

Final Report

Workshop: “Awareness to Action: How to Implement CSR in SMEs”

Montevideo, Uruguay

29-30 July 2014

I. Workshop Overview

Objectives:

- Understand the opportunities that CSR can generate for SMEs, especially by improving competitiveness and providing access to new markets.
- Provide an overview of the current state of CSR, including CSR principles.
- Develop a tailored CSR action plan for each SME that can be implemented over a period of six months.

Key materials covered:

- Overview of CSR principles and advantages.
- How to develop and implement a CSR action plan for an SME; this includes: mapping stakeholders, diagnosis, benchmarking, strategic planning, implementation strategy, evaluation and communication.
- How to take initiative once an action plan is developed.

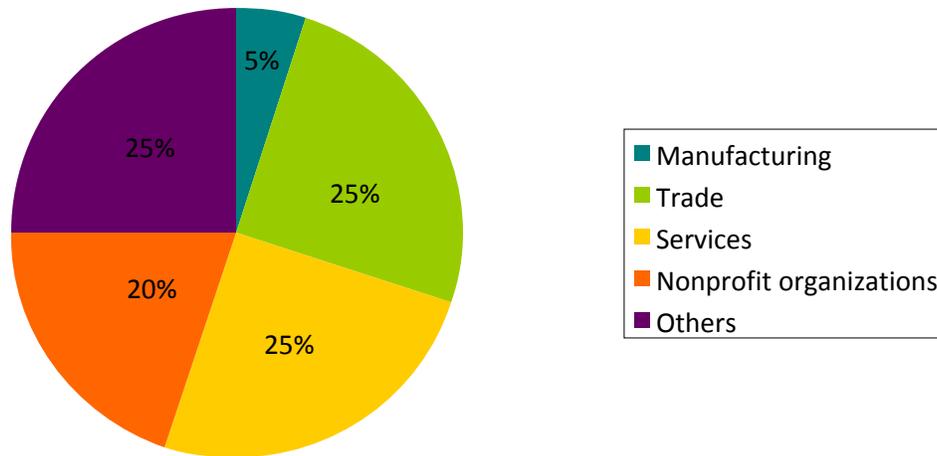
Workshop structure:

- Introduction: objectives, expectations, introducing participants.
- CSR awareness: current state of CSR, benefits and obstacles of implementing CSR in SMEs, CSR and becoming more competitive; interactive sessions: CSR in an SME, benefits of CSR.
- Overview of CSR principles: internal public, external public, suppliers, environment, responsible marketing and community relations; gender and human rights; interactive session: responsible practices in my SME.
- Implementing CSR in a SMEs business strategy: developing a mission, vision and values; mapping stakeholders; CSR diagnosis, incentives, opportunities and challenges; strategic analysis; creating an action plan; evaluation; communication; interactive sessions: mapping stakeholders, diagnosis and benchmarking; business case for key CSR principles; and presenting action plans.
- Follow up and conclusion: next steps for developing a tailored action plan, OAS role and support; diploma ceremony.

Workshop participants:

- 25 participants, from 14 distinct SMEs, representing a variety of sectors including: manufacturing, trade, services and nonprofit organizations. Of the 25 participants, 13 were women and 12 were men.

SMEs by Sector



II. Workshop Results

Emerging themes:

During the two day workshop, the Uruguayan SMEs demonstrated strong interest and commitment to learning about how to implement CSR in their business strategies. The participants rapidly integrated as a group and quickly engaged in dynamic and interesting discussions, despite their seemingly distinct business sectors.

The workshop generated an excellent exchange of CSR practices among the participants, which illustrated the creativity that SMEs exhibit in adapting to the sustainable economy of the future. For example, a plastic manufacturing company from Montevideo had developed a modular floor that was made entirely of bottle caps and sawdust, and a rainwater harvesting system to collect all of the water necessary for its production processes. Though the SME had already been implementing these advanced environmental practices, it was not aware that they were considered as such.

Most SMEs had pre-existing knowledge of CSR and some, as stated above, were already implementing isolated CSR practices. During a benchmarking exercise, the SMEs demonstrated relatively good practices in the following areas: public policies (69%), governance (66%), supplier practices (63%), and responsible marketing (62%); and weak practices in community (51%), internal audience (50%), and environment (35%). Following this exercise, the SMEs better understood their strengths and weaknesses.

Although the Uruguayan SMEs understood how CSR could improve their competitiveness and reputation in increasingly demanding markets, they did not have a clear idea of how CSR was linked to the business case and how it could add value to their products and/or services. In order to understand this concept, SMEs took part of a useful role playing exercise, in which participants had to present their business case to the group and received feedback from the others.

Results and participant feedback:

- The SMEs indicated that they were very satisfied with the methodology, stating that it was innovative, practical and easy to apply.
- Participants' knowledge of CSR increased by 23% over the course of the workshop, according to the survey that was administered prior to and following the workshop.
- The SMEs were not aware that in implementing CSR, they should include gender sensitive practices. According to the survey, this perception increased by 43% over the course of the workshop.
- At the end of the workshop, participants were very motivated to work on their CSR action plans. The SMEs indicated that the tools that they had acquired could provide them with a better long term vision and more socially responsible business plan.
- Participants valued the practical and interactive nature of the workshop because they felt they could learn from one another. They were pleased with the way the instructor handled the group interventions, since it helped to keep an atmosphere of seriousness and respect.
- Prior to the workshop, participants were more inclined to believe that CSR was for large corporations, not for SMEs; however, at the end of the workshop, they were firmly convinced that CSR could be implemented by SMEs.

Next steps:

The OAS will be following up with the Uruguayan SMEs over the next six months. The SMEs will have to submit the action plans that they developed during the workshop for OAS review and recommendations. Thereafter, the SMEs will select a few key aspects of the action plans that they will implement over the next six months, with support from the OAS. The training, as well as the six month follow up, should provide the SMEs with a solid idea of how to develop future CSR action plans.

The OAS CSR Program will also be holding a CSR workshop for SMEs in the following country:

1. Panama City, Panama (September 2014)
 - Status: confirmed.

III. Workshop Pictures

