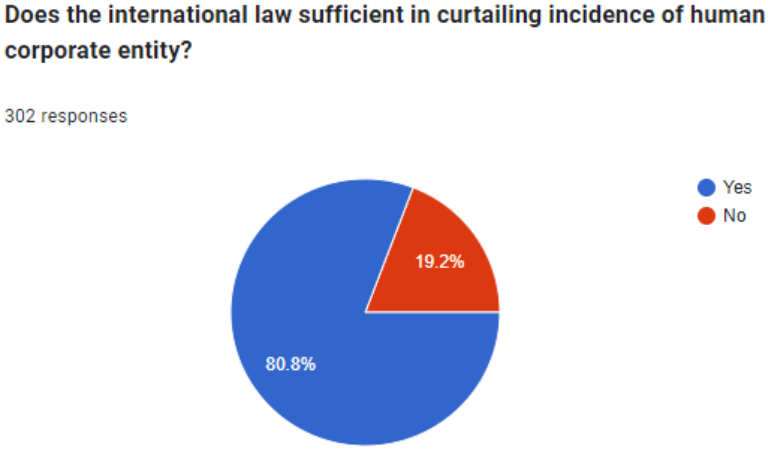


Table 2

Respondents confirming international laws regulating human rights and business

	Response	Percent

Valid Yes	244	80.8%
Valid No	58	19.2%
Total	**302**	**100%**

Figure 2 and Table 2 are respondents' confirmation of the fact that international human rights laws sufficiently regulate human rights and business activities.

3. Research Question Three

Figure 3

Ways International Laws Secure Human Rights Against Abuse by A Corporate Entity



Table 3

Identification of ways international laws secure human rights against abuse by a corporate entity

Ways international laws protect against abuse by a corporate entity	Cluster of Response	Percentage
The laws prohibit discrimination against the community and employees by a corporate entity	164	65.9%
It secures the rights of employees to ensure fair wages, a conducive working environment and against undue exploitation by employers	209	83.9%
It provides for the rights of employees and the community to have access to justice when being abused by a corporate entity	204	81.9%
It promotes and ensures that corporate entities observe accountability and transparency in their business activities	165	66.3%
It requires corporate entities to observe corporate social responsibility	122	49%
It provides for access to remedy	125	50.2%

Figure 3 and Table 3 are clusters of valid confirmation of the extent international laws secure the rights of individuals and societies against human rights abuse by corporate entities.

4. Research Question Four

Figure 4

Confirmation of socio-economic and legal issues often limiting international laws against human rights abuse

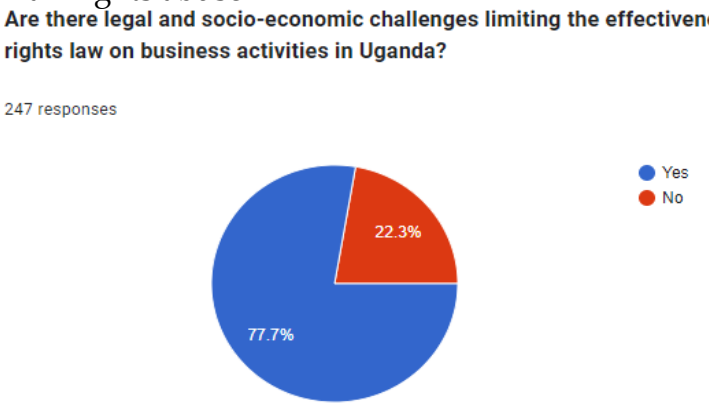


Table 4
Confirmation of socio-economic and legal issues limiting international laws against human rights abuse

	Response	Percent
Valid Yes	192	77.7%
Valid No	55	22.3%
Total	**247**	**100%**

Figure 4 and Table 4 are identification of the legal and socio-economic challenges often limiting international laws against human rights abuse by corporate entities.

