

DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PRACTICES: FEATURES, CONDITIONS IMPACT

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The article is devoted to the analysis of the current condition of corporate social responsibility in Belarus, its main problems and impacts. The relevance of the topic is determined by the growing number of social projects implemented by businesses, and the lack of structured and generalized data in this field. This article reveals the concept of corporate social responsibility, identifies the main areas of CSR in Belarus and describes the experience of the Belarusian business in this sphere. The author of the article has analyzed the data and reports on corporate social responsibility, tools and methods of its development. Based on this analysis the main problems of the area are identified and recommendations for improvement are given. The considered topic could be interesting to researchers on corporate social responsibility, in particular specialists in communications and marketing.

Key words: Corporate social responsibility, CSR directions, corporate sustainability, external CSR, internal CSR, charity, CSR reports, the responsibility of business, environmental responsibility, the sociality of business.

The social responsibility of business is the subject of criticism today. This topic provokes a lot of discussions. Some people believe that the main purpose of business is precisely financial, making a profit. Others believe that this phenomenon has a solid economic rationale and that companies gain enormous benefits by working for a longer perspective than short-term profits. People argue that the social responsibility of business takes away from its fundamental economic role. In the last years, social responsibility has become a kind of a trend and has appeared in the business environment, which has also served as a basis for condemnation: some companies are beginning to use CSR as a part of brand promotion, which may be condemned and seem contradictory to the direct concept of «sociality» in business.

But it is very important to discern CSR and other social actions which are taken by the company, or other instruments of the company's corporate sustainability. For example, paying salaries to employees on time, paying taxes are not a CSR, it is a regulatory compliance. When a company hires people who have recovered from alcoholism - these people make up more than 50% of the company's employees, and the company donates all of its profits to the psychological rehabilitation of such people – it is social entrepreneurship.

When a company pays a percentage of their sales to a local civic organization for merchandise labeled as part of a major fundraiser – it is social marketing.

However, when a company's employees plant trees with a local eco-organization, it is an internal CSR. When a clothing brand donates some of its products to a charity, it is a part of external CSR. When a company creates a foundation to support social and ecological projects, it is an IMPACT investing, and it is also CSR.

Thus, we can formulate the following definition of CSR – it is a voluntary activity of business to obtain a social effect in various spheres, which can be aimed at employees or society as a whole, and implemented in various formats. For a company to be socially responsible it is important to be accountable to itself and its shareholders. Sometimes companies that adopt CSR programs have grown their business to the point where they can give back to the society. In this way, CSR is primarily a strategy for huge companies and corporations. The more visible and successful a corporation is, the more responsibility it has to set standards of ethical behavior for its peers, competition, and industry [1].

In general, the formation of CSR in a company includes 5 stages that manifest themselves in different forms. The first stage is the development of internal CSR, which is a good business practice and provides social services within the company. The second stage is non-systemic social investments, which include financial aid, Probono volunteering, etc. The next stage implies participation in the formation of a CSR ecosystem in the country. In this case, there are actively promoted principles of social responsibility and published open data on CSR. Then it spills over into the final stages – regular systemic social investments and the previously mentioned IMPACT investment [4, p. 24].

And what about the main fields of CSR developing in Belarus? In 2019 an international consulting company CIVITTA had researched the experience of 184 Belarusian companies that are actively developing their CSR direction. Among them were IT companies, banks, large commercial realtors, food producers, construction companies and many others. According to the results, it was found that the priority format of external CSR in Belarus is charity. Based on these results the most popular fields of CSR were identified:

- Support for vulnerable groups;
- Science and education;
- Culture and art [4, p. 29].

At the same time, there is an opinion in the Belarusian culture of implementing CSR projects that such activities are of a «quiet» nature. This is especially true for charity. This is partly the reason why many companies do not publicly report on their CSR activities. Thus, among the surveyed companies,

only 120 declare their social responsibility, 95 tell the public about their projects, and only 29 publish open reports [4, p. 30].

However, if a company implements a socially useful project that solves the problem of their target group, it should be publicized – so that new partners and followers would emerge from this company, and the social responsibility of business in Belarus would develop openly and go to the international level. And even though CSR remains a powerful factor influencing the reputation of business, few companies make public reports on their social activities. In this context, the CSR report is an effective communication tool that can increase both the social effect of CSR and the economic one.

An important step in the development of the national experience of CSR implementation was the signing of the Agreement on cooperation between socially responsible companies of Belarus in the implementation of CSR projects. More than 30 companies became participants in the agreement. The initiator was the social fund «Dobra». This agreement is designed to promote the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as to support companies in the implementation of external CSR projects [2].

In addition, the fund «Dobra» has established the Goodness Index for the development of CSR in Belarus. The main idea of this index is to demonstrate the desire of Belarusian businesses to maximize their voluntary responsibility. The Goodness Index is a tool for independent assessment of corporate sustainability, social and environmental responsibility of business companies in terms of their involvement in the sustainable development of society [3].

The problems associated with the lack of open CSR reports of companies had a serious impact. Belarusian businesses began to use tools that allow them to loudly declare their social responsibility. In particular, many companies began to use event marketing as a tool to implement projects in the field of CSR. Companies began to develop public documents that describe strategies for the implementation of CSR aspects.

An excellent example of the both impacts is the company A1 Belarus – operator of telecommunications services in Belarus. One of the main CSR directions in this company is helping children. With the use of event marketing, they develop this direction. Every year they hold a conference for high school students in the Ted Talks format, where children can present their project ideas on one of some topics – «Technology», «Culture», «Ecology», «Inclusion», «Urbanism». In this way, young people can share their vision of how to change lives around them.

Besides, A1 develops the ecological direction behavior as part of CSR. At the end of 2020, the company published a document called «A1 Environmental Policy». The purpose of this document is to increase the level of environmental safety, apply a comprehensive approach to the rational use of energy

and natural resources, minimizing environmental damage from the activities of the A1 company, preserving a favorable environment for future generations, positioning A1 as an environmentally oriented company in the public opinion.

Thus, this company, being one of the leaders in the implementation of corporate social responsibility, by its example shows that social activities should be «loud» and can serve as an excellent means of communication with the Belarusian society [5].

Overall, it is worth noting that many Belarusian companies have great potential to relaunch corporate social responsibility. The main problem that still holds back the development of CSR in the country is the silence on social activities and the lack of open data from companies that would allow a full picture to be drawn. However, the gradual development of CSR requires long-term involvement and understanding of marketing tools that can help build a competent corporate social responsibility strategy for companies.

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