The world is changing faster than ever before. Globally, population growth and its impact are being felt in more and more ways. This change has profound implications for businesses and how they prioritize CSR as a response to society’s expectations. Bangladesh is no exception to this change. In an effort to foster CSR in Bangladesh, the CSR Centre, in partnership with the Embassy of the Republic of Korea, organized a seminar “Bangladesh—Korea CSR Seminar: Strengthening Partnership through CSR”. The main purpose of this seminar was to raise awareness about CSR and highlight the various CSR activities undertaken by different companies and organizations.

The seminar took place on December 6, 2012 where the Minister of Finance of the Government of Bangladesh, Mr. Abdul Mal A Muhit, graced the occasion as chief guest. Dr. Gowher Rizvi, Prime Minister’s Foreign Affairs Adviser; Mr. Kihak Sung, Chairman of the Board of Youngone Corporation, H.E. Mr. Lee Yun-young, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea, and; Mr. Ehsan Ul Fattah, Secretary General of BGMEA were present as special guests. Mr. Farooq Sobhan, Chairman of the CSR Centre Board of Trustees, chaired the event. The consensus among the speakers was that they do not look forward to do business in a “concrete jungle” but rather build businesses, which are in harmony with nature with sustainable impact upon biodiversity and ecosystems. These will lead to a greater, combined contribution in tackling climate change.

Manifesto for the Extreme Poor

The Bangladeshi economy has grown at nearly 6 percent per year over the past decade. Nonetheless, around 47 million people are still below the poverty line, and there are also many people who could fall back into poverty if they lose their jobs or are affected by natural disasters.

On November 30th, 2012, the CSR Centre team participated in the Extreme Poverty Day Fair at Bashundhara Convention Center organized by Dfid-Shereee and WaterAid Bangladesh. Around 70 organizations participated by setting-up stalls displaying various poverty reduction activities being carried out across the country. The CSR Centre hosted a stall showcasing its expertise through research reports which were well-received by the participants. The private sector representatives highlighted the best practices of CSR and inclusive business. There were approximately 30 NGOs present whose stalls showcased their extreme poverty eradication projects. Research institutions and think tanks that are working on poverty reduction displayed reports of their work.
National UNGC Conference 2012

Launched in July 2000, the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) is a leadership platform for the development, implementation and disclosure of responsible and sustainable corporate policies and practices. Endorsed by Chief Executives, it seeks to align business operations and strategies everywhere with ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. With more than 10,800 signatories in over 145 countries, the UN Global Compact is the world’s largest voluntary corporate sustainability initiative.

As the joint focal point of UNGC in Bangladesh CSR Centre and Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), in collaboration with UNDP Bangladesh, have been promoting the UNGC principles in Bangladesh over the last two years (2010-2012) through various outreach programs. On December 17, 2012, the consortium organized the “National UNGC Conference: Best Practices of UNGC Principles in Bangladesh.” The multi-stakeholder gathering highlighted best practices from women entrepreneurship, the RMG sector, financial and pharmaceutical sectors and gave an opportunity for knowledge dissemination to encourage new members to join the UNGC Bangladesh Network. A number of recommendations also came out of the Conference namely capacity building and resource sharing, strategy development for UNGC sustainability, and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

National Release of ‘Children’s Rights and Business Principles’

The “Children’s Rights and Business Principles” are a set of principles developed by UNICEF, the United Nations Global Compact and Save the Children. They are the first comprehensive set of principles to guide companies on the full range of actions that all businesses should take to respect and support the rights of children in four distinct clusters – workplace, marketplace, community and environment.

In order to introduce the Principles to the private sector of Bangladesh, a national workshop was organized on June 30, 2012 where leading members of the country’s private sector were invited. Highlighting the importance of upholding children’s rights, the Chief Guest, Mr. Latifur Rahman of Transcom Group remarked that from a business perspective there’s no competition between what is socially responsible and what is good for business. UNICEF Representative Dr. Pascal Villeneuve mentioned that children’s rights are an essential investment in our sustainable future. The group discussions that took place in the latter part of the workshop brought out some pertinent issues such as the importance of more awareness on children’s rights among the private sector actors as well as in the community.

