



THE ROLE OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF WOMEN VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. THE SENSIBLU FOUNDATION

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Abstract: *A serious phenomenon, undergoing constant expansion, which affects the human fundamental rights to life, safety, freedom, dignity, physical and psychic integrity is represented by domestic violence. This article is a brief incursion in the vast field of corporate social responsibility, in terms of good practices, analysing its potential to promote social inclusion for women victims of domestic violence, a vulnerable group in Romanian society. Social responsibility is implemented in practice by some non-governmental activities which undertake direct involvement in the issue of domestic violence, supporting women victims of domestic violence, this aspect being unknown to the wide public. The initiatives adopted in this case demonstrate the fact that social responsibility may constitute an example of good practices in Romanian society, an efficient tool in promoting the social inclusion of women victims of domestic violence.*

Keywords: *corporate social responsibility; social inclusion; vulnerable group; domestic violence.*

1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility has become an increasingly mentioned concept at an international, as well as European, level, in debates on globalization, competitiveness and sustainable development (Crane et al., 2008: 63). At present, corporate social responsibility is increasingly turning into an issue of public concern, because it puts into question the relation between the business environment and society, a highly sensitive spot in terms of the public's perception regarding the contribution that companies should make to the overall development of the modern society (Carroll, 1999: 292).

Corporate social responsibility consists of including a set of social practices and programs in the company's policies, and implies the development of some strategy for

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getting involved in the community as well as a partnership from which the company, too, draws benefits. The concept of community involvement relies on the idea that the business sector may reach its interests faster by supporting the community to develop itself. At the same time, getting involved in the community becomes absolutely necessary for an organization which aims not only at commercial success, but also at the respect of the society within which it conducts its activity: "corporate social responsibility is seriously considering the impact of the company's actions on society" (Carroll and Buchholtz, 1999: 28). In this context, responsible initiatives contribute to enhancing the trust and support of the community, the authorities, the business partners, the media and, implicitly, to building or improving the image of the organization.

At the same time, we should mention the fact that corporate social responsibility is not a miraculous remedy and the related practices are not sufficient to obtain the envisaged results. These practices cannot replace the actions of public policies, but they can support them in achieving some of their objectives, particularly those of obtaining a positive image of the organization, respecting human rights, protecting the environment, better use of natural resources, reducing pollution and, not least, increasing the integration of job markets and promoting social inclusion of vulnerable groups (Diaconescu and Voicu-Dorobanțu, 2012: 173-174). This is a challenge we shall further consider.

Based on these considerations, we shall attempt to identify the role of corporate social responsibility in promoting the social inclusion of women victims of domestic violence, as a vulnerable group in the Romanian society. Although social responsibility is assumed by some non-governmental organizations through social programs which support women victims of domestic violence, these aspects are not known to the wider public. In our opinion social responsibility may represent an example of good practices in promoting social inclusion, by adopting a set of initiatives which may support this process. To support our statement, we shall proceed to a brief overview of the concept of CSR and its strategic role in promoting the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, respectively women victims of domestic violence. Methodologically, we have selected a case study on the way in which social responsibility implemented practically at the level of the non-governmental organizations have been actively involved in supporting women victims of domestic violence. To this effect, we have analyzed the initiatives conducted in this respect and posted on the profile site <http://www.responsabilitatesociala.ro>, as well as some additional materials which may complete this process and enable the formulation of conclusive observations.

2. Literature review

An initial definition mentioned in the literature indicates that social responsibility represents "the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (Bowen, 1953: 6). Called the "Father of Corporate Social Responsibility", Bowen (1953: 44) argued that the "social consciousness" of managers refers to "the responsibility for the consequences of their actions in a sphere

somewhat wider than that covered by their profit-and-loss statements”. Davis (1960: 70-71) considers that some socially responsible business decisions can be justified by a long, complicated process of reasoning as having a good chance of bringing long-run economic gain to the firm, respectively “social responsibility of businessmen need to be commensurate with their social power”.

