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Arabia CSR Network®

NEWSLETTER

June 2021 Volume 10 Issue 118

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ONLINE TRAINING ON CSR STRATEGY AND LEADERSHIP

13th - 15th July, 2021



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5th AUGUST 2021 | DUBAI, UAE



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Note from the President & CEO Habiba Al Mar'ashi

As we move closer to the half way mark in another pandemic ravaged year, efforts continue to achieve some level of normal functioning, albeit with serious limitations.

In May, the Muslim world celebrated Eid Al Fitr, bringing to a close the holy month of Ramadhan, the month of fasting, contemplation and spirituality. Given the pandemic situation, it was again a subdued celebration this year, nevertheless it marked an annual milestone for Muslims around the world and injected much needed happiness and hope among the milieu. At the Arabia CSR Network, May was typically a busy month.

We participated in a set of important global and local programmes. On **3rd May**, we attended the Task Team 2 Meeting of GISD (Global Investors for Sustainable Development, a high level body of select business leaders committed to facilitating financing for the SDGs.)

The purpose of the online event was to provide sector-specific parameter suggestions to task team members. Automobiles and Components, Consumer Staples, Health Care, Financials, Information Technology, Telecommunications, Utilities, and Real Estate were among the industries focused on. On **25th May**, we were invited to the Envision Partnership's Business Talk, on the theme of Defying Gender Bias. A group of experts from different industries addressed the attendees, sharing insights and experiences on the topic.

We participated, along with our sister organisation and environmental partner Emirates Environmental Group (EEG) in an online meeting on the joint initiative, 'Impact Standards for Financing Sustainable Development', between the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development joined with the UN Development Programme which was held on **26th May**.

The framework focuses on mobilising and enhancing development impact of private finance through alignment to the SDGs. Four impact standards were discussed during the meeting. Two popular ACSRN programmes were successfully conducted in May; the GRI Standards Certified Training course on **May 17th to 19th**. Developed with local case examples by ACSRN and accredited by GRI.

The GRI Standards' training is a strong tool for companies that are keen to report performance in environmental, social and governance areas, using international standards and best practices.

The module included interactive discussions and exercises, which helped to test the principles and learning on a practical basis. We also carried out a full day workshop on **20th May** for a group of delegates coming from various companies in the UAE. The workshop focused on a step by step approach towards Gap Analysis and SWOT Analysis. It aimed at providing foundational knowledge and building requisite skills, which allows the participants to conduct the exercise within their own organisations.

We supported and attended EEG's 2nd panel discussion of the year on **19th May** under the title 'From Textbook to Tech-Savvy: The Impact of COVID-19 on Educational Systems'. In my capacity as the Chairperson of EEG, I was privileged to host four distinguished speakers who shared unique insights into the transition and development of current educational systems with regards to fulfilling the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal #4: Quality Education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected economies around the world and amongst the highest affected is the educational sector. Overnight, the academic sector globally had to re-evaluate its teaching methods and adjust to provide quality education from a distance. The distance learning has impacted students and teachers as well as administrators and staff, parents, investors, tech companies and many others. It is necessary to learn how to maintain the quality of education provided and measure the outcomes of shifting to digital learning.

Assessing the sustainability of online learning is a must as it has become evident now that it will continue to be a part of our lives for the next few years. This has in turn brought to attention the underprivileged students who cannot afford to implement the transition.

I hope you enjoy reading about these events and activities in more details in the inside pages of this newsletter and let us continue working together to build effective partnerships for a sustainable future.





ACSRN News

GISD Task Team 2

From the beginning, the GISD Alliance embraced the Secretary-General's call to align global economic policies and the financial systems with the SDGs. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to mobilise greater resources for sustainable development has significantly increased. In response to the call the Alliance regroup the work of GISD around the key deliverables. This would entail replacing the current Working Groups with Task Teams. On **3rd May**, ACSRN attended the GISD Task Team 2 meeting virtually which is in charge of supporting the development and implementation of a clear set of SDG related metrics that can be widely adopted and integrated into existing reporting frameworks. This is for the alignment of investment portfolios and the development of SDG related metrics of different sectors. Prior to beginning the external meeting, the conference was used to provide sector-specific parameter suggestions to task team members. The session started with a brief on each industry which included Automobiles and Components, Consumer Staples, Health Care, Financials, Information Technology, Telecommunications, Utilities, and Real Estate were among the industries discussed during the meeting. It was then followed by the proposed metrics and consultation presentations to be incorporated to each sector. From these proposed consultations and metrics, the GISD project team will then develop an interim report with proposed key metrics which will then be presented to the UN Secretary-General and CEOs in the 2021 GISD Annual Meeting.

