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Businesses keen on green issues, but lag on graft and human rights – UN survey



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Businesses across the world are making tangible progress towards tackling environmental concerns related to their activities, but continue to lag on issues related to human rights and corruption, the United Nations initiative that seeks to foster socially responsible corporate practices said in a survey released today.

The findings of the latest implementation survey on corporate sustainability performance of the UN Global Compact completed anonymously by more than 1,200 companies forms the basis of 2010 the Compact's annual review launched at UN Headquarters today.

According to the survey, large and publicly traded companies are performing impressively on all of the Global Compact's issue – human rights, labour, environment and the fight against corruption – than small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs). This is attributable to the fact that larger corporations have greater financial and human resources to support extensive sustainability programmes, according to the survey.

The assessment also found that more than 70 per cent of the respondents indicated active involvement of chief executives in policy and strategy development. Nearly 60 per cent of all publicly traded companies reported active involvement of their boards of directors.

Companies across the board reported having anti-discrimination and equal opportunity policies in place – one of the few issues that transcended size or sector. Yet, less than 20 per cent of all respondents reported conducting human rights impact assessments and less than 30 per cent recorded instances of corruption, with dramatic differences between SMEs and larger companies, according to the survey.

Regarding supply chain implementation of sustainability principles, which are widely seen as critical to enhancing corporate responsibility, 65 per cent of companies reported some measure of supplier involvement, with 12 per cent requiring their suppliers to be Global Compact participants.

About 79 per cent of the responding companies said they spread their commitment to the Global Compact principles to their subsidiaries, with nearly half of those, 44 per cent, creating separate sustainability functions at the subsidiary level.

Increasingly, businesses recognized the role of the private sector in advancing UN development objectives, according to the survey.

Some 56 per cent of survey respondents are engaged in some form of public-private partnership at the global or local level. Reflecting a broader trend by business to build on the growing sustainability market, 42 per cent of all respondents said that they are developing products and services or designing business models that seek to contribute to UN priorities.

Launched in 2008, the Global Compact Implementation Survey is an annual, anonymous online survey of Global Compact participants worldwide to take stock of environmental and social performance and identify trends and developments related to corporate sustainability issues.

All of the more than 6,000 companies participating in the Global Compact were invited to take the 2010 survey conducted in November and December last year.

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