Decent Work in the Context of Corporate Social Responsibility

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Abstract—Corporate Social Responsibility is the responsibility to support economic, environmental, cultural and social development for a sustainable world with all people from local to global community working together to improve the quality of life. It constitutes, in this respect, a strong argument in dissemination of decent work suitable for the mission of promoting job opportunities with minimum labor standards in the concept of ILO’s decent work. Decent work focuses on four main strategic goals: I) rights at work, II) employment, III) social protection and IV) social dialogue. The essence of decent work approach is to establish a balance between these different components, to create integrity and political and institutional options in order to overcome confrontational relationships and constraints. Decent work takes into account equal voice recognition of workers, employers and governments as parties while developing policies and programs for labor standards as part of the dialectic strategists in its own inner loop. As it was included in the agenda of United Nations (UN) as well as International Labour Organization (ILO), decent work can be operational at work through sharing the same approach with the same accuracy. In this study, it was discussed, in relation to corporate social responsibility, decent work concept which was included in the United Nations’ millennium development goals as one of the important strategies in the fight against global poverty and sustainable development on the agenda of the ILO in 1999, and it has been proposed as "a visionary model" for sustainable growth for businesses

Index Terms—corporate social responsibility, decent work, sustainable growth

I. INTRODUCTION

For more than twenty years, the globalization of the world’s economies, changes in political structures and improvements in technology have been offering new opportunities that can uplift the living conditions of many people. However, the fact that many people still live without social security and hope for their future, the emergence of new damaging conflicts, and the deterioration of environmental conditions and the inequality of opportunities worry people more than ever. Social aspects of globalization and the problems that have resulted from these in the quality of work life raised concerns for the business circle. While in the search for ways eliminate these worries, the introduction of new labour acts and social policies that overlap with the concept of “New Economy” have become rather important. This is due to the embraceable fact that the ability to adapt to the rapidly changing conditions of the global market is possible not only because of its competitiveness but also with the configuration of social and financial systems that can offer security and employment. In this regard, organizations such as the United Nations, World Bank, and ILO have started to present thesis’s that can generate solutions on this issue. One of the most remarkable of these solutions is the one proposed by ILO. From this proposal has developed the term “Decent Work”, which aims to transform the working conditions into more humanistic manner [1].

Governments, business environment and all shareholders of the non-governmental organizations should take different roles and responsibilities in order to contribute to the utilization of globalization by more people and countries. Leaders of all countries, main sectors and social institutions have to collaborate so that they can support human development and share advantages of globalization. The business world should give the priority to provide the sustainability of these benefits for all the firms and society.

II. WHAT IS CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY?

Over the past several decades, the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) idea of management concepts, ideologies and technologies, reflecting an overall corporate strategy, global expansion has become increasingly evident. For one thing, it is the government’s special agent of social change and was accepted as a problem solver. Now, companies with CSR programs in social projects are larger and take a more active role in [2]. Adding CSR into their individual components or stakeholders work against reason is very ethical behavior. However, the term "corporate social responsibility" is
associated with a wide range of concepts and definitions, but there is a general agreement on the terms [3].

Even though the concept of CSR has been developing since the 1950s, there is no one universally accepted definition. A much wider and widely accepted definition has been proposed by Carroll in 1979. He argued that “the social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time” [4]. Generally, voluntary CSR Involvement refers to the investment of companies in our social projects that help the community in which they advance to the operator [5].

Lately, CSR has become a key factor to the creation of corporate values and sustainable operations, as well as being a common value in the world. International Organizations established the relevant standards that have to be followed, including the UN Global Compact and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, corporations that have been instrumental in implementing CSR Strategies in their operational and organizational values for society to establish [6].

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) also defines CSR as “the continuing commitment by business to contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the community and society at large” [7]. In the WBCSD, there is no universal standard for CSR and that the initiatives of a society's culture, religion and government or regulatory framework have different meanings depending on the diagnosis [8]. In the European Commission, they define CSR as, “business operations and core strategy into the social, environmental, ethical, human rights and efforts to integrate consumer problems” [9]. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO), describes CSR as “a balanced approach for organizations to address economic, social and environmental issues in a way that aims to benefit people, communities and society”. According to the ISO, the definition of CSR also includes such issues as [10]:

- Human rights.
- Workplace and employee issues, including occupational health and safety.
- Unfair business practices.
- Organizational governance.
- Environmental aspects.
- Marketplace and consumer issues.
- Community involvement.
- Social development

The European Commission defined CSR as the responsibility of enterprises to have an impact on society [11]. This report is fully focused on its corporate social responsibility by fulfilling their goals with their business operations and stakeholders in close collaboration with the core strategy, human rights and consumer concerns. The social, environmental, ethical, integrated process should be noted that it is [12]:

- Maximizing the creation of a shared value for their owners and shareholders and other stakeholders for themselves and society at large
- The determination to prevent and mitigate possible adverse impacts

From an ILO perspective, the social responsibilities of business and their contribution to the decent work agenda is, and has always been, a central part of ILO efforts to promote economic and social progress. Today, CSR is one of the important ways in which businesses can say their principles and values are important, both in their own internal processes and operations and in their interaction with other actors. While enterprises are increasingly reflecting the principles that supporting international labour standards in their CSR policies is important, for the ILO it is also important to emphasize the voluntary nature of CSR [13].