58th GRI Standards Training

Arabia CSR Network is a certified training partner of Global Reporting Initiative since 2011. In May it ran a three-day virtual training course on the GRI Standards from **17th – 19th**. ACSRN is the first certified training partner of GRI in the Arab Region; it has been bringing various GRI training modules to interested participants. The GRI Standards creates a common language for organisations to report on their sustainability impacts in a consistent and credible way which then enhances global comparability and enables organisations to be transparent and accountable. The training helps organisations to understand and disclose their impacts in a way that meets the needs of their stakeholders. The GRI Standards consist of Universal Standards and Topic Standards which an organisation uses to reflect its most significant sustainability impacts. Many reports have been launched by organisations that had taken part in these trainings and gained both knowledge and technical know-how related to sustainability reporting based on the GRI structure. Mrs. Al Mar'ashi, ACSRN President & CEO, on her opening remarks said, "The challenges to the natural environment today are immense; from climate change to the loss of biodiversity and growing inequality, the list is long. By doing business in a way that aligns long-term commercial strategies with care for people and the environment, entities can play a crucial role towards sustainable development". To date, ACSRN has delivered 58 sessions on GRI reporting, that have spawned a large number of reports and built the capacity of hundreds of individuals.

2nd Panel Discussion - From Textbook to Tech-Savvy: Impact of COVID-19 on Educational Systems

Arabia CSR Network (ACSRN) hosted its 2nd panel discussion of the year on **19th May** under the title From Textbook to Tech-Savvy: The Impact of COVID-19 on Education Systems. Moderated by ACSRN president herself, four distinguished speakers gave strong insights into the current transition and development of current educational systems with regards to fulfilling the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal #4: Quality Education. In her introductory remarks, the President of the ACSRN said "The pandemic known as 'COVID-19' has devastated economies all over the world and the education sector is one of the most affected. The academic industry has had to reassess its ways of learning globally and adapt to deliver excellent training across the distance in a very short span of time. The distant learning has affected not only students and instructors but also managers and employees, parents, investors, IT businesses, and so on". This brought disadvantaged pupils in 3rd world countries and in poor economy countries to be the center of attention as they are unable to achieve the shift as easily as their counterparts in the developed part of the world. The funding of education is likewise under threat as fiscal strains increase and affects development in education.

As the problem continues to unfold across the world, students in different age groups from multiple countries across regions have been thrown behind the edge of growing education. The UN Sustainable Development Objective #4 - Quality Education is experiencing a setback. This panel discussion was organised by ACSRN in order to talk about these abrupt changes and the development strategies needed to support education. Ultimately, it is vital to discover how to sustain education quality and assess the results of transition to digital learning. ACSRN invited reputed entities representing, International Bodies, Academia and Regional Bodies to the Panel; they included: Mr. Saji Thomas, Chief Child Protection of the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund, Dr. Yousef Al-Assaf, President of Rochester Institute of Technology, H.E. Sarah Mbi Enow Anyang, Commissioner for Human Resource and Youth Development, Education and Science and Technology of the African Union Commission, and Dr. Norita Ahmad, Director of Center for Innovation Teaching and Learning and an Associate Professor of MIS at American University of Sharjah.





The crisis indeed exposed the many inadequacies and inequities in educational systems globally – from access to broadband and computers needed for online education, and the supportive environments needed to focus on learning, up to the misalignment between resources and needs. While the educational community has made concerted efforts to maintain learning continuity during this period, children and students have had to rely more on their own resources to continue learning remotely through the Internet, television or radio. The session was also able to address questions on how teachers adapted to new pedagogical concepts and modes of delivery of teaching. How are countries strategising on reaching out to learners in the most marginalised groups (e.g. Africa), who don't have access to digital learning resources or lack the resilience and engagement to learn on their own and are at risk of falling behind. Getting investments from governments, investors, educational and financial institutions and the impact of the pandemic on young girls were also some of the issues tackled during the session.

Online Gap Analysis Workshop

Arabia CSR Network has always accustomed its members to roll out strong workshops during the year and it continued the path in May by organising a virtual **Gap Analysis Workshop** on **20th May**, it aimed at helping the participants to understand the nuances of successful sustainability practices, link business strategy to the sustainability context by reviewing, and analysing the management of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) related issues by the organisation. Gap analysis is a technique that can be used to assess organisations in meeting their needs using present capabilities. It focused on the key elements of Sustainability Gap Analysis and SWOT exercise using a process flow approach and demonstrated how it would help in perfecting sustainability related strategies and thus, ensuring the desired outcomes and impacts. The overall objective of the workshop was to equip participants with requisite knowledge and process know-how that would lead to objectives, targets and performance indicators applicable throughout the value chain. Periodic gap analysis efforts should be encouraged as it plays an important role in measuring performance and defining the key activities that need to be completed to attain the desired future state of an organisation.

