

Public Awareness as a Primary Catalyst to Develop Corporate Socially Responsible Practices

Essam Babiker Coco – Sudan
Public Relations Director – Sudani
Email: esamb@sudani.sd



We may see good examples of socially responsible corporates scattered all over our Arab nation. In addition, every now and then, we witness new endeavors to promote the concept of social responsibility and set forth a roadmap that corporates may follow in their journey towards social responsibility. However, a closer look into these trends will reveal the humungous gap between theory and practice, between what we hope for and what really is. Still some corporates that showed good intentions have not taken any steps further; others may provide projects and programs as part of their charitable business or they may plan certain projects with a façade of social responsibility demonstrated during their marketing and public relation campaigns to improve the public perception and promote good reputation on the short run. Undoubtedly, such benefits would materialize by moral and socially acceptable means if these corporates adopted a management and strategic approach towards social responsibility, if they took into account the social, economic and environmental aspects as part of their vision and message and if they sustainably strengthened their position when they carry out their main business and daily activities.

The concept of social responsibility may sound relatively new in most of our countries. Nevertheless, a mere look into our vibrant Islamic intellectual and cultural heritage would render all of us inexcusable; for we must follow the good teachings of our seal religion that has been revealed by God to perfect good manners. The Prophet of Islam PBUH called for adhering to truthfulness and honesty in His saying: “Those who cheat us, are none of us”. The Prophet also advised us to work with goodness towards the happiness of mankind, protection of plants and people and a peaceful life where mercy, love and cooperation prevail. These are the high standards and moral values of our religion that we have forsaken, which led us to our ongoing ineffectual and directionless lagging behind other nations. The West has integrated these values into the modern model of social responsibility that calls for adhering to moral values when exercising economic activities. Social responsibility is essentially a moral issue. If moral values are integrated in corporate activities and corporate economic, social and environmental approaches, they help improve the quality of life on our planet and enable the coming generations to enjoy sustainable resources.

Good efforts have been exerted in the Euro-American West to develop the current model of social responsibility that we must apply in line with our moral, intellectual and cultural values in our humanitarian endeavors to settle our affairs in a more scientific fashion. In the era of globalism and the knowledge society, we can never be isolated from the global trends in this area; as we live in the age of free market and open space where overseas companies are already invading our economies. The said model encourages transparency, governance, equity and environment protection, and fights against bribery, corruption child labour and anti-human rights

practices; it also takes the rights of every related parties into account. Therefore, it would be wise to adopt that model and facilitate the application thereof as far as possible, which constitutes the wise action that every faithful has the right to follow prudent and deeply conscious manner.

Our corporates may be driven to move in that direction by the studies and researches, which have shown that the companies and corporates that adopted the said values have managed to achieve great profits, and tangible development, and therefore helped them obtain good reputation and customer satisfaction in the communities where they operate; customers also became less critical in times of crisis. Moreover, those values have enthused skillful human resources to work for the companies that adhere to social responsibility, and have helped achieve many other benefits that are too numerous to list herein.

The benefits referred to above could be the main reason why western companies have chosen to observe social responsibility and general public awareness that made people more conscious of their rights and made them cherish those rights even more. Therefore, companies chose to pay great attention to public opinion to least they face severe criticism and have their products boycotted, which is demonstrated by the great momentum gained by anti-globalism groups, customer protection associations, influential group syndicates and Greenpeace movement. Such a rational approach is supported by encouraging government policies and clear legislations that control the way in which companies and corporates operate.

Public awareness has obliged corporates to modify their policies in order meet the interests of the community and related parties. **Professor Medhat Mohamed AbuNnasr** have provided certain examples in his book entitled “ISO 26000 Corporate Social Responsibility”; these examples relate how the public have compelled some companies to respond to their criticism. Some of those examples are provided below:

- In 1989, Exxon was heavily censured for its slow response to the disaster caused by an oil leakage; therefore, it was severely berated for its failure to deal with this crisis properly.
- In 1995, Shell sales dropped by 70% in Germany after the Greenpeace campaigns launched against it due to its oil rig in the North Sea.
- In 1997, there were increasing calls to boycott Nike products after it has been accused of condoning child labour and labour exploitation. A recent study entitled “The Annual Observatory on Corporate Social Responsibility” states that 27% of consumers in 25 countries have actually punished some companies for their irresponsible business practices; and another 27% have seriously thought of doing the same. A further study, carried out by an Australian market intelligence company, shows that 80% of consumers in Australia have punished certain companies for their immoral actions; such punishment is usually takes the form of turning to buy the products of a competitive company. Thus, public awareness has been proven to be of the utmost importance as a factor that drives corporates to meet their social responsibility and sustainability requirements.

If we were to classify companies according to their compliance with social responsibility, those that are too concerned about criticism directed against them would come at the bottom of the list. Whereas the companies that adhere to social responsibility as a management approach and the companies whose culture is imbued with SR values do really provide the best examples of socially responsible companies that deserve our appreciation and respect. Increased awareness leads to increased socially responsible practices... To be continued.

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