To provide an overview, Carroll proposes the pyramid of corporate social responsibility for the business environment, where the direction of achieving the responsibilities is from the base to the top: “For CSR to be accepted by the conscientious business person, it should be framed in such a way that the entire range of business responsibilities is embraced. Furthermore, these four categories or components of CSR might be depicted as a pyramid. To be sure, all of these kinds of responsibility have always existed to some extent, but it has only been in recent years that ethical and philanthropic functions have taken a significant place” (1991: 39-48). In this context, corporate social responsibility includes the full range of social obligations which a company has towards society: economic responsibilities, legal responsibilities, moral responsibilities and philanthropic responsibilities which the company should integrate in its business practice, both in its relationship with the employees and with the categories of partners. One of the most cited definitions is that proposed by Carroll which embellishes the conceptual model of CSR: “In my view, CSR involves the conduct of a business so that it is economically profitable, law abiding, ethical and socially supportive. To be socially responsible... means that profitability and obedience to the law are foremost conditions to discussing the firm’s ethics and the extent to which it supports the society in which it exists with contributions of money, time and talent. Thus, CSR is composed of four parts: economic, legal, ethical and voluntary or philanthropic” (Carroll, 1983: 604). CSR designates the company’s attitude towards society, according to which obtaining success is possible by respecting the law, assuming ethical conduct, giving special attention to the environment and taking into consideration the needs and interests of all partners (Oprea, 2005: 45-47).

According to the *European Union*, social responsibility is a concept through which a company willingly integrates its concerns regarding social and environmental issues in its business operations and interaction with its business partners. These principles are related to two dimensions of the relation between company and community, namely: an *internal dimension*, which foregrounds the relationship with the employees and implies the provision of a healthy work environment; and *external dimension*, which focuses upon the relation with the interest partners, developing the communities in which the companies conduct their activity (Oprea, 2011: 42-44).

Kotler and Lee (2005: 3) define this concept as a corporate engagement to augment the welfare of the community, by means of discretionary business practices and allotting corporate resources. The two authors argue that corporate social initiatives are major activities undertaken by a corporation to support social causes and accomplish its corporate social responsibility engagements. The reasons supporting the involvement of companies in socially responsible actions are of a: *moral* nature, as reflected by an ethical and responsible behaviour towards society; an *economic* nature, as revealed by increased notoriety and visibility on the market; and *rational* nature, demonstrating the fact that in today’s globalized world, CSR represents a way of anticipating and mirroring social

concerns with a view to reducing the operational and financial limitations upon a business (Werther and Chandler, 2006: 18).

As we can see, the majority of the viewpoints describe social responsibility as a concept by means of which companies should display their social and environmental concerns, through the activities conducted, contributing to the economic development of the community. In our view, social responsibility is a fundamental concept – similar to freedom or truth – which is being constantly (re)defined in order to meet various needs which are also in a continuous transformation, from one era to another (Petrovici, 2012: 40).

3. CSR and the social inclusion of vulnerable groups

In its modern form, corporate social responsibility is inspired by two principles. According to the principle of charity, the companies have the obligation to assist the vulnerable groups of society. The second principle demands that corporations protect the public interest, and respectively act for the interest of all the groups affected by their activity (Diaconu, 2009: 154).

At the European level, the year 2000 constitutes a reference point in the evolution of social policies by the elaboration of the Lisbon strategy, which establishes the action frame of the European Union, represented by transforming the community economy into the most competitive economy based on knowledge. The European Council (2005: 15) recommends that the member states of the European Union encourage investments and create an attractive frame for companies and workers, stimulating firms to develop social responsibility. On the occasion of re-launching the Lisbon strategy (2005), the European Council (2005: 26) stated that corporate social responsibility (CSR) “can play a key role in contributing to sustainable development while enhancing Europe’s innovative potential and competitiveness”. In this respect, each member state of the European Union should develop its own approach to social responsibility, which better corresponds to their circumstances and priorities.

