VOLUNTARY AGENDA FOR RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS

Our Business.
Our Responsibility.
Our Sri Lanka.
The Voluntary Agenda for Responsible Business

Internal to Business

- Adhere to all the statutory regulations, governance procedures and pay taxes as a business operating under Sri Lankan law.
- Factor in and assess the socio-economic and environmental impact business operations have on society as a whole.
- Maintain & promote ethical and sustainable business practices based on values of honesty, integrity and eschewing all forms of corruption and non-compliance with standards, in dealing with all stakeholders; be it employees, government, suppliers, customers and the public.
- Promote social harmony and peace in the workplace, accept the freedom to associate, have fair systems & practices, promote equal opportunity, gender equality, racial and religious harmony and support initiatives to enhance the quality of life of all employees.

External to Business

- Engage in partnerships with government, civil society and all relevant actors to support initiatives of employers and business organizations that promote nation building, economic activity, peace, harmony and sustainability.
- Link with government, civil society and all relevant actors to support national development goals and objectives in alignment with the Millennium Development Goals in areas of poverty alleviation, public services, water & sanitation, health, gender equality, infrastructure, HIV-AIDS eradication, education, justice and governance.
- Support corporate volunteerism as a strategy to promote economic growth, human development and social cohesion.
- Support rebuilding of the nation and protection from man-made and natural disasters - assisting internally displaced people to resettle, supporting initiatives for economic and social productivity such as assisting ex-combatants to be trained for suitable employment, restoring their physical and mental health, helping the disabled and assimilating them to mainstream society.
- Adhere to the environmental protection regulations of Sri Lanka and promote the protection of ecosystems and nature in all business ventures and in procurement, production and meeting customer needs.
- Conserve energy and support the use to sustainable energy technologies in the interest of the environment and the economy.
- Promote human resources development for the nation through partnerships in education, skills development, mental and physical health.
- Support the development of creative arts and help preserve cultural traditions.
- Support the development of sports to build character, team spirit, fair play and international recognition.
- Support initiatives which focus on uniting Sri Lankans and enhancing a spirit of oneness.
About the Agenda

Sri Lanka espouses a tradition of compassion and generosity through its cultural ethos. Often these have been inspired by the spirit of Shramadana (volunteerism) or philanthropy, which is an integral part of Sri Lankan culture. But Sri Lanka also has a long way to go in real action resulting in a just, peaceful, economically strong and a sustainable nation.

Over the years, the poorer elements of society have relied on the government for assistance. With the advent of the free enterprise system, the private sector has also been called upon to shoulder part of the burden of development. Therefore, business faces the additional challenge to contribute towards alleviating poverty and provide opportunities for deprived segments of society to improve their quality of life.

In the current context, contributing to building a peaceful nation is also part of the business sector’s responsibility. This means first of all doing no harm - abstaining from behaviour that fuel or exacerbate tensions in society. It can also mean, when the opportunities arise, joining hands with civil society to promote unity and mend the social fabric of the communities that have been scarred by so many dramatic events in the recent history of the country.

There have been and continue to be many philanthropists among the business community. Business organizations have contributed on an ad-hoc basis when disaster struck or needs arose but been fragmented in its approach.

The Voluntary Agenda for Responsible Business is developed in this context, so the business sector has a set of voluntary principles to enable a multi-stakeholder action.

The Agenda will help define a role for business in an increasingly complex social context. As such, the agenda is a guide to help shape business strategy to promote a sustainable balance as a society that is developing and growing. Apart from operating profitably, a good business will be aware of its socio-economic and environmental impact in the way it conducts itself; engages with its workers, suppliers, investors and customers; and complies with governance requirements; in order to help shape a prosperous, peaceful and an environmentally friendly Sri Lanka.

This Agenda is a vehicle for business to address all issues of exclusion and deprivation in partnership with the government and civil society. These actions, as far as possible, should be aligned with national priorities, developmental policies, global strategies such as the Millennium Development Goals, Decent Work Programme and the Global Compact.

The Focus of the Agenda

Companies may use the Agenda as a guide to develop interventions in four ways to become a trusted social partner;

Core business activities – How business is run in keeping with accepted values, ethics and principals internally with employees and investors, and externally with suppliers and customers

Social investment – How business participates in development to alleviate poverty, to help people live in dignity with equitable access to services and to live in peace. This involves the community, the nation and the world

Policy dialogue – How business can influence government policy towards sustainable development, poverty alleviation, justice and peace

Co-ordination & Action – How businesses can co-operate and collaborate with civil society and government to respond to Sri Lanka’s sector-specific developmental challenges

The Agenda is developed in two sections, internal and external. As a responsible business, the internal interventions are critically important before an organization focuses externally, as this builds credibility. The external interventions are broad and all encompassing giving opportunities for business to focus on any specific area of interest and relevance.

The Agenda is based on a set of values, but these will be meaningless concepts unless business leaders transform them based on experience in the way we all live our everyday lives. As such, this process begins with individuals first.
A Way Forward

In order to transform this agenda into action, all stakeholders must feel the need for deep change in Sri Lanka. Yet, individually most business leaders may feel helpless in acting alone towards it. Collectively, however, there is potential for extraordinary power and action. The agenda has to be collectively promoted to ignite individual commitment and meaningful action that will bring alive the Voluntary Agenda for Responsible Business.