Envision Partnership Business Talk for May - Defying Gender Bias

ACSRN attended Envision Partnership's business talk on 'Defying Gender Bias in the Workplace' on **25th May**. The stubbornness of gender bias lies in the fact that it is rooted in our societal beliefs about men, women and leadership. Men are believed to be 'agentic' (assertive, decisive, strong) and women should be 'communal' (warm, caring, sympathetic). These gender stereotypes clash with the leadership prototype, i.e. the societal view of what a prototypical leader should be. The leader prototype shares characteristics with the male stereotype: self-reliant, assertive, dominant and competitive. This prototype is widely shared and, if one were to be asked to close their eyes and picture a leader, most people would automatically picture a tall, white, middle class man. Conversely, women are seen as submissive although caring, sympathetic and sensitive to the needs of others. Company and team culture play key roles in challenging gender bias in the workplace. A strong company and team culture re-enforce the key message that everyone has a place and deserves to be seen, which helps people from all backgrounds to reach their full potential. Additional steps to overcoming gender bias in the workplace were discussed such as the need for the decision makers, both male and female, to increase awareness of their own biases and try to recognise when these views are affecting their hiring and promotion processes. Perceptions need to change to accept both men and women in counter-stereotypical roles. Breaking gender stereotypes means that we need to allow all members of society the freedom to choose the roles most suited to them. Entities need to engage in data collection on their organisations to be able to analyse and to reveal the true picture and to find out the gender balance among all applicants compared to successful applicants. Finally, all speakers agreed that the only way that we will create meaningful change is to create systems designed to eliminate bias. For example, ensuring there is gender balance when shortlisting candidates.

CEBC Annual Summit 2021

The Clean Energy Business Council (CEBC), a sister entity of ACSRN organised its annual summit on **26th May** and was attended by the President and CEO of ACSRN. The CEBC is a non-profit organisation, which promotes clean energy, renewables, energy efficiency, smart grid, energy storage and clean energy, as well as environmental solutions. The annual summit, which is a flagship event of CEBC, was attended by experts and industry professionals throughout the region to talk about clean energy trends, problems, opportunities and perspectives. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) market were the main focus of the Summit. The topics covered included: Climate Finance, Energy Efficiency, Electric Mobility, Energy Storage, Green Hydrogen and more. The CEBC offered a venue for increased public-private discourse to establish policies and regulations needed to push renewable energy throughout the MENA region. The summit discussed the current trends, challenges and opportunities in the MENA clean energy sector, the current status of the climate finance sector in MENA, the barriers that the sectors face and market enablers, the status quo and outlook of the energy efficiency market across the MENA region with a focus on the UAE, KSA and Oman.

High Level Dialogue on Energy (HLDE)

ACSRN digitally attended the High Level Dialogue on Energy (HLDE): deep-dive workshop on **26th May** which aimed to support the High-Level Dialogue on Energy (HLDE) to galvanise action on SDG #7 ahead of COP26, recognising that accelerating a just, low carbon energy transition and achieving universal clean energy access are key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and Paris Climate Change





Agreement and ensuring an inclusive, resilient Green Recovery. Hosted by UN Energy and as part of the preparatory process for the High-level Dialogue on Energy, this deep-dive workshop explored opportunities for catalysing action in the areas of Energy Access, Energy Transition, and Enabling SDGs through just and inclusive energy transitions towards advancing SDG #7 by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2050. This interactive workshop included a detailed presentation on the Energy Compacts, followed by a question and answer session to explore the process of creating and registering an Energy Compact towards the High-level Dialogue on Energy in contribution to SDG #7 and net-zero emissions. As co-chair, the UNDP Administrator, along with the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sustainable Energy for All, are mobilising actionable 'Compacts' from both Governments and the Private Sector across the four key themes of the Dialogue: energy access; just transition; innovation & data; and finance.