CSR plays an important role in the ILO with regards to labour standards and social dialogue processes, which are at the heart of the “Decent Work” concept. The ILO’s commitment to CSR is guided by the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998) and the Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (1977). The ILO also participated in the development process of the United Nations Global Compact (2000). Subsequently, the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization (2004) highlighted CSR and the role that companies play. During the years 2006 and 2007, the ILO implemented an InFocus Initiative on CSR promoting the principles of the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration). This Initiative builds upon and complements the ILO’s role in setting, implementing and supervising labour standards, promoting social dialogue and assisting countries in implementing good policies in this regard [14].

Most definitions of CSR are often unclear, but in each case, the economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities that firms have towards their stakeholders are emphasized as a means of linking the market economy to sustainable development. There is also a general consensus that CSR also asks a business to voluntarily go beyond legal compliance. While the commerce and the social community were once viewed as antithetical, the two concepts are now being coupled together in what is referred to as “compassionate capitalism” or “the new humane face of capitalism,” which unites the demands of social issues with desires of profit maximization [15].

During the past decade, many global concerns have come to the fore, such as rapid growth in the consumption of natural resources, the global financial crisis, the exploitation of child labour, disaster, and so forth. As a result of all these developments, CSR has become an important strategy for sustaining a competitive advantage in products and services [16]. The responsibility to support CSR is important because it can support economic, environmental, cultural and social development for a sustainable world for all people from local to global societies, helping improve the quality of life. It constitutes, in this respect, a strong argument for the dissemination of decent work suitable for the mission of promoting job opportunities with minimum labor standards in the concept of ILO’s decent work.

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III. THE CONCEPT OF DECENT WORK AND ITS AIMS

The Concept of “Decent Work” has been introduced by ILO as a result of globalization and the troubles it brought with it. This theory aims at enhancing the working conditions of people due to the deterioration of labour environment and increase in irregular workload. The report presented by the General Director of ILO at the 87. International Labour Conference in 1999 focused on the following issues about labour: “The main goal of the ILO is to encourage the opportunities that will provide women and men with decent and productive labour under independent, equal, secure and humanistic conditions” [17]. This objective gives the definition of decent work as follows: “Decent work is the one that offer men and women opportunities to get a respectable and beneficial job in an environment where freedom, equality, security and humanity are valued” [18].

According to the ILO, what is required today is the design of social and financial systems that can offer employment and security without losing the ability to adapt to the rapidly changing conditions in the competitive arena of today’s global world [19]. Thus, while talking about the priorities of the ILO, Somavia, the General Director of the ILO, put the emphasis on the expansion of the chances that men and women can find decent and effective jobs which can offer freedom, equality, security and prestige [20]. This point of Somavi’s brought about the following 4 strategies in the agenda of ILO. First, Respect the basic principles and, rights in labour life, second, Employment, third, Social security, and fourth, Social Dialogue. These strategies can be explained as follows [21];

a) To generate standards, principles and rights in business life.

b) To create more alternatives so that women and men can work under humanistic conditions.

c) To increase the efficiency and scope of the social security and social protection programs.

d) To strengthen the social dialogue among the government, employers and employee.

The basic purpose of the decent work approach is to boost the options for employment around the world. Nonetheless, decent work not only aims “to create job opportunities” but also “to ensure the acceptability of these jobs”. Therefore, decent work should intend to practice employment which can be accepted by many people [22]. In this regard, decent work is a composite of a number of aspects related to employment such as income, working conditions, social security, workplace safety, basic labour rights and social dialogue. In this process, this phenomenon analyzes the interrelation among these aspects from a holistic approach [23].

In line with ILO’s definition of decent work as offering women and men opportunities to find humanistic and useful jobs which provide them with freedom, equality, security and reputation, decent work also is examined in six dimensions in a study which tries to answer the question of what aspects of labour decent work is related to. The details of these dimensions can be seen in the following lines [24].