Rio+20 Corporate Sustainability Forum:
Innovation & Collaboration for the Future We Want

Today, over one billion people in the world lack access to food, electricity or safe drinking water. Most of the world’s ecosystems are in decline. Climate change and global population growth are predicted to exacerbate these challenges. There has never been greater urgency to secure a better environmental, economic and social future for all. World leaders convened from June 15-19, 2012 at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development – known as Rio+20 – to build consensus on a more sustainable course for our world. With over 2,700 participants, the Forum presented an opportunity for all stakeholders to exchange views and experiences through workshops and thematic sessions directly linked to the Rio+20 agenda. These sessions included discussions on energy and climate, water and ecosystems, agriculture and food, social development, urbanization and cities, and economics and finance.

More than 100 thematic sessions tackled various sustainable development related topics, with a constant focus on innovative public-private partnerships, business contribution and new commitments. Ms. Shahamin S. Zaman, CEO of CSR Centre along with Dr. Atiur Rahman, Governor of Bangladesh Bank attended the summit. The CSR Centre, UNESCAP, UNGC Pakistan, UNGC Vietnam together organized a session at the conference.
CSR for Banks and Financial Institutions

The banking sector in Bangladesh is in a leading position to coordinate enterprising CSR projects in the country. In recent years, CSR practices by banks have become an integral example to other sectors as well as being a central part of the banks’ business strategies. In 2008, Bangladesh Bank (BB) formalized a clear directive for banks and financial institutions in Bangladesh to practice and report on CSR. However, a stronger guideline to share knowledge and recognize banks and other non-banking financial institutions are needed to promote good business and contribute to sustainable social development.

With this concern in mind, CSR Centre, in association with Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) and UNDP Bangladesh, organized a sensitizing seminar on “CSR for Banks & Financial Institutions” on April 19, 2012. As the keynote speaker during the event, Dr. Atiur Rahman, Governor of Bangladesh Bank, remarked that reporting of CSR initiatives by banks in their periodic returns to BB and in their public disclosures is steadily gaining comprehensiveness. He further explained that these reports have also touched upon environmental impact assessment in project financing decisions and gender issues in workforce composition and internal working environment.

Sensitizing the Youth and Young Entrepreneurs on CSR

The youth of this country has the power to enact positive change for the future. It is therefore essential to provide an opportunity for inspired and enthusiastic young people to debate and develop a pathway for creating a more sustainable and healthier future for Bangladesh. Starting at a young age encourages an individual to become a more responsible corporate citizen.

With the support from UNDP Bangladesh, CSR Centre organized two seminars on “Sensitizing the Youth and Young Entrepreneurs on Corporate Social Responsibility”. The first seminar was held on March 1, 2012, in collaboration with Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB), and support from the Junior Chamber International (JCI), Bangladesh Youth Leadership Centre (BYLC) and JAAGO Foundation. The Vice Chancellor of IUB, Mr. M. Omar Rahman, inaugurated the session with his opening remarks. Speakers included Korvi Rakshand of JAAGO and Ejaj Ahmad of BYLC. The country has seen an unprecedented increase in youth volunteerism activities in recent years. To keep the momentum going, the speakers addressed the need to generate interest in environmental initiatives, human and labour rights concerns, which are all different facets of good citizenship. Such activism can be brought about through updated college curricula to include more CSR relevant topics and intern-

UNGC LN Newsbyte

On October 1, 2012, UNGCLN Steering Committee for Bangladesh was formed, with eight members from the signatories. The objective of the Steering Committee is to create a sustainability platform of the UNGC initiatives in Bangladesh and to create a critical Forum to implement UNGC Principles.
In recent years, climate change has been a priority issue for the development sector in Bangladesh. Climate change impact is predicted to cause the sea level to rise, which then will lead to water scarcity and falling of crop yields and exacerbate hunger and poverty. Cities located in the coastal areas of Bangladesh will become highly vulnerable due to the sea level rise.

