The Future of Sustainability in Dubai

The last edition of CSR Al Youm for 2010 will look ahead at what Dubai and the UAE can do using past achievements as the starting point. Dubai achieved many societal goals over the last few years. Many of these goals have had the assistance and support of the government and business community – whether it was branded as ‘CSR’ or not. The business community is one of the fastest growing groups in UAE with the ease of doing business and the UAE’s central location being major factors in attracting global businesses and talent. This group also has much of the financial power in controlling Dubai’s reputation and direction in trade and commerce.

With global business conditions severely battered by a lack of trust, transparency and stability, sustainability initiatives will follow similar recovery patterns around the world. Key sustainability traits that will be rewarded in a recovering economy are: innovation, productivity, social entrepreneurship and efficiency improvements. These aspects will help businesses ride out the storm by allowing them to create and lean cutting edge and responsible practices by marrying economic efficiency and productivity with wider social goals. Sustainability is essentially a long term strategy; however, short term goals are readily achieved through responsible management of staff, defined internal processes and clear communication.

In the past, organizations had large budgets to create CSR and sustainability programs. With budgets reduced, the real challenge for the Dubai business community is to learn to create value for consumers and staff using the remainder. The first step is to create a lean workforce. A lean and efficient workforce will become the strength of any organization. They are the brand ambassadors and the key to future recruitment and successes. Intelligent organizations can use this as an opportunity to develop and educate talent and align business objectives with Human Resources strategies. The organization’s mission and vision can be adjusted and a brand new start can be made with the staff on board to support it.

The second step is for organizations to take part in collaborations. This can stem from sector or industry based collaboration to cross sector and private public partnerships. Over the last year, we have witnessed many projects flourishing which encompassed many stakeholders from the business community. ENGAGE Dubai, Dubai’s premiere employee volunteering program brought together over 30 companies to work collaboratively on a project, the ENGAGE Dubai Health Fair, to increase the awareness levels of employee health and wellness. This project not only had a huge impact, but through collaboration, companies were able to contribute towards a project bigger than any had the time, budget or manpower to accomplish individually. Many of these companies also contributed to the content of a guidebook on health and wellness in the workplace, which will be published by the Dubai Chamber Centre for Responsible Business. This guidebook documents the outcomes and lessons learnt into a tool that can be useful for all organizations in Dubai.

The third step is to take advantage of doing business in Dubai through access to resources and talent that would not be available in other markets. According to a study by the Deutsche Bank, Dubai, an emerging financial centre has improved its global ranking since 2007 raising its competitiveness ranking by 42 percent and currently is ranked second in the HSBC Trade Confidence Index. This clearly indicates that Dubai is on the way to recovery and is again a main player on the global stage. This also sends a clear signal to companies and entrepreneurs on the ease of doing business and the attractiveness of Dubai to the global business community. The constant rise in consumer confidence from the second quarter of 2010 onwards of the UAE has placed it in the 10 most optimistic nations according to the recent Nielsen Global Consumer Confidence Index.

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Dubai based consumers are also beginning to spend more compared to their global counterparts and according to a study conducted by Emirate Business 24/7. The long-term prospects of the economy look bright with government, health, education and utility sectors leading the charge in 2010. While the economic indicators are looking positive for the UAE, more emphasis must be placed at building the right checks and balances to sustain such positions.

This trend is shown by the new wave of support for entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs through conferences aimed at raising awareness of the concept to online platforms such as Wamda which aims to connect entrepreneurs with mentors, investors and the global community. The recent Celebration of Entrepreneurship event in Dubai, bringing together speakers, academics as well as business and government leaders gave an opportunity for entrepreneurs to learn and promote themselves in a safe and creative environment. Such initiatives are also useful for companies and sustainability, as it is important to share how other perceive similar problems and have designed creative ways to solve them.

There are strong indicators that social entrepreneurship will be flourishing in the UAE in the future. This is a direct result of many public private partnerships (PPP) that will be forged to enable societal needs to be met adequately and of the support that is being given to budding entrepreneurs. One such example is Beeah, a waste management company who is in a PPP with the Sharjah Municipality to not only manage landfills but is now also educating Sharjah residents on recycling, disposal and have also partnered with various tertiary institutes to further research and develop waste management systems.

Carezone, an up and coming program allows consumers to harness their spending power for good by allowing them to customize donor recipients while allowing retail outlets to also gain from added sales. Organizations with goals of solving social problems as their core function will begin to operate in the UAE as the focus has now shifted to a sustainable function to catalyze social change.

Widespread innovation has not been present in Dubai markets over the last few years. Reasons for this absence include unfavorable conditions to foster it and house it. Now as resources are becoming scarce, the need to foster innovation, productivity, efficiency and entrepreneurship becomes even more crucial. Consumers are now eager for new technologies and products that will meet environmental and social goals as well as serve functional purposes. There is more demand for entrepreneurship than ever.

