

Middle East Executives Agree: Governments need to do more to require and incentivise business to adopt Corporate Social Responsibility

- Results of the largest ever cross-regional CSR survey are released, and the findings are clear. Regional leaders view CSR as an essential ingredient for business recovery and call for ‘carrots and sticks’ from governments to encourage good practice -

25 November 2009, Dubai - The largest cross-regional CSR survey was conducted for the lead up to Dubai's 6th CSR Summit organised in October. Instigated by Sustainability Advisory Group the survey captures executive attitudes towards CSR in the Middle East. With over 100 executives responding to the survey, from eight participating countries in the Middle East, the findings prove to be a compelling read.

Highlighted throughout the results is a common thread of opinion from executives operating in countries ranging from the UAE to those in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Lebanon. This consistency of opinion rings especially true in response to questions about the business case and the perceived benefits of getting involved in CSR. Here over 80% of respondents indicated that, done properly, CSR can enable companies to maintain and build a strong reputation, attract and retain the best employees, and attract new customers, while more than 65% also see it as key to capturing new markets, market share and investment. More than half of all respondents took a step further to indicate that they believe that CSR is more important than ever, given the current economic climate, and that it should be recognised as a framework for business growth.

Commenting on the results, Maria Sillanpaa – Founding Director of Sustainability Advisory Group said:

“We are witnessing a global shift – following the collapse of Lehman Brothers there is increasing demand for business to be more accountable. At the same time the community is becoming increasingly aware that business has not been shouldering the true cost of its social and environmental impacts or realised the full business benefits that the agenda can bring.

We are very excited by the survey results – they reveal a reassuring level of sophistication in the regional markets’ understanding of CSR. Where once CSR was seen as a series of ad-hoc good will gestures today’s leaders are seeing it as an enabler for business growth, innovation and enduring prosperity.”

Another area in which the consistency of views held true related to critical sustainability issues for the future. In this instance more than 90% of respondents identified governance, transparency, ethical business processes, risk management, recruitment and retention and energy issues highly important issues facing business in the coming years.

The results also highlight clear areas of future action. A worrying 30 to 40% of respondents indicate that issues of water conservation, climate change, waste management and pollution, and poverty alleviation are either not relevant or not currently being addressed by their companies. Considering the fragile ecology and geo-political context of the region, Sustainability Advisory Group, together with many of the respondents, believe that these issues require urgent attention in the coming years.

In general, the findings highlight a growing regional awareness that companies must accept a much wider role than purely economic. However, to make CSR part and parcel of corporate practice, respondents call for more ‘carrots and sticks’ from governments (almost half of the respondents maintain that lack of government requirements and incentives is the biggest barrier to effectively implementing CSR) and that senior executives accept that CSR programmes require an initial investment to ensure they add value to all (again, almost half of the respondents maintain that it is difficult to secure funding for CSR at the moment).

ENDS

Notes:

- A soft copy of the high-level survey results should have been received alongside the distributed news release. For further details on the results please send an email to info@sustainabilityadvisory.net.

About Sustainability Advisory Group

Sustainability Advisory Group is a leading international alliance of sustainability strategists and specialists. We have access to a wide range of proven specialists with diverse backgrounds and skills. This combined with our robust understanding of business realities means that we offer our clients a winning package of innovative yet practical and cost effective strategies and programmes for action. Our network spans from Australia and Asia to the Middle East and from Europe to the United States and Africa. We have a strong hub of professionals based in the Middle East and have been active in the region for three years.

We excel at making the connection between sustainability and what it means for business. We have helped literally hundreds of organisations realise the benefits of integrating corporate responsibility and sustainability into their business.

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