On March 15, 2012, the CSR Centre, in collaboration with VSO Bangladesh, organized the 4th CSR Platform Meeting on the topic of “Market Development and Climate Change: Nurturing for Sustainable Profits”. Bangladesh Climate Change Strategic Action Plan (BCCSAP) was developed in 2009, which identified the areas of intervention and developed some specific action plans to address the challenges of the negative impacts of climate change. Dr. Khondoker Mokadem Hossain, Director of Centre for Disaster and Vulnerability Studies (CDVS), mentioned in his presentation that the interests of private sector investors and workers have been ignored in addressing challenges of the negative impacts of climate change. The discussions emphasized the need for socially responsible business for the sustainable development of the country. In order to combat the challenges that lie ahead, companies should place greater interest on social responsibility, which goes beyond just social causes, and addresses issues of climate change, future sustainability, resource mobilization, community development and business sustainability.

In Bangladesh, there is a great disconnect between producers and retailers of agricultural goods. The farmers, who are the producers, oftentimes bear the laborious task of providing quality produce but are unable to reap the benefits. In order to address this critical issue of marginalized producers, CSR Centre and VSO Bangladesh organized the 5th CSR Platform Meeting on “Market Access and Role of Corporate: Agricultural Market” on June 5, 2012. Mr. Rajiv Pradhan, Country Director of iDE Bangladesh, Mr. Niaz Rahim, Group Director of Rahmaz frooz (Bangladesh) Ltd. and Mr. Syed Rezwanul Kabir, Managing Director of SME Foundation were present as panel speakers. The discussion revolved around the issue that the bulk of the financial benefit goes to the middlemen who transport the produce to end retailers. The farmers are at a disadvantage of loss of revenue if the middlemen do not accept their product. The discussions also touched upon finding viable solutions that would benefit the farmers by creating a “green bridge” to patch the disparity in the supply chain.

To address the rights of marginalized producers, CSR Centre and VSO Bangladesh organized the sixth CSR Platform Meeting on “Market Access and Role of Corporate: Non-Agricultural Sector” on September 27, 2012. Ms. Anette Galskjøt, Commercial Counsellor of the Royal Danish Embassy in Bangladesh, and Ms. Rubina Farooq of Bangladesh Federation of Women Entrepreneurs (BFWE) were present as panel speakers. Ms. Galskjøt talked about the success of Danida and the joint businesses ventures between Danish firms and Bangladeshi startups. Ms. Rubina Farouq talked about BFWE's engagements with women entrepreneurs. Specifically, she talked about awareness on advocacy initiatives to streamline policies and regulations to encourage women entrepreneurs.

Embedding CSR principles into the business strategy enables a company to progress with a sustainable long term vision”

-Sanchita Sapkota
Programme Officer
CSR Centre
Launch of SANSAR (South Asian Network on Sustainability and Responsibility)

The economies of South Asia have been radically reformed in recent years due to increased development in different sectors. At the same time, South Asian nations are faced with increasing internal pressures of growing populations and limited resources. Certain economies of Southeast and East Asia have outstripped those of South Asia in a short period of time. Given a rapidly changing political and economic climate in South Asia, there is an immense need to enhance sustainability initiatives in by participating in a forum to share fresh thinking, and to debate matters of national and regional concern to the countries of South Asia from their perspective.

