



CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be with you here today, at a venue that aims to discuss an extremely important issue in today's world: Corporate Social Responsibility.

Corporate Social Responsibility is “the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society”.

In the light of this definition, CSR is mainly concerned with a company's self-governance and integrity in fulfilling its values and mission. It also regulates the ethical interaction with the community, the stakeholders and the public.

In addition to the fact that CSR helps companies to establish the well-being of both the institution and the society, it further helps in the creation of true competitive advantages and the development of a positive reputation. Higher education institutions are no exception.

There is no doubt that due to the various aspects of globalization, higher education institutions have to take competitiveness into consideration. The aim is not merely to attract high quality students and academic staff, both nationally and internationally, but also to graduate highly-qualified candidates for a competitive job-market. In response to this changing

scene, many higher education institutions have started to adopt a more business-like approach at the administrative level.

Beirut Arab University, ever since its establishment in 1960, has committed itself to create a cultural and scientific environment that has strong ties with every part of society, and has managed to implement a successful CSR strategy. This has largely been achieved through exploring the potentials and opportunities of expanding CSR practices beyond the classroom and into its institutional operations.

Thus, in line with its vision and mission statements, BAU continues to create a cultural and scientific environment that enhances CSR awareness and practices. There are a number of steps that have been taken to realize this.

First, BAU has launched a number of CSR-conscious centres, including the Human Rights Center, the Research Center for Environment and Development, and the Center for Entrepreneurship.

The Human Rights Center HRC was established with the aim of assisting students, and thus their communities, to raise their awareness of their rights. This is achieved through formal and non-formal methods, extra-curricular activities and communal interaction. The Centre is also keen on establishing partnerships with national and international institutions and NGOs, to enhance students' empowerment, access to data and development.

A multi-disciplinary unit, the Research Center for Research and Development (RCED) aims to deal with all aspects of environmental impact on socio-economic development. Its mission is to stimulate and conduct various academic and scientific research endeavors that aim at a better understanding of the various threats and challenges to ecosystems and natural resources. The Centre also fosters the participation of community members, the promotion of gender equity and the enhancement of sustainable development.

The Center for Entrepreneur CFE's mission is to inspire BAU students, as well as the broader community, to become the next generation of

entrepreneurs. The Centre achieves this by encouraging, hosting and supporting potential future entrepreneurs, as well as growing enterprises in all domains.

Second, BAU annually organizes conferences and hosts events that focus on such topics as cultural diversity, human rights, labor conditions, sustainability, corporate social responsibility, renewable energy, as well as social and local governance. In addition, BAU promotes relevant extra-curricular activities, publications and research that raise students' awareness of social responsibility. For example, BAU intends to organise in the near future a workshop entitled "Integration of Corporate Social Responsibility for the Lebanese businesses".

Third, BAU is keen on offering several courses designed to introduce topics of social responsibility. The Social Responsibility Course, a University Elective, is a case in point. Other examples include the Corporate Social Responsibility Course and the Business Ethics Course, which provides students with an understanding of ethical and social responsibility issues in contemporary business life. Other courses are encouraged to integrate components on social responsibility or projects into their syllabuses. The aim is to enhance students' critical perspectives in implementing ethical behavior in organizations in relation to various stakeholders as well as the institutionalization of business ethics in corporations. In these courses, the students are presented with real-life examples to identify the ethical issues confronted by the managers of Lebanese and global companies, and they learn about the importance and the role of social responsibility activities in companies.

Fourth, the University has established an Ethics Committee in order to evaluate the ethical dimensions of academic research conducted on human-related subjects in terms of health, security, human rights, general law and ethical principles.

Fifth, BAU is also actively involved with UN centered initiatives. Since 2011, BAU has been committed both to the United Nations Global

Compact (UNGC) initiative and working group, as well as to the Principles for Responsible Business Education.

Sixth, since the impact of raising awareness of CSR can be most effective at the social, economic and environmental levels, BAU will launch a web platform as a bridge between the business field and community. Thus, the issues which require a solution may become a starting point to elaborate a strategy of social responsibility in Lebanon.

The impact at the social level is:

- to raise the awareness of diverse public categories (representatives of local companies, citizens, public institutions) in order to implement a value system in businesses and daily life (the preservation of the environment, cultural values, etc);
- to raise the level of citizen engagement in the process of sustainable development;

The impact at the economic and environmental levels is:

- a global and integrated approach to all activities with a powerful impact on the local society and environment;
- to raise the level of awareness of stakeholders of risks in today's crisis-prone environment.

In conclusion, the majority of universities have limited themselves to teaching social responsibility within the confines of the classroom. The practice of social responsibility, however, as an additional cutting-edge for higher education institutions, requires an enhancement of their commitment to CSR at both the academic and the operational level.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.