5. Research Question Five

Figure 5
Identification of socio-economic and legal issues limiting international laws against human rights abuse

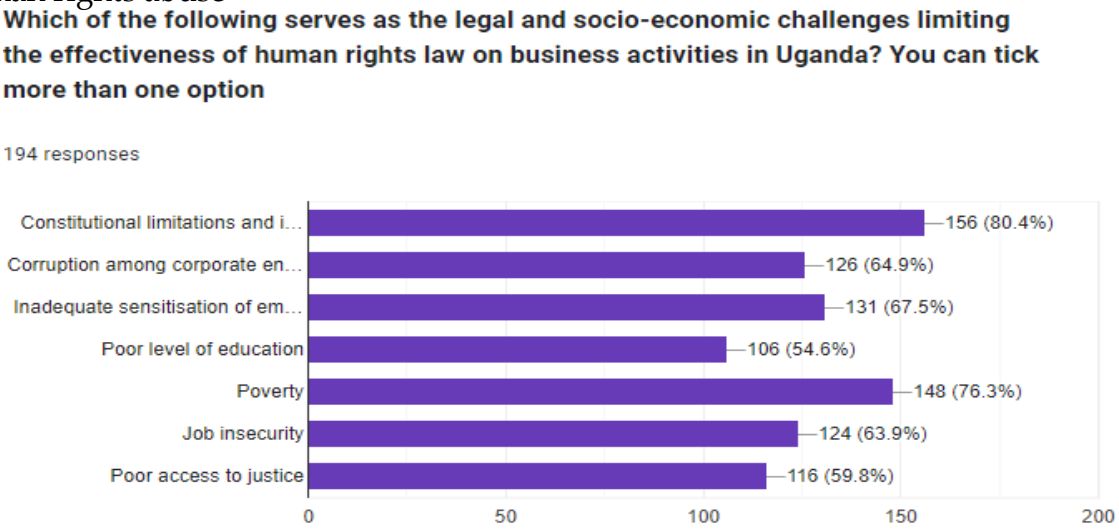


Table 5
Cluster of socio-economic and legal issues limiting international laws against human rights abuse

socio-economic and legal issues limiting international laws against human rights abuse in business	Cluster of Responses	Percentage
Constitutional limitations and impediments	156	80.4%
Corruption among corporate entity	126	64.9%

Inadequate sensitization of employee and community concerning their rights and engagement with the corporate entity	131	67.5%
Poor level of education	106	54.6%
Poverty	148	76.3%
Job insecurity	124	63.9%
Poor access to justice	116	59.8%

Figure 5 and Table 5 are valid clusters of socio-economic and legal issues limiting international laws against human rights abuse.

6. Research Question Six

Figure 6

Possible remedy in mitigating the challenges limiting international laws against human rights abuse in business

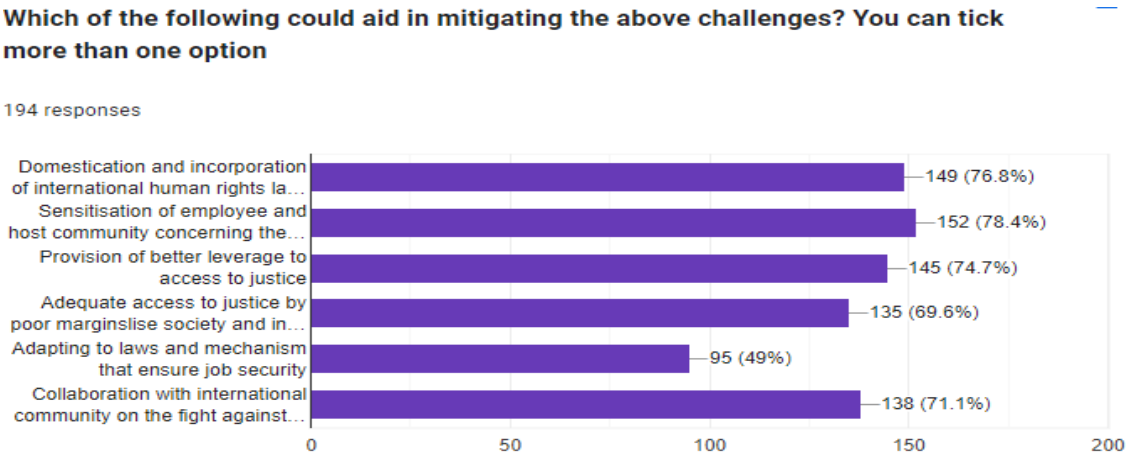


Table 6

Cluster of remedies in mitigating the challenges limiting international laws against human rights abuse in business

