

Local companies have to make CSR count: Experts

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By Shehana Dain

Private sector corporates were challenged to bring national priorities to the boardroom by strategically devising their annual corporate responsibility budgets.



**CSR Sri Lanka
Chairman Chandula
Abeywickrema**



**Durham University
Dept. of Anthropology
Welcome Trust
Research Fellow
Dr. Tom Widger**

Currently Sri Lankan companies spend over Rs. 4 billion on CSR projects, however a study conducted by the Durham University of United Kingdom has observed that many of these project-based activities focus on certain marginalised schemes, resulting in short-term results while neglecting national priorities.

“Companies should be interdependent on the larger canvas which includes people and the environment; they are yet to understand that this canvas should be strong for commercial entities to be sustainable. Normal business is critical when it comes to CSR. It doesn’t matter how much you donate if a company’s core business is detrimental to society and the environment as a whole. Today there are many companies which are going in this direction and this is alarming,” CSR Sri Lanka Chairman Chandula Abeywickrema said.

He made these comments while addressing a gathering which included business personalities, Government officials and NGO officials at a policy dialogue to identify national priorities for the private sector responsibility and sustainability. The event was co-organised by CSR Sri Lanka and in collaboration with the University of Sussex and Durham University

of United Kingdom.

Furthermore, Abeywickrema also highlighted that every company should align its CSR strategy with its core business. “How do we conclude that the national priorities are in the context of corporate growth? There is no point of donating millions by the end of the year so you can show it in your annual reports if you have damaged the society at large,” he added.

Noting that local companies are short-term driven with their CSR activities, Durham University Department of Anthropology Welcome Trust Research Fellow Dr. Tom Widger said that this does not help recognise the fundamentals that are a focal point for policy dialogue.

“Studies show that Sri Lankan corporates give a lot of donations but it basically takes the form of very short-term oriented objectives. This is good for example to understand the symptoms of poverty but does not give a clear picture of the fundamental cause.”

Sri Lanka faces a number of development challenges including post-war reconciliation and reconstruction, equitable economic participation among women, youth and minority communities, uneven growth between the western province and the rest of the island, growing incidence of non-communicable diseases and the degradation of ecosystems to name a few. Over the past few decades, private companies in Sri Lanka have played a dual role in respect to these challenges, at times creating or perpetuating them, while at other times helping alleviate them, the study found.

The program observed that that if Sri Lanka is to move into a stable, prosperous and secure post-war era, then the responsibilities and priorities of the private sector need to be clearly defined.

The diverse group of stakeholders present at the policy dialogue voiced their opinions on some of the most concerning issues in Sri Lanka today. Many participants agreed that low female participation in the workforce, revamp of the whole educational system, Sri Lanka rapidly moving into the red zone as one of the unhealthiest countries in the world, environmental damage, extremism and politicisation are hampering growth. These factors should be addressed immediately by policy makers, they opined.

Results from the policy dialogue will be used to develop a strategic plan for creating shared value in the private sector by setting national priorities for responsibility and sustainability.

- See more at: <http://www.ft.lk/article/544390/Local-companies-have-to-make-CSR-count--Experts#sthash.UIHbwoYg.dpuf>