The past year, 2010, has been peppered with challenges for the sustainability community. From the BP oil spill which was the largest in US history and their removal from the FTSE4Good Index sent shock waves throughout the business community but illustrated the fragility of the balance between the bottom line and the triple bottom line. Businesses that have inherent risks associated with their main core function are now looking at how sustainability measures can help them in changing how they do business, not merely as an add-on function. For example steps are being taken to align international standards on financial, environmental and social reporting by the International Integrated Reporting Committee, which include top corporations from around the world.

The Dubai Dialogue: Sustainability Matters conference highlighted the local challenges that we are facing in light of the global changes, which include integrating special needs people into the workplace and ethical promotion of goods and services. The second Dubai Dialogue event also emphasized the need for support and transparency at the top levels of organization including board members and top management. Good governance has become one of the most important aspects of the sustainability agenda in the UAE with global players such as Transparency International and World Business Council on Sustainable Development becoming key participants in this discussion.

Dubai and the UAE still have a long way to go to develop their potential as sustainability leaders. Although the development of initiatives such as Masdar City, EnPark, the Pearl Initiative and aid companies to implement and integrate sustainable practices. This trend will continue as the government, industries and associations are playing a strong role in promoting best practices. As the world continues to climb out of a situation that made us all sit up and question the importance of doing responsible business, we in the UAE can use this period as one of self reflection.

Where do we want our business community to be heading in the next five to ten years? What do we want to leave behind and what do we want to be known as? Let's all use this period as a strategic opportunity to explore lessons learnt and new directions to take our organizations to the next level.
CSR Executive Trainings

A Look at 2010

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is fast becoming a popular board room topic. Businesses in UAE are beginning to understand that CSR in a business is essentially about achieving economic success and competitive advantage by building reputation and gaining the trust of people. This is why businesses are no longer looking at CSR initiatives as an exercise in public relations, but as a management tool that offers several opportunities and benefits such as enhanced reputation, trust, lower risks, improved organisational efficiencies and employee motivation.

With additional time and resources being allocated to explore, implement and communicate CSR initiatives, there is also a growing need for specialized CSR trainings to understand various elements and applications of CSR. With growing awareness and understanding of CSR issues and the need to manage it well, interest in CSR as an area of a specialization and professional development has also increased. This has lead to a higher demand for specialized CSR trainings that are topic and industry specific.

The Centre for Responsible Business (CRB) CSR Trainings were developed to cater to this growing need from the business community in the market and is strongly aligned with the Dubai Chamber mission and vision of representing, supporting and promoting the interests of the business community in Dubai.

Our 2010 trainings took on a different dimension as we introduced several trainings for the first time in the UAE such as a two day Certified Training Workshop on the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), Stakeholder Engagement Webinar with Canadian Business for Social Responsibility (CBSR) and two day workshop on Responsible Supply Chain Practices with Business for Social Responsibility (BSR). This year we also ran a series of three CSR introduction courses, of which two were done at the Jbel Ali Branch of Dubai Chamber in partnership with the Economic Zones World (EZW). We also conducted two CSR Leadership Forums this year, one for the manufacturing sector with Unilever and the second for the accounting sector with the Institute of Chartered Accountants England and Wales (ICAEW). The CRB also partnered with the Indian Institute of Chartered Accountants (ICA) to run a joint seminar on CSR for accounting professionals.

This year the training was also supported through the development of additional learning resources such as guidebooks and online tools and references. Some of the learning resources that are being developed include a Sustainable Supply Chain Guidebook, Wellbeing in Workplace Guidebook and CSR in SME sector. The CRB ran a total of 12 trainings this year and feedback received from all the trainings have been very positive with companies enthused on the active role that the Chamber has taken on in promoting CSR and Governance. We aim to evolve CSR Executive trainings to offer a range that will offer in depth & practical knowledge on CSR and additionally substantiate these by offering useful learning resources. For more information, please contact:

Vineetha Mathew, Senior CSR Trainer at Vineetha.Mathew@dubaichamber.ae

ENGAGE Dubai

Helping Employees Give Back to Society

Over the last 12 months, ENGAGE Dubai has been involved in a variety of projects. This has included our popular Faculty for a Day which allows corporate volunteers to share their experiences with their students, helping run the Al Noor Centre for Special Needs Funfair, collecting goods for the Pakistan Flood Victims, and Big Pen School in Kenya and our most recent event, the ENGAGE Dubai Health Fair. The Health Fair was a huge success attracting over 900 participants, which included employees of various organization as well as their families. The Fair aimed to raise awareness of corporate employee wellbeing and promoting healthy lifestyles in the workplace and at home.

Run purely by the volunteers of the Dubai Chamber Centre for Responsible Business and ENGAGE Dubai and supported by the 30 participating partners including Jumeirah Group, Dnata, Barclays, TNT Express, DL Piper and ENOC, the Health Fair saw a large turnout of the business community with their employees and families who took part in activities, learnt about various health aspects such as choosing the right mattress for your back and sampled products on healthy living such as choosing the right mattress for your back and sampled products on healthy living.

The ENGAGE Dubai Health Fair provided fertile ground for companies to meet and exchange ideas on health practices for their employees and their families and this initiative came as part of the Chamber’s efforts in raising awareness of CSR and assisting businesses to address the broad environmental, ethical, and social aspects of their everyday business.

