

## **Companies Urged To Play A Much Bigger Social Role**

- The making of a good corporate citizen – the tripartite way -

New tripartite committee lays out plans to get companies to do more for workers, the community and the environment

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A NEW tripartite initiative has been launched to encourage companies to pay more attention to their workers, the community and the environment.

Made up of representatives from the Ministry of Manpower, NTUC, Singapore Business Federation and Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF), it will look into ways to promote a culture of corporate social responsibility among big and small companies alike.

It is co-chaired by Singapore Shell Employees' Union General Secretary Thomas Thomas and Banyan Tree Gallery executive director Claire Chiang.

For now, Ms Chiang told reporters at the launch of the national tripartite initiative on May 26, the panel will focus on pushing social responsibility higher up the national agenda.

“Past efforts have been patchy, but this initiative will give these efforts prominence and coherence,” she said.

For a start, the panel has lined up a series of initiatives and activities to boost corporate social responsibility. Besides setting up a forum for collaboration, support and sharing of information among key stakeholders, it will develop strategies to promote and showcase examples of model companies.

Different sector groups will also be formed so that companies in similar industries can exchange views on promoting social responsibility.

### **Model firms praised**

Leaving no doubt that it truly means business, the panel had several organisations such as the Singapore National Co-operative Federation, Shell and BP share their initiatives on social responsibilities with more than 500 representatives from the Government, employers and unions.

This was followed by a question-and-answer session with members of the tripartite panel.

SNEF vice-president Bob Tan, a member of the panel, said: “What we’re trying to do, really, is to excite the whole business community into thinking and trying to formalise some of the elements of corporate social responsibility into something which is much more cohesive than in the past.”

Ultimately, the aim is to get companies to go beyond revenue, profit and legal obligations, and have people realise that making money is no longer the primary focus of any company.

Some firms have already been singled out for playing their part in the community. They include Qian Hu Corporation, 3M, Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) and NTUC FairPrice.

Qian Hu and 3M recycle raw materials to protect the environment, while CAAS encourages its employees to get more involved in community service. As for FairPrice, it keeps its prices low to tide Singaporeans over difficult times.

So are other firms doing likewise? NTUC Assistant Secretary-General Halimah Yacob believes that there are many employers in Singapore who do practise good corporate citizenry, but do not put a title to it, nor specifically label it as corporate social responsibility.

“Our companies are not very good in saying ‘I’m implementing good corporate social responsibility practices and initiatives’. They don’t. They just do it, like the family-friendly practices,” she said.

For instance, the NTUC May Day Awards – which recognise companies for having good labour-management relations with their unions— demonstrate that there are indeed companies out there doing their part for workers and the community.

“There are some local companies that are good employers,” concluded Madam Halimah. “They are consultative and discuss with the unions, giving opportunities for their employees to grow. These are socially responsible employers.”

The benefits accrue to employers as well as employees and community. Observed Ms Chiang: “Practising corporate social responsibility is not a cost but an investment in the long-term sustainability of a business.”

Indeed, Minister of State for Defence Cedric Foo had noted in his keynote speech that many progressive companies have recognised that their success hinges on the welfare and stability of the communities they operate in.

“Such companies understand that caring for employees, for communities and for the environment is not only politically and ethically correct, but also makes good business sense,” he said.

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### ***What the panel wants to do***

- 1. Provide a forum for collaboration, support and sharing of information among key stakeholders*
  - 2. Develop effective strategies and approaches to promote corporate social responsibility*
  - 3. Highlight and showcase successful examples*
  - 4. Facilitate the implementation and follow-up of corporate social responsibility through sectoral networks or other appropriate groupings*
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## **Co-Operatives A Good Model**

WHAT'S an example of an organisation that fulfils its corporate social responsibility?

NTUC's co-operatives, replies Mr Thomas Thomas. Unlike many other businesses, their No. 1 priority revolves around a social mission and its accompanying objectives.

“Co-operatives have a social mission,” he observes. “If the social objective is not met, they are a failure.”

Yet, co-operatives are not so unlike other companies that they cannot succeed in their commercial activities. In fact, they have to do these well, so that they can make money to meet their social objectives.

“If they don't make money, if they are commercial failures, they would have failed in their social objectives. And yet, it is in their social objectives that they are marked whether they are a success or not,” says Mr Thomas.

“They are a good example of corporate social responsibility.”

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