The stimulation of corporate social responsibility is one of EC prerogatives. Within the Strategy Europe 2020, the European Council has issued specific recommendations (CSRs) for Romania, in order to improve its economic performance, respectively: to complete the financial assistance program, to ensure growth-friendly fiscal consolidation and implement the budgetary strategy for the year 2013, to pursue health sector reforms in order to increase its efficiency, quality and accessibility, to improve labour market participation, as well as employability and productivity of the labour force, to implement the education reform, to increase the professionalism of the public service through improved human resource management, and to improve and simplify the business environment and to promote competition and efficiency in network industries (EC, 2013: 6-7).

Encouraging the adoption of corporate social responsibility, as an example of good practices, reflects the need to defend shared values and enhance the meaning of solidarity and social cohesion by achieving a set of objectives which thus turn into reference points. Among these, promoting social inclusion is one of the European

priorities. In Romania, the terms social inclusion and social development has been adopted along with the program of implementing the National plan against poverty and for promoting social inclusion (NPAPPSinc, 2006), focused particularly on vulnerable groups: Roma people, persons with disabilities, young people above 18 who leave the state child care system, children with special educational needs, mono-parental families, persons who were convicted, drug addicted persons, homeless people, and victims of domestic violence.

The concept of “*vulnerable group*” relies on the universal human rights and designates the segments of population faced with discriminating attitudes and behaviors, which need assistance in order to avoid being exploited. The term vulnerable groups was introduced by supporters and promoters of human rights, in order to highlight the fact that human rights are still an ideal regarding their observance and legal strength, as well as to point to the social groups which are more exposed to suffer from discrimination or violation of human rights (Reichert, 2006: 78). Accordingly to Pavel (2011: 75), the characteristics of the participation of the vulnerable groups on the labour market are: higher risk of exclusion from the labor market depending on the age; dependence of the people with disabilities on the system of social assistance as illustrated by very low employment rates; the complex causality of Roma exclusion from the labour market; the higher poverty risk for the families with many children and, paradoxically, the higher poverty risk of the employed people.

It could be observed that under the conditions in which the European Union replaced the equal opportunity policy and the discrimination policy with the gender mainstreaming policy, the structural inequalities have been perpetuated (Rădoi, 2012: 15). In recent years, the number of cases of domestic violence has increased significantly, which is a serious phenomenon, undergoing constant expansion, violating the human rights to life, safety, freedom, dignity, physical and psychic integrity. The risk factors for the emergence and development of domestic violence on women may be analysed by interpreting the results of a research performed at national level (*Social Risks and Inequalities in Romania*, PCARSDR, 2009; *National Research on Domestic Violence and Violence in the Workplace*, Center Partnership for Equality, 2003; *Perception of Children in need of the Romanian public opinion*, MSI, 2000; *You should not be indifferent to domestic violence*, MWFSPAP, 2013) and also by updating and adjusting: the paradigm of women submission, based on an unconscious belief that women must suffer, the theories of social psychology, which discuss a new category of factors involved in building violent behavior, the information provided by the media (Mândrilă, 2009); the interaction patterns theory and the perspective upon the roles undertaken by the members of a family [domestic violence has been associated with the recent socioeconomic changes that affected the role dynamics in a couple or resulted in the couple’s incapacity to interact (Cojocaru, 2011); the social learning theory and the violence subculture theory which argue that some groups accept and promote values (or, rather, non-values) related to the use of violence, the distribution of violence among social classes (according to the violence subculture theory, the prevalence of violence is associated more with the lower classes) (Walker, 1979); the theory of social fields, according to which each “agent” should obey social distances in order to avoid the situations which generate vulnerability as it happens when, for example, the agent’s actions conflict with

the values of the field within which he acts (Bourdieu, 1979); the main line of feminist approach, although only the feminist approaches related traditional concepts to the risk factors involved in the occurrence of family violence (Roy, 1982); the idea that violence against women may be excused due to men's alleged superiority, especially in those societies in which women's status is generally regarded as inferior and subjected to men's status (Bunch, 1991).

According to Special Eurobarometer, a report at the international level entitled *Domestic Violence against Women* (September 2010), 78% of Europeans recognise that domestic violence is a common problem: „one respondent in four across the EU knows a women among friends or in the family circle who is a victim of domestic violence. Since the previous survey, the proportion of Europeans that say they know a victim of domestic violence in their circle of friends or family has increased from 19% to 25%”. A report of the Presidential Commission for the analysis of social and demographic risks (PCARSDR, 2009: 250) shows that the number of recorded cases of domestic violence in Romania, during 2004-2008, is 47.334, 677 of these resulting in the victim's death. A national survey, entitled *The National Research on Domestic Violence and Violence in the Workplace*, reveals the fact that „domestic violence is associated with a set of beliefs and values generating a tolerant environment in which this type of violence can grow” (CPE, 2003). The issue of the tolerant attitude towards domestic violence is aggravated by ignorance regarding individual rights provided by law. According to the report, 14,3% of the whole population of Romania, 17,8% of women respectively, have been victims of some type of domestic violence at a certain point in their lives. Only 55% of the persons subjected to domestic violence abuse, women and men alike, as well as the rest of the population, know about the existence of a law protecting victims of domestic violence and sanctioning the aggressor.

The surveys revealed a high percentage of domestic violence based on the traditional idea of man's superiority and hence legitimacy of using violence against women. Violence against women based on man's superiority has also been approached in the literature as part of the concept of patriarchal violence (Turluc, Tobolcea, 2008). A factor which determines an increase in the prevalence of domestic violence is the victim's acceptance (IMAS, 2000). Absence of social visibility of domestic violence, the blaming of the victim, and social tolerance towards the violent man are aspects which diminish the negative reaction to violence, also making it more difficult for the victim to undertake the actions needed to leave the abusing relation or to control violence. Social passivity to domestic violence can lead only to the perpetuation of violence patterns, along with a decrease in the rate of signaling such cases (Fedor, 2011: 159-176).

The synthesis of the research report regarding the campaign for raising the awareness of the public opinion concerning the prevention and control of domestic violence initiated by the Ministry of Work, Family, Social Protection and Aged Persons (MWFSPAP, 2013: 5-6) shows that the great majority of the investigated population displays an extremely negative attitude regarding this aspect, which they consider unacceptable and punishable by law. Nevertheless, only half of the persons included in the research group know of institutions or organizations supporting victims of domestic violence, the non-governmental organizations being mentioned generically

and only a small number of names of such organizations being effectively indicated. We shall further discuss this aspect of the problem.

4. CSR and domestic violence victims. A case study on the Sensiblu Foundation

Ever since the beginning of its activity, the Sensiblu Foundation has been involved in supporting women and children, victims of domestic violence, through the free services of social, psychological and legal counselling, as well as providing temporary shelter. The Sensiblu Foundation has a clear philosophy concerning social responsibility, the initiatives undertaken in this respect reflecting preoccupations towards the community in which they conduct their activity. The agenda of social involvement of the organization aims at supporting vulnerable persons, especially women victims of domestic violence.

On the site <http://www.responsabilitatesociala.ro>, in the section of human rights, there are presented a number of five applications conducted by the Sensiblu Foundation, a non-governmental organization working to prevent domestic violence. As shown in the official declaration, the “Sensiblu Foundation is a trustworthy partner for non-governmental organizations and for the authorities involved in cutting this phenomenon, because it provides a second chance to women and children who want to escape all types of abuse. We are a strong corporate foundation, in which people trust and where not only are they given help but they themselves are willing to give. With each campaign conducted by the foundation, we realize that it is about saving as many lives as possible, and not about dry statistics. Your help is priceless, and so are the lives of women who are supported through the BluHome Program in starting a normal, harmonious life, devoid of violence”.