Remedies on limiting international laws against human rights abuse in business	Cluster of Responses	Percentage
Domestication and incorporation of international human rights law concerning business activities	149	76.8%
Sensitization of employees and host community concerning their rights in engaging corporate entity	152	78.4%
Provision of better leverage to access justice	145	74.7%
Adequate access to justice by poor marginalized society and individuals	135	69.6%
Adapting to laws and mechanisms that ensure job security	95	49%
Collaboration with the international community in the fight against unfair treatment of community and individuals concerning business-related activities by a corporate entity	138	71.1%

Figure 6 and Table 6 are valid respondents' confirmations of remedies in mitigating the challenges limiting international laws against human rights abuse in business.

Discussion

The study by Aidonojie et al. investigates international human rights law implementation in Uganda's business sector using a mixed-method approach with 302 respondents across four regions. While 80.8% acknowledge that international frameworks sufficiently regulate human rights, enforcement remains weak due to systemic barriers (Lichuma, 2024a). Constitutional limitations (80.4%) prevent direct application of international laws without parliamentary approval (Krajewski, 2023). Corruption (64.9%), poverty (76.3%), and inadequate access to justice (59.8%) collectively undermine effectiveness (Dehbi & Martin-Ortega, 2023). Job insecurity (63.9%) and inadequate sensitization (67.5%) further exacerbate enforcement gaps. The study reveals that Uganda's commitment to international instruments has not translated into tangible protections, creating a legal vacuum that corporate entities exploit (Choudhury, 2023; Ong, 2024). Consequently, addressing these interconnected barriers requires urgent policy intervention to bridge the gap between international norms and domestic realities.

The findings reflect observable social realities where vulnerable communities bear the brunt of unregulated corporate activities. Poverty (76.3%) forces individuals to accept exploitative working conditions due to economic necessity, perpetuating dependency on employers with minimal accountability (Dillard et al., 2024; Quarm & Begho, 2024; Zimmerman et al., 2024). Inadequate sensitization (67.5%) creates an awareness gap where employees do not know their rights, rendering legal protections meaningless (Gustiawan et al., 2023). Poor access to justice (59.8%) affects marginalized communities in remote regions, limiting their ability to seek remedy. Job insecurity (63.9%) creates fear of termination, discouraging reporting of violations (Kim & Wang, 2024; Ozer et al., 2024). Corruption among corporate entities (64.9%) erodes trust in regulatory institutions and allows violations to go unpunished (Boateng et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2022). Corporate activities directly impact citizen safety and dignity, making the research highly socially relevant.

The findings align with "governance gaps" theory, where human rights violations occur when states fail to provide adequate protection through legal inadequacies or weak enforcement. Lichuma (2024b) argues governance gaps emerge when states lack capacity to regulate corporate conduct, supported by 80.4% identifying constitutional limitations as primary barriers (Palguna & Wardana, 2024). Chimni's (2022) TWAIL perspective critiques the lack of genuine engagement with international norms due to socio-economic constraints, aligning with poverty (76.3%) and inadequate sensitization (67.5%). Peters (2024) confirms constitutional frameworks often render international standards as non-binding principles. Corruption (64.9%) and poor access to justice (59.8%) validate the governance gaps framework (Ali et al., 2023; ElKelish, 2023; Juwita, 2024; Peters, 2024). The study demonstrates that effective governance requires robust legal frameworks, institutional capacity, and genuine political will to bridge international norms and domestic realities.

