

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Gender Makes the Difference

Sustainable development and poverty elimination efforts require a global partnership between the public and private sectors. Although for decades it was assumed that social responsibility should be the task of the public sector, it is now clear that the private sector has a key role to play. One of the ways that the private sector can fulfill this role is through the adoption of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) principles.

The ethics and practice of Corporate Social Responsibility affirm that enterprises are accountable for their impact on all relevant stakeholders. Corporate Social Responsibility is the continuing commitment of business to behave fairly and responsibly, while contributing to economic competitiveness and progress. CSR principles also require that private sector businesses provide acceptable work conditions, and help their workers achieve an improved quality of life. Socially responsible human resource management involves a commitment to life-long learning, health and safety, a better balance between work, family and leisure, greater workforce diversity, gender-blind compensation and career opportunities, profit-sharing and shared ownership schemes.

The incorporation of the gender perspective in CSR must be strengthened through organizational thinking, in order to improve the effectiveness of mainstream policies by making visible the gendered nature of assumptions, processes and outcomes in environmental, ethical, social and economic issues.

The introduction of gender into the mainstream of business thinking will require the transformation and reorientation of existing policies, a change in decision-making processes, prioritization of gender-equality objectives and re-thinking the role of multi-stakeholders –employees, customers, suppliers– so as to more effectively achieve existing policy goals and improve competitiveness. The first code of business conduct on women's rights (*Women's Principles*, published by the Calvert Mutual Funds Investment Group and the United Nations, on June 30, 2004) defines a role for business corporations in fostering and nurturing the relationship between empowerment of women and potential for sustainable development.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY WILL HELP:

- To protect human rights (environmental and social rights of working women and men).
- To implement different types of policy and accountability instruments, including environmental policy, codes of conduct, codes of ethics, environmental and social certification and standards, social dialogues with multi-stakeholders and business sustainability reports.
- To stimulate innovation and experimentation and reward creativity without business vulnerability.
- To enforce transparency and ethics, requiring corporate citizens to issue reports on environmental, social and financial sustainability, that will serve as monitoring and evaluation instruments for continual improvement.
- To recognize that women are important business stakeholders as suppliers, consumers, employees, employers and shareholders, whose interests must be known and represented on the boards of companies that sell products and services to them, employ them, contract with them for services or goods and whose shares are held by many of them.
- To generate new benefits to businesses, including greater employee motivation, commitment and satisfaction; attraction of talent; reduced absenteeism; fewer medical leaves; greater innovation, creativity and diversity; and a better corporate image.



FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC CAN BE FOUND AT:

Copenhagen Centre
www.copenhagencentre.org

European Multi stakeholders Forum on Corporate Social Responsibility
www.forum.europea.eu.int/irc/empl/csr_eu_multi_stakeholders_forum/info/data

Global Report Initiative (GRI)
www.globalreporting.org/guidelines/2002.asp

Global Compact
www.unglobalcompact.org

Interamerican Development Bank
www.iadb.org/mif/v2/spanish/rse2.html

Institute of Social and Ethical Accountability
www.accountability.org.uk

University of Leeds
www.leeds.ac.uk

World Bank
www.worldbank.org/wbi/corpgov/csr/

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WHY GENDER MAKES THE DIFFERENCE IN CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

- Gender recognition broadens corporate culture to promote gender equality through creation of policies for compliance with the international standards of the International Labour Organization (ILO), such as – equalization of wages and social benefits, occupational health and safety, freedom of association and effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining. It also stimulates the elimination of employment and occupational discrimination and helps to promote humane practices for care of children, sick relatives and the elderly.
- It stimulates recognition by business entities that their activities have a wider impact on the society in which they operate, that such activities affect men and women in different ways and that societal development, in turn, impacts a company's ability to pursue its business plan in a sustainable manner.
- It contributes to reduce the poverty of women, as well as men, through programs of social investment in the communities where companies operate, recognizing the differentiated impact of poverty on men and women, the sexual division of labor and the obstacles that limit the access of women to options for poverty reduction.
- It recognizes that women play a key role in the chain of production, but that their contribution of skills and knowledge in the use and management of natural resources – including food, water and energy production – often goes unrecognized, unrecorded and undervalued.
- It promotes energy initiatives focusing on poverty eradication and management of natural resources in developing countries. This can help to improve the population's access to adequate, affordable and sustainable energy services, through a variety of ways: rural electrification, improved management and use of biomass, the increased use of renewable energy sources, enhanced energy efficiency, and other wide-reaching measures. Without proper energy services, women in developing countries will continue to experience insufficient opportunities to progress in society. This sector's responsibility is essential if national development strategies, such as those for health, education, rural development and gender equality, are to be successful.
- It encourages and supports farming practices which improve agricultural productivity and contribute to the conservation of biodiversity (as long as caution is exercised in admitting alien invasive species), giving women equal access to resources, human capital, technology and credit. Evidence shows that women farmers can achieve agricultural yields equal to, or even significantly higher, than those attained by men.
- It recognizes that the lives of millions of poor families depend entirely on small-scale fishing and that their livelihoods are being threatened by large scale overfishing. Similarly, it acknowledges the active participation of women in pre and post-fishing activities, including handling, processing, marketing, distribution, maintenance of nets and tools and preparation of meals for fishing trips. CSR also involves commitment to global efforts to stop the overfishing crisis, by reducing fleets and total catch and restoring stocks to sustainable levels by 2015 at the latest, according to the Biodiversity Action Plan on Fisheries.
- It includes making pharmaceutical products available to the developing world at the lowest possible prices, recognizes the rights of women to an equitable distribution of benefits derived from biodiversity and its genetic resources, and improves women's productive and managerial capacities, through transfer of technological innovation.
- It underscores that climatic change may exacerbate current gender inequalities. Depletion of natural resources and decreasing agricultural productivity may place additional burdens on women's health and reduce time available to participate in decision-making processes and income generation activities. Corporate commitment includes ecologically sustainable production patterns, aimed at reducing the causes of climatic change. In 1997, the world released 23.8 billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, the most important of the greenhouse gases. Almost half of those emissions originated in highly productive economies.
- It allows a better understanding of how limited or non-existent access to clean water affects the ability of women to achieve better crop and livestock production and increases the amount of labor they must invest to collect, store, protect, and distribute water, thus affecting their health and that of their families. Gendered CSR ensures the development of new technologies destined to improve irrigation mechanisms and safe access to water fit for human consumption, prioritizing such access to the poorer communities and to women in general. It also promotes sustainable use of clean water resources, the use of new technologies designed for sustainable production processes and a fair distribution of these resources amongst men and women.