OECD – UNDP Impact Standards for Financing Sustainable Development

ACSRN on 26th May took part in an online conference of the United Nations Development Programme with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on the Joint Initiative, 'Impact Standards for Financing Sustainable Development'. The IS-FSD is a means of supporting donors through DFIs and private asset managers in their constructive contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). More generally, the Standards are a framework for any organisation that wants to show public responsibility with relation to their impact assessment and management. During 2020, standard discussions and feedbacks from a wide variety of stakeholders, including the donor community, Development Finance Institutions, asset management and civil society organisations, as well as impact measurement and management specialists were integrated with the Standards. With regards to the session on 'building forward greener' post-COVID-19 and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, it explored IS-FSD's added values for donors seeking more accountability and transparency of their investment in the private sector. In addition to highlighting how the Secretariat plans to continue its efforts in 2021 with the detailed IS- FSD Implementation Guidance and pilot study, the significance of the standards was emphasized in providing deeper harmonisation of the space for measurement and management.

FEATURE ARTICLE

Dubai Tourism mandates that all Hotels must comply with Sustainability Requirements by July 1

by: Hotelier Middle East

A directive from Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (Dubai Tourism) says all hotels must meet new sustainability requirements by July 1. Set by Dubai Sustainable Tourism (DST), the initiative aims to enhance Dubai's position as one of the world's leading sustainable tourism destinations. Under the directive, hotels must also resume monthly submission of carbon emission drivers. The system has the long-term objective of advancing sustainability performance across the sector. Back in 2019, Dubai Tourism, led by DST, trained 528 hotels on the implementation of these sustainability standards and currently inviting hotels for a refresher webinar ahead of July 2021. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the deadline was extended for an additional 12 months, a decision that Dubai Tourism took to strengthen the foundations for recovery of the hospitality sector. The progress on implementation of the mandatory standards will be tracked by hotels and audited by DST.

Yousuf Lootah, Vice Chairman of DST said: "Over the past year, the strength of the city's tourism industry is reflected in the safe and successful reopening of Dubai to domestic and international visitors. In alignment with the city's wider carbon reduction strategy, we know that tourism can also be an area where Dubai truly sets the benchmark at a global level with forward-thinking sustainability and corporate social responsibility practices. "We strongly encourage hotels to comply with the 19 Sustainability Requirements set by Dubai Tourism and provide Carbon Calculator submissions by July 1. We know that with the ongoing support of the relevant government bodies these hotel establishments can play a huge part in achieving the overall carbon emission reduction target over the next year and beyond." The requirements include sustainable management approaches, performance metrics, energy, food and water management plans, guest education, employee training initiatives, the presence of sustainability committees within hotel establishments and corporate social responsibility programmes for local communities.





Best Practices 2019 From The Archives

Oman LNG Development Foundation (ODF)

Arabia CSR Awards Winner - Social Enterprise Category

Profile

In order to strengthen its CSR activities, Oman LNG LLC established Oman LNG Development Foundation (ODF) in 2009. The Foundation became operational on 1st July 2015. The vision of the Foundation is to create a sustainable income channel and provide financial support for programmes, projects and initiatives that benefit the local community located near Oman LNG's liquefaction plant as well as communities in other governorates of the Sultanate. The approach adopted by ODF is to invest 1.5% of its net income after tax (NIAT), which is then used to contribute to the social development of sustainability programmes. Additionally, the Foundation also conducts studies which help to serve and develop the society. The primary aim of ODF is to provide financial support for projects, initiatives and programmes for the benefit of the Omani society as well as to be an exemplary CSR Centre of excellence in Oman and to function as a role model for sustainable social investment in the Sultanate.



Lesson Learnt

The Foundation publishes its annual report which includes the most important results and achievements secured during the year.

- The study of proposed social initiatives is held every three months and then a consolidated report is submitted to the management of the institution including the corresponding projects and initiatives.
- The Foundation follows the occupational safety and environment plan and all employees and contractors are encouraged to comply with the stipulated laws in-line with the strategic objectives and annual performance indicators approved by the Board of Directors in cooperation with the shareholders.
- In terms of corporate social responsibility, the Foundation ensures the accuracy of data and reporting as well as the engagement of business units and other key players in order to assess and monitor performance indicators.

Conclusion

Since its establishment, Oman LNG Foundation has achieved many distinctions both domestically and internationally. One of the tangible benefits for stakeholders & communities across the Sultanate is that the Foundation has grown steadily as an organisation with verified CSR projects that support ambitious national goals. This success is attributed to the unique experimental approach to corporate social responsibility, where the way of working with public sector organisations has been reformulated and streamlined to promote integrated cooperation. This cooperation has an impact that extends to the national economy as well, which is of great value and is reflected in the sustainable development strategies in the country. Oman LNG, through its development institution, has proven its true commitment to the society where the company continued even in light of the global crisis of oil prices and its negative repercussions on the natural gas industry.