The principal wisdom is that legal frameworks alone are insufficient without institutional reforms and socio-economic empowerment (Andabayeva et al., 2024; Atmadja & Wirawan, 2023). While 80.8% acknowledge international legal provisions, effectiveness is contingent on addressing systemic constraints simultaneously (Heredia et al., 2022). Inadequate sensitization (67.5%) and poor access to justice

(59.8%) are central determinants of enforcement effectiveness (Mohd-Rashid et al., 2022). The mixed-method approach integrates survey data with doctrinal analysis, capturing lived experiences of employees and communities (Bell et al., 2022; Regmi, 2024). Job insecurity (63.9%) demonstrates economic dependency can be more powerful than legal protections. The study shows legal empowerment is linked to social and economic empowerment, requiring interventions addressing root vulnerabilities preventing communities from exercising their rights.

This study fills a critical gap by simultaneously analyzing legal and socio-economic factors in Uganda. Mniwasa (2021) examined constitutional constraints in Tanzania but did not integrate empirical community perspectives on poverty and corruption (Pattenden, 2024; Ssekajja, 2024). Carroll (2021) explored CSR evolution globally, yet this study demonstrates CSR lacks enforceability without domestic legal mechanisms, supported by only 49% viewing CSR as significant safeguard. Alfonsi et al. (2024) examined women's rights but did not address broader barriers like poverty (76.3%) and job insecurity (63.9%). The mixed-method approach reveals 80.4% identify constitutional limitations, extending prior qualitative research. The study validates Pattenden (2024) and Olawuyi and Abe (2022) suggestions about cultural influences through large-scale empirical evidence.

Based on findings, concrete recommendations are necessary. Domestication of international law is essential, with 76.8% identifying this as critical to overcome constitutional limitations (Cingranelli et al., 2023; Hickson, 2024; Lima & Gomez, 2021). Public sensitization is imperative, with 78.4% affirming this as key remedy to increase rights awareness Akwaji et al. (2024). Improved access to justice is needed, with 74.7% calling for better legal leverage and 69.6% for adequate access for marginalized communities (Otteburn, 2024; Shivji, 2024). Job security mechanisms must be adapted, as 63.9% experience job insecurity preventing rights claims Parkes et al. (2024). International collaboration is vital, with 71.1% affirming its importance to combat unfair treatment ElKelish, (2023). These interconnected measures will build a resilient rights-respecting business environment in Uganda.

Conclusion

The review of the international legal Framework on human rights in business in shows how human rights law within the international realm has developed over time in safeguarding and securing the rights of the community and individuals in business-related activities. Furthermore, the study also reveals that given the fact that as the corporate entity continues to strive for development and profit-making motive, the need for a legal framework for the advancement of human dignity, justice, and fair treatment of community and individuals by corporate entity becomes necessary. Furthermore, the essence on the United Nations formulating possible legal framework concerning human rights in business activities. These international laws are ensuring corporate accountability, fair treatment by employer, and conducting of business activities with due regard to corporate social responsibility to its employees and community when the business activities is carried out

Study further found that, though Uganda is also grappling with the challenges of balancing human rights and business activities, however, it seems to be a legal and socio-economic gridlock in the implementation and enforcement of international laws concerning human rights and business practices. Some of these challenges ranges from constitutional limitations on international law, poverty, corruption among corporate

entities and job insecurities.

Concerning the above, for an effective balancing of human rights and business activities by corporate entities, the following are therefore recommended: Incorporation and domestication of the core provisions that provide and secure the rights of the individuals and community against unfair business practices by a corporate entity, Alleviation of poverty, Adequate access to justice by poor marginalized society and individuals, Adapting to laws and mechanisms that ensure job security, Sensitisation of the general public on their rights against any unfair treatment by a corporate entity, Collaboration with the international community on the fight against unfair treatment of community and individuals concerning business-related activities by a corporate entity

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