Established in 2002, the Sensiblu Foundation was the first corporate foundation which assumed the responsibility of direct involvement in the issue of domestic violence. The same year, the Blu Home program was started, which aimed at increasing the population’s level of knowledge about the phenomenon of domestic violence, respectively diminishing the number of women and children victims of domestic violence. The program consisted of building a shelter and counselling centre where women and children affected by domestic violence received counselling and temporary shelter for a period ranging from one to six months. Simultaneously, the Sensiblu Foundation conducted intensive campaigns for informing and raising awareness in order to diminish the number of domestic violence victims and to obtain appropriate legal support. Thus, November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, constituted a reference point for conducting the Campaign V-Days: 2006 (Silent Witness), 2007 (Wall of Indifference), 2008 (Home is not a Prison), 2009 (This is no story.ro). The social cause is based on a painful reality for Romania, the statistics on domestic violence being increasingly worrying.

Each year, the campaigns conducted by Sensiblu had different approaches. For example, in 2006, the campaign was addressed to men who abuse their partners, trying to convey the message that *when you lose control, the other may lose her/his life*; in 2007, the

organizers addressed the witnesses of domestic violence, warning them that *indifference encourages domestic violence*, and the 2008 campaign addressed women who accept domestic violence, telling them that this acceptance may lead them to extreme gestures, such as killing their partner and then imprisonment. In 2009, the campaign focused on a certain consequence of domestic violence, that is, on children's psychological trauma. The Sensiblu Foundation started from the finding that mothers often decide not to leave their aggressive partner because of children, believing that this may negatively affect children. The campaign sought to show that such an approach is completely wrong and that a child is more traumatized if witnessing, or being subjected to, acts of violence (Petrovici, 2012: 113). In a 2010 press conference, Sensiblu launched the seventh edition of the campaign, "16 Days of Activism against Domestic Violence", under the slogan "Domestic violence distorts reality". In 2011, on the International Day of the Family, the Sensiblu Foundation reasserted its condemnation of domestic violence and, in partnership with Avon Cosmetics Romania, launched a program to support women in obtaining medical-legal certificates following domestic aggression. In 2012, during the 16 International Days of Fighting Violence Against Women, the Sensiblu Foundation, in partnership with the Committee for Gender Equality and Development of the Peace Corp Romania and the IREX Foundation, launched the campaign "Peace at home, peace in the world", which presented relevant information about the situation of women, victims of domestic violence, about the legal tools which they may use to protect themselves, as well as the services which may provide help in crisis situations. In 2013, the Sensiblu Foundation launched a bold campaign entitled "A Gift for the 8th of March: no slaps", meant to raise the public's awareness concerning the phenomenon of domestic violence and provide useful information to women in such situations.

The Sensiblu Foundation conducts annual campaigns of informing and raising awareness, meant to draw the public's attention to the seriousness of domestic violence. The results obtained show the fact that the conducted campaigns were an opportunity, for many of the abused women, to find out about the services provided by the Sensiblu Foundation, the number of calls received by the BluHome Counseling Centre being under constant growth. Therefore, since 2002, more than 3500 women and children, victims of domestic violence, have received counseling services, and a number of more than 120 persons have been given temporary shelter.

The BluHome program supports women and children who are victims of domestic violence, through the services of social, psychological and legal counseling, shelter, court representation, financial support, and assistance in finding a job. At the counseling centre, the specialists of the Sensiblu Foundation, social assistants, psychologists, jurists and lawyers, provide immediate support for the efficient management of crisis situations and, in the long term, assist the abused persons in acquiring the skills needed to be able to integrate themselves in the social environment. At the end of their stay in the shelter, the assisted person should be capable of leading a life independent from the aggressor's, and to build new skills in order to face other potentially violent situations.

