



Thematic lunch organized & animated by:

Arabia CSR Network (ACSRN)



The CSR Network aims at working more closely with the corporate sector in the promotion of sustainable development in the UAE. The CSR Network also aimed to bring into focus the local and regional efforts that are undertaken at the corporate level to further CSR in the Middle East. As the only multi-stakeholder forum the region, the CSR Network has been dedicated to the promotion of CSR, sharing best practices, exchanging ideas and forging lasting partnerships across sectors.

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THEMATIC LUNCH : CSR in Arab countries

BACKGROUND

You perform activities in Middle-East or East Africa, and you want to deploy corporate responsibility initiatives there. Come to learn and debate about CSR trends in this region. Organized and moderated in exclusive partnership with Habiba AL MARASHI, CEO of Arabia CSR Network.

DEBATES SUMMARY

About twenty people had come to listen to Habiba Al Marashi : consultants, association directors, representatives of companies. Her presence at this World Forum Lille is noteworthy : the Middle East is under-represented in this kind of events. Mrs. Al Marashi began by presenting the Arabia CSR Network.

Her speech rests upon a successful story, an experience she wants to share. During her occupation as chairperson at the Emirates Environmental Group, she founded the first CSR network in the United Arab Emirates in 2004, as the only multi stakeholder forum with local and multinational entities. The network has become structured and evolved into an independent service.

The ACSRN worked on the assumption that the first challenge for CSR is the lack of awareness ; then that companies implementing best practices should be recognized.

But, taking in account the significant differences between countries of Middle East and East Africa, how to build an Arab network together ? It must be based on factors of connection : language, history, religion. A holistic thinking which focuses on philanthropy, a core value of Islam, practiced by many companies. The next step is to promote CSR, beyond just charity. Commonly, companies in the Middle East also do not have a long-term sustainability aspect in their business strategy.

But otherwise, everything is different. Therefore, dialogue and attention to the local situation are the key points, especially in many countries where the state is not equally established over its territory.

ACSRN works also on two other important dimensions of CSR : training and reporting. Some regions have very high unemployment rate because people don't have the experience. To Mrs. Al Marashi, « this youth is a national ressource that should be turned into a strong opportunity. Our aim is self-efficiency. » ACSRN works with Global Reporting Initiative to offer Training Courses to the increasing demand for experts. « Companies practising CSR now become competitive. This is very commendable considering the fact that there are no binding CSR and sustainability laws and regulations yet in most parts of the Arab world, even if there are good responses from governments », concluded Habiba Al Marashi.

Paying close attention to these stories, participants then took the floor to discuss CSR as such. OCP presented in particular its CSR programs in Morocco and worldwide. It appears that beyond the culture and values structuring different societies, CSR raises the same difficulties : how to do without legal infrastructures ? How to encourage multinationals without make them flee ? Should we legislate or enhance skills with credits and facilities ? Everyone defended his point of view. Points of agreement stand finally : necessity to communicate, to build an ecosystem with local communities, to balance awareness and profit.

This lunch proved anyway that Arab countries have excellent examples of CSR programs to share : water management, food security, training of young people... It is understandable that this region of the world needs visibility into forums and partnerships. « We want to be heard, but also to listen. »

THEY SAID IT!

« We became aware that we were living CSR in our organization, as a way of life. » H. Al Marashi, ACSRN

« There will be no real change as long as leaders of companies choose CSR because it is profitable, not because they believe in it. » F. Chara, New-Way Capital

To learn more about this thematic :

- Get inspired with OCP's responsible programs : <http://www.ocpgroup.ma/>
- More information about Global Reporting Initiative : <https://www.globalreporting.org>