Next year we will be looking to create new projects and initiatives to further contribute positively and strategically to Dubai’s social goals. Community partners and NGO’s may contact the Centre for Responsible Business with projects proposals.

ENGAGE Dubai is a volunteering programme run by the Dubai Chamber Centre for Responsible Business. ENGAGE is an international programme that operates in over 13 countries around the world and aims to increase strategic non financial contributions to the local community. This programme is convened by Business in the Community (BITC) UK. ENGAGE Dubai was launched in 2008 and was the first programme of its kind in the Middle East and over the years has grown to encompass over 40 companies and 500 volunteers who have given 2000 hours of volunteering.

The Dubai Chamber CRB acts as a matchmaker to bring together the business community with the local community and causes. ENGAGE Dubai has also helped build capacity for community partners, by encouraging them to communicate non financial needs and tap into the rich corporate volunteer market in Dubai.

To enroll your organization or receive more information, please contact:

ENGAGE Dubai Coordinator, Sabrin Rahman at sabrin.rahman@dubaichamber.ae
Dubai Chamber CSR Label: A Journey Towards CSR Excellence

The Dubai Chamber CSR Label was launched in September 2010 at a time when there was great demand for benchmarking and communication of sustainability initiatives in the emirate of Dubai. The creation of this tool was the result of the requests of the business community to document and communicate their experiences they faced while going through the journey of integrating sustainability and CSR into their organizations.

The Dubai Chamber CSR Label has been designed to target all companies in all sectors with various levels of awareness of CSR in the region. The recent report published by the Dubai Chamber Centre for Responsible Business and Emirates Foundation titled, 'Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Governance in the UAE' highlighted that CSR is important to their companies. In the meantime, the results indicated a low level of CSR management practices as more than 90 percent stated that they did not adopt CSR policies and CSR practices in spite of recognizing the importance of CSR. The Dubai Chamber CSR Label is a sound tool to link strategy and implementation and consistently streamline the organizational objectives with stakeholders objectives.

As Dubai consumers and companies evolve in their understanding and practice of CSR and sustainable development, a simple tool was needed to communicate a company’s achievement and commitment to sustainability. The Dubai Chamber CSR Label is a transparent framework that demonstrates CSR best practices and lead to better performance. As such, the Dubai Chamber CSR Label has been developed by the Dubai Chamber to bring together international best practices in CSR and the local context of Dubai together.

The Dubai Chamber CSR Label is a comprehensive framework that explains the most efficient ways to manage core CSR components. The label’s process a self evaluation process, a window for CSR check up and diagnosis, an opportunity to get an objective feedback report and enjoy the privilege of being labeled and to communicate to stakeholders and markets.

It fills the need for recognition of CSR initiatives by companies in order to improve reputation and market presence and is tailored to the Middle East, specifically Dubai, UAE. As such, it aims to contribute towards building a more responsible and sustainable Dubai business community.

Dubai Dialogue: Good Governance Matters

To address the growing need in the UAE to raise awareness on best practices in Governance, the Dubai Chamber Centre for Responsible Business organized a conference entitled 'Dubai Dialogue: Good Governance Matters’ on October 10 2010 at the Park Hyatt hotel in Dubai, UAE. Attended by over 150 delegates from local, international and government entities the conference focused on Good Governance and its link to economic performance and sustainability.

The main goal of the conference was to look deeper into the concept and practices of good governance and particularly its importance and relevance to sustainability. The conference gave participants an opportunity to hear from experts on the basic principles underlying Good Governance and the benefits and challenges around it. Participants also took a close look through case examples at how governance is moving forward in the UAE, being supported by institutions and the implications for the business community.

Governance has wide implications for sustainable development and is critical to economic and social well being. Good governance underpins market confidence, integrity and efficiency, and hence promotes economic growth and financial stability. The Dubai Dialogue: Good Governance Matters stressed on implementing the principles of good governance for maintaining investor and consumer confidence.

The conference was attended by HE Hamad Buamim, Director General, Dubai Chamber, HE Mohammed Ahmed bin Abdul Aziz Al Shehhi, Director General, Ministry of Economy; HE Marwan bin Ghalita, Director General, Dubai Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA), dignitaries and officials from the local and international companies, government institutions and individuals.

In his keynote address, Buamim said that there can be no Good Governance without transparency and that good governance is one that is transparent, accountable and enhances efficiency. Good governance is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone for sustainable economic growth, poverty eradication and development and is directly linked to sustainability which integrates social, environmental and ethical practices as it helps build long term value for various stakeholders.

For more information please contact Sabrin Rahman at sabrin.rahman@dubaichamber.ae

Renowned speakers from the International Finance Corporation, Transparency International, Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA), Linklaters LLP, Nasdaq Dubai, HSBC and DP World Limited spoke on the importance of good governance from macro to micro level, specific challenges in implementing good governance for different stakeholders while also touching upon local examples and positive developments across the globe.

The Centre will be issuing a conference proceedings paper by the end of 2010 with summaries of presentations and discussions.

For more information please contact Sabrin Rahman at sabrin.rahman@dubaichamber.ae