The alarming growth of domestic violence cases has generated echoes at the level of the public institutions with attributions in the field of domestic violence prevention and

control. In 2013, the Ministry of Work, Family, Social Protection and Aged Persons launched a campaign to raise the public opinion's awareness and sensitivity towards the prevention and control of domestic violence, under the slogan "You should not be indifferent to domestic violence". The purpose of this campaign was to inform and raise the population's awareness about the gravity and consequences that domestic violence, in its various forms, may have upon its victims, as well as upon society as a whole.

Given the aspects presented, several observations should be made. Firstly, controlling domestic violence requires a long-term approach and combined efforts from all the parts interested. For example, parental educational programs may have a preventing character and may constitute instances of corporate social responsibility. On the one hand, informational campaigns on raising awareness towards parental educational programs, which are meant to address a larger audience, can lead to reducing tolerance towards violence. On the other hand, when included in the activity of specialized services and having the objective of identifying the persons at risk or identifying the violence risk factors, the results of reducing domestic violence may also become more tangible. Prevention of domestic violence should also be seriously supported by concrete public efforts to create laws and specialized services within the community (Wolfe, Jaffe, 1999).

In order to respond to the issue of domestic violence, standards of good practices should be implemented at the level of the organizations actively involved in diminishing this phenomenon, and responsible conduct should be stimulated at the level of the community, by raising awareness of the consequences and social costs of violence. Social responsibility should also be included in internal strategies and policies, in human resources management, in the professional development of employees, the good relation between the business environment and communities, in the needs of the vulnerable groups, so that the generated social impact may be a long-term one, encouraging the adoption of good practices. This means a transition from a minimal level, in which organizations do only what it is absolutely necessary, in compliance with the valid rules and regulations, to an average level, in which the organizations interact with the co-interested groups and, also, to a higher level, that of social reaction, in which the organizations are actively involved in the problems of the community and in communicating with the different social groups.

5. Conclusions

Social responsibility may contribute not only to building or improving the image of the organization, and enhancing trust and the support of the community, authorities or business partners, but also to increasing solidarity and social cohesion, by achieving a set of objectives, among which the promotion of social inclusion represents a reference points for European priorities. Implementing social programs and community involvement strategies, recruiting human resources from vulnerable groups, and developing partnerships from which all the factors involved may draw benefits may constitute examples of good practices. This implies, first of all, that a company assumes social responsibilities, acknowledges the interdependence between the business

environment and society, manages correctly the relations with the community and, not last, that managers are aware of the fact that public and business interests may be convergent and be subsumed to the same principle according to which doing good means making profit.

Carroll (1979: 497-505) argued that for managers or firms to engage in CSR they need to have a basic definition of CSR, an understanding of the issues for which social responsibility exists, and a specification of the philosophy of responsiveness to the issues. In the future, social responsibility should be a guide for business because, “the CSR firm should strive to make a profit, obey the law, be ethical, and be a good corporate citizen. The total corporate social responsibility of business entails the simultaneous achievement of the firm’s economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities” (Carroll, 1991: 39-48). For most companies, corporate social responsibility turns into a strategic objective which may be used as business practice, with a view to maximizing the results obtained. To this effect, companies should take into account two lines of action, respectively the relation between the company and its employees, and the relation between the company and its categories of audiences/stakeholders involved.

In our opinion, integrating these directions into the codes of conduct and reporting on the way in which these have been applied represent, for companies as well as the community, is the proof of responsible practice. In this case, social responsibility may constitute an example of good practices in the Romanian society, a responsible practice at the level of the community, and an efficient tool in promoting the social inclusion of vulnerable groups. We hope that our observations may constitute new directions of action for future research.

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Acronyms:

- CGEDPCR – Committee for Gender Equality and Development of the Peace Corp Romania
- CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility
- EU – European Commission
- EC – European Council
- EU – European Union
- MSI – The Marketing and Surveys Institute
- NPAPPSinc – National Plan against poverty and for promoting social inclusion
- CPE – Center for Partnership and Equality
- PCARSDR – Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Social and Demographic Risks
- MWFSPAP – Ministry of Work, Family, Social Protection and Aged Persons