

3C - Employee's Involvement in CSR Issues: **A factor of Wealth Creation for Companies?**

The central theme of this workshop is employee involvement and mobilization. Although the two companies presented were different in the nature of business and in geographic location, the speakers both emphasized that employee involvement is vital for the sustainability of a company's CSR policies. The different phases of employee involvement in CSR are: creating awareness about the company's policies as well as about the importance and usefulness of having such policies; training and empowering employees to ensure that they are on the path envisioned by the company management; and finally, a follow-through by a sustainable process to ensure long-term awareness and commitment .

Mr. Luuk de Jong, Vice President of Human Resources and Organizational Development at Interface FLOR Europe in the Netherlands said he used the company's MD 2020 plan of promoting sustainability to involve employees in the company CSR program. The company's visionary leader gave impulsion to this program but despite this top-down approach, it successfully cascaded down to the employee level. The HR department played a key role in the process by training employees about the importance of the program and specially by empowering them to take an active part in it. Mr. De Jong further stressed the objectives of employee involvement: go beyond correcting employee weaknesses and focus on building on their strengths.

Mr. José Obregon, CEO, Finca Tropical in Honduras presented a very different context in which the same issues were handled by using similar frameworks and almost identical steps as the first speaker. When Mr. Obregon joined the company, it was plagued by bad labor relations, low productivity and an increasing threat of climate change – which was potentially very dangerous to the company's core business of exporting bananas. These problems and threats were systematically corrected by top management through a well-structured employee involvement program. A new committee was created at an intermediary level between top management and employees; this was largely instrumental in increasing employee empowerment and in driving higher productivity and increasing the revenues of the company.

Both speakers demonstrated quite effectively the need for companies to have a clear vision and mission with respect to their CSR programs, and more important, to communicate this to employees and give them the means to enable them to be actively involved in the whole process.