First Dimension: “job opportunities”: The first dimension of decent work is related to job opportunities. It highlights the fact that decent work can only be mentioned in the presence of labour, thus job opportunities should be increased for anyone who wants to work. Decent work comprises any kind of financial activities regardless of how many self-employers, servants without payment, or those who work in formal or informal institutions with payment there are.

Second Dimension: “freedom in the workplace”: The freedom of labour refers to the idea that employment is the result of a man’s free will. This dimension aims to eliminate forced labour such as slavery and child labour, prevent discrimination and facilitate people to help them become members of labour unions.

Third Dimension: “Productive Work”: Productive work not only triggers sustainable development and prevents the sustainable competitiveness of business enterprises and countries but also offers workers and their families jobs that will provide them with reasonable income.

Fourth Dimension: “equality in the workplace”: Equality in the workplace refers to the idea that workers should have fair and equal treatment and opportunities in the workplace. This dimension aims at eliminating all kinds of discrimination in the employment process and also during work. It also aspires to a balance between working life and home life.

Fifth Dimension: “workplace safety”: This dimension aims to protect the health of workers and includes social security issues such as workers’ health, safety, job security, protection of right in the case of retirement and illnesses.

Sixth Dimension: “Humanity in the workplace”: The last dimension of decent work is related to respect human beings and involvement of workers in decision making processes. It also calls attention to the fact that workers should be freely represented so that they can express their worries and prevent their rights.

From the perspective of these dimensions, decent work refers to working under humanistic conditions, getting paid deservedly, opportunities for workplace safety, social security and labor unions, and elimination of forced labour and child labour as well as the negotiation of government, workers and employers about basic rights and principles.

With the developments that have emerged in recent years, decent work is regarded as part of the national strategies to reducing poverty and is an international goal of development. Therefore, the efficient application of decent work is currently on the onset of developmental policies, poverty reducing strategies and helpful programs in developing countries [25].

The most important necessity today is to keep a competitive edge in order to keep up with the rapid changes in the global market and to introduce social and financial systems that will offer basic safety and employment [26]. Thus, the decent work approach of the ILO is supported by international institutions and the public. The United Nations has accepted a way to
providing decent work as one of the fundamental rights of independency in the Human Development Report in 2000. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) called for a programme of action for work and life that is humane in October 2007. The European Non-Governmental Organizations Study Group has also attempted to enlarge the scope of social security in developing countries [27] while the International Chemistry, Energy, Mine and Worker Unions Federation (ICEM) organized the campaign of Decent Work in Europe in 2008 [28]. The Global Labour Agreement, which presents the policies that are oriented for decent work and proposed by the ILO, was accepted with the support of the workers, governments and workers’ representatives of all the member countries. This alliance was also supported in the 46th paragraph of the G20 Leaders Summit Final Declaration, which highlights the fact that the support of the G20 countries are decisive in helping develop this so that it is in line with the quality employment as underlined in Global Labour Agreement [29].

IV. WHO HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR DECENT WORK?

The concept of decent work aimed at by the ILO proposes an independent, fair, secure and humanly work with the collaboration of the government, employer and representatives of the employees. Decent work paradigm integrates all parties as stakeholders and implies that the contribution of all parties is necessary to meet the decent work deficits faced in the application of global governance systems. Decent work can only become functional with the common interest of social shareholders such as employers, unions and governments. Employees should embrace the belief that the strongest approach to survive global competitiveness is a corporate structure that complies with the indicators of decent work. They should also consider that universal competitiveness will strengthen as long as the quality, profit and prolificacy of production correspond to the indicators of decent work.

By force of the strategic dialectic present in its inner circle, decent work is based on the ideas that employers, employee and governments have the equal rights to speak and the ideas of the all social shareholders should be paid attention while policies and programs of working conditions are developed. Therefore, decent work is only possible with the mutual approach of employers, unions and governments all working together.

The government of a country cannot devolve all its responsibilities in key policy areas to business or the community. We can, though, have a reasonable expectation that business will take some responsibility for assisting in the operation of key policies - because of a broader social outlook, or at least a pragmatic response to the government’s agenda [30].

From the perspective of employers [31], it

✓ Requires, in the first instance, the creation of employment opportunities.
✓ Does not mean universal standards are applicable to all workers and jobs throughout the world. It is a relative concept, a moving target and a goal to be achieved within the capacity and development goals of each country. It does not mean every worker performing comparable work must receive the same quantum of wages and enjoy the same conditions of work everywhere.
✓ Does not mean the application of all international labour standards in all countries.
✓ Is conditional on a country having an adequate level of sustainable economic development and capacity, which are prerequisites to alleviating unsatisfactory social and economic conditions.

V. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY WITH THE AIM OF DECENT WORK FOR EVERYONE

The concept of Organizational social responsibility is important because firms as well as the supranational organizations such as UN, ILO, EU, OECD and WB should improve their knowledge and interests about the society in which they practice. Firms are responsible for carrying out the followings in order to offer decent work for everyone:

- Support and respect the protection of basic labour rights required at international level: Basic rights regarding labour constitutes the general frame, value and rules of the financial development [32] and refers to the social aspect of the globalization process. The basic aim of labour rights is to provide each worker with honorable, equal, independent, and fair jobs which offer social security and rights to participate and represent one in the management processes. Rooted in philosophy, theology and judiciary beliefs and based on a wide range of traditions, labour rights have an important place in human rights. Human rights are regarded as natural rights which have their juristic presence in national laws and international agreements; and which have their moral and ethical roots in humanistic thoughts [33].
- Efficiently identify the right of freedom of association and collective bargaining: Although faced with a number of uncertainties in the rapidly changing global market, the business world gives the employers and employees the opportunity to understand each other and find solutions to their problems by providing all the parties with a secure and an improved environment for dialogue to take place. Positive opportunities for communication give way to the use of energy and investment for the use of shareholders and the society. Studies on business management and others show that the dynamic strength resulted from the freedom of unions can boost the business world by increasing the productivity, income and profits of all parties. Assurance of representation proposed by “voice of
the employee” forms a basis for a sustainable development.

- Elimination of all types of forced or compulsory labour: A compulsory labour force detains the appropriate improvement of human resources and diminishes the cultural richness of the families. It has negative effects both on individuals, especially on children, and on the economy. Human capital caused by compulsory labour force and social balance disorder causes distrust in savings. As a result of the erection of ordinary labour or a cut in the high income rate of labour, compulsory labour causes loss in income. In fact, this loss also brings about the loss of food, accommodation and health.

- Abolishment of child labour: Efficient prevention of child labour in the business world. Child labour amplifies the number of unqualified employees and threatens the skills in the labour force. Children who are in forced labour that have not completed their primary education will be uneducated. Furthermore, they will never be able to have the skills necessary for finding a job and for the development of a modern economy. What is more, child labour may destroy the firms’ reputation.

- Fair treatment and equal opportunities: Discrimination in employment and labour not only restricts the potentials and skills of the employee but also alienates the employers from their environment. Objective approaches will help to employ the qualified people. However, subjective approaches may damage the reputation of the firms and affect their profit and investment rates negatively. Discrimination in the business world slows down financial growth. Lack of tolerance causes firms to miss the opportunity to develop abilities and deprives them of the infrastructure required for competitiveness at an international level.

- Secure and healthy workplace: One of the fundamental rights of the employee is to work in a secure and healthy work place. Labour is regarded as decent work only if it is carried out in a secure and healthy environment. Labour which has negative effects on human health is not regarded as decent work regardless of their financial outcomes. Working conditions which threaten the health and security of the employee are accepted as the indicators of lack of decent work.

- Provide opportunities for education: Protecting and improving human capital by offering them technical education is one of the key elements of a corporation. This indicator gives an idea about the investment of the firm on the education of its employee. Access to education supports the development in other social areas such as equal opportunities and contributes to both individual and corporate development.

Decent Work is made up of many components and is relative in terms of content. The challenge is to develop Decent Work policies that take account of national capacities, and result in the effective balance of economic and social development needs, achieved through a competitive national economy. The development and implementation of Decent Work programmes should be demand driven, and include the full involvement of the social partners who should have the requisite assistance extended to them [31].

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Decent work is an instrument for comprehensive social policies. It is accepted as a balanced and integrated program proposed by the ILO with the aim of offering full and productive employment for everyone at global, regional, national, sectoral and local levels. However, it does not aim to become the only way or model at the international level due to the financial, social and political differences among countries. Besides, decent work is a strategic approach based on the development of decent work policies in line with the resources, developmental level and financial and social structures of the countries and regions. In this regard, decent work seem to be possible with the responsibility of all shareholders in line with the economical, cultural and social features of each country within the scope of fundamental rights and principles depicted in international agreements.

Decent work objectives are also reflected in the Government’s strategy for the promotion of decent work, which covers foreign policy, developmental policy, and trade and industry policy. Although the main responsibility for regulating the working environment lies with the authorities of the countries concerned, the private sector has an independent responsibility for working conditions in its own activities. Companies’ obligations to respect and promote human rights include creating decent working conditions where fundamental labour standards are complied with and employees receive a living wage. Companies are expected to be familiar with both national legislation and international conventions relating to working conditions. The ILO core conventions are of central importance in this context. Companies should consider whether or not it is sufficient to comply with the legislation of the countries in which they are operating. At a minimum, they should ensure that workers’ rights and working conditions are in line with the standards set out in the ILO core conventions.

REFERENCES


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