

5B – Labor relations resources: trade union contributions towards developing corporate wealth

In the last 10 years, companies have realized that implementing CSR policies within their business was related to their long-term success. Nowadays, new challenges for the companies ask how to integrate trade unions in their CSR plan, how to generate synergies not only for the companies and their employees, but also for their stakeholders.

Delivering CSR plans will inevitably affect the employees of the companies, and considering the closed relationship between trade unions and employees, the degree of companies' work with the trade unions will strongly impact the progress of their CSR plans.

However, in practice, trade unions are reluctant to be involved in CSR development as they fear that social dialogue would have negative effect to the unions' interests. If trade unions benefit from the supports of the society (companies, communities, governments), they should provide tangible benefits not only to their members, but also to their stakeholders (society, communities, etc.). Companies should encourage the trade unions to get involved in the CSR programs and to share their interests of developing social responsibility.

Gaëtan SMETS, CSR Manager at **Ethias**, the third Belgian insurer and a pioneer in social responsibility, explained that it is the first company to obtain the Social Label awarded by the Belgian government. Ethias developed a formal body (Joint and National Ethics Committee) to support social, societal and environmental measures. The Committee is supposed to be responsible for the CSR multi-year plans, delivering dialogue between management and employees, and provide suggestions for development of innovation and societal sustainability. The Committee meets at least twice a year to discuss the on-going plan. Its contributions are:

- A permanent and constructive dialogue between management and employees.
- Indirect effect: reduction of Ethias carbon footprint by 37%.
- Increase employees' loyalty and Ethias image as a social responsible partner.

Marco La Touche from Chiquita Brands International Inc. (Costa Rica) is a producer and distributor of bananas and other produce. For Chiquita, CSR is an important part of their global business strategy. A large part of their social responsibility efforts involve how they interact with their employees and stakeholders. Their work practices, approach to labor relations and corporate culture are put into practices on a daily basis.

Chiquita adopted the Social Accountability 8000 (SA8000) labor rights standard, a tool for measuring and improving their practices to better serve the communities in which they live and work, a decade ago.