

Corporate role in focus at CSR Qatar

Leveraging corporate social responsibility (CSR) to accelerate Qatar's socio-economic development, building a strong framework for effective sustainability reporting and enhancing labour standards and workplace safety were among the issues that dominated discussion on the first day of CSR Qatar 2014, which opened yesterday at the Marriott Marquis City Center Doha Hotel.

The second edition of the annual conference – taking place until tomorrow – brings together corporate and community leaders from Qatar and across the region to share ideas and experiences and discuss ways to enhance business contribution to sustainable development.

Officially supported by Qatar Chamber, the three-day conference is seen as a key platform in further developing the CSR environment in Qatar and in enabling decision-makers to explore how CSR can support Qatar National Vision 2030 and drive social progress and economic development.

The conference kicked off with an opening keynote address by Mohamed bin Ahmed bin Tawar, vice-president of Qatar Chamber. "As the role of the private sector in the country's economic activity continues to increase, businesses must take on greater responsibility in contributing to the common good and ensure that their actions and initiatives benefit society as a whole. I hope that this conference will be an important step in taking CSR in Qatar forward to the next level."

The day's sessions got off to an engaging start with a panel discussion on the topic "CSR – More Than Just Charity". Participants in the discussion included Essa al-Mannai, executive director of Reach Out to Asia (Qatar Foundation); Mohamed Hammoudi, general manager of Cisco; and Hasmig Khoury, head of corporate social responsibility at Bank Audi, Lebanon.

"We definitely see a shift from philanthropy to CSR, which is a good sign for the future of CSR in the region," said al-Mannai.

"At Bank Audi we had to reassess our CSR programmes in order to be more strategic and get stakeholders aligned," added Khoury.

"When we talk about CSR programmes being strategic, we need to understand the relevance of CSR and what is important to the country and community... it has to be sustainable and have a long-term vision," observed Hammoudi.

Rounding of the discussion, al-Mannai talked about the need to be a responsible citizen and said all sections of society have to develop - locals, expatriates and migrant labourers. He remarked on the impact of volunteer initiatives and said they are studying how such programmes can help bolster literacy initiatives among labourers so that they can also improve their lives.

Meanwhile, a spokesperson from Alfardan Group said: "Our participation in the event is a testimony to our unwavering support towards further instilling and nurturing a culture of social responsibility within the group, to reiterate the vision of HH the Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, embodied in Qatar National Vision 2030 for building a better and sustainable nation for future generations."

The second day of the conference will commence with a panel discussion on private and public partnerships.

The third and final day is dedicated to workshops.