Ms. Shahamin S. Zaman, CEO of the CSR Centre, attended a seminar in Bangaluru (India) in March of 2012 where the South Asian Network on Sustainability and Responsibility (SANSAR) was created. SANSAR was born out of the need to improve the sustainability of value chains, especially in the South Asian countries, where a common goal and agenda for CSR networking was identified among the founding members. The founding members include SDPI from Pakistan, Prakruthi from India, CSR Centre from Bangladesh and the Center for Afghan Civil Society Support from Afghanistan. SANSAR was officially launched on March 29, 2012 in Bangalore, India.

Challenges in Sustainability and CSR: The Sugar Industry in Bangladesh

Although the consumption of sugar varies between urban and rural populations, it still acts as a significant food item at a national level in Bangladesh. Domestic consumption is multiplying through the years, and therefore, the high importance of the sugar industry and its future sustainability is a concern for those stakeholders engaged within this industry.

The CSR Centre, in partnership with Prakruthi, an INGO based in India, conducted a study funded by Oxfam Novib titled “Challenges in Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility: the Sugar Industry in Bangladesh.” The study was completed in 2012 and was commissioned in order to identify the challenges facing the sugar industry in Bangladesh and the scope of CSR to strengthen it. The launching ceremony of the study was held on June 26, 2012. The CSR team visited 11 sugar mills to collect primary and secondary data to highlight challenges that the sector is facing such as upgrading machinery for greater production. The discussions brought to light the need for new initiatives that are required to meet the demand of the population. However, the government initiative of PPP and privatization has become unsuccessful. The PPP initiative faced resistance from the private sector and one of the two privatized mills has switched to refinery and the other one has had to shut down. Therefore, the government needs to invest more in order to increase production.

CSR Centre
Key Activities & Services

- Advise companies on CSR strategy development, partnerships and project management.
- Participate in forums to engage stakeholders to advocate responsible business.
- Promote UNGC and membership and retention and provide advisory services to members.
- Provide training and facilitate workshops on topics of CSR to build private sector capacity.
Sustainable development is an important topic all over the world, and more importantly, for developing nations. As Bangladesh strives forward towards attaining sustainable development with the targets set out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), CSR strategies and policy implementation are becoming more and more a part of the core business strategy. Development stakeholders and governments are prioritizing the role of private sector engagement in steering towards public-private partnership (PPP) for achieving sustainable growth.

In this regard, the CSR Centre celebrated the distinct recognition of producing the first report on sustainability practices in Bangladesh. This launch of the “Report on CSR in Bangladesh: Practicing Responsible Business for Mutual Benefits, 2012” took place on July 15, 2012. Mr. Farooq Sobhan, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of CSR Centre, chaired the event, which was attended by 50 participants from academia, media, corporate houses and development stakeholders. The panellists at the event were included H.E. Mr. William Hanna, Ambassador and Head of Delegation, European Union, H.E. Ms. Ragne Birte Lund, Ambassador, The Royal Norwegian Embassy of Dhaka, Mr. SK Sur Chowdhury, Deputy Governor, Bangladesh Bank, and Dr. Saleemul Huq, Senior Fellow, Climate Change Group, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

The report acts as an important asset of reference for different stakeholders and the Centre has recently made it available on its website.

The CSR Centre is an independent, non-profit Trust supported by the private sector and civil society trustees. It was established in September 5, 2007, with private sector start-up funding to raise CSR awareness. The CSR Centre’s goal is to promote sustainable development through responsible business practices. The Centre provides CSR services on a commercial basis. The primary objective of the Centre is to become the prime source of information, resources, and advisory services on CSR in Bangladesh, and the operational principal is to contribute to achieving the human development targets set in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Bangladesh through private sector led growth.

CSR Centre is the focal point for United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) in Bangladesh. The Centre comprises of the UNGC principles and is the principal promoter of UNGC in Bangladesh. The CSR Centre is also the founder member of SANSAR (South Asian Network in Sustainability and Responsibility), which is a regional network working collaboratively for long term development of economy at a national level.

For more information you can check out CSR Centre website: www.csrcentre-bd.org