Be more creative in being better corporate citizens, companies urged

BY ADELA MEGAN WILLY

Companies should place more emphasis on the welfare, and not just the wages, of foreign workers and improve efforts to uplift retired workers, both carriers rather than simply handing out monetary contributions to recipients, say judges of the corporate responsibility (CR) component of The Edge Billion Ringgit Club (BRC) Company of the Year award.

An example of this are efforts by the TA Foundation, which through the TA Family Living Skills Centre (TFLSC) not only sponsors materials to make school uniforms but also pays wages. “This is a pity because poor workers have taken care of them, regardless of race and religion.” According to TA Global Bhd’s annual report, all women who graduate from the basic sewing classes are hired by TMF, ST to work as school uniforms. Plans are underway for educational and motivational classes to be given to the women’s school-going children.

“I am moved by the efforts of companies to align their corporate philanthropy to their business. This is not just about giving corporate responsibility (CR) in all communities, regardless of creed and race,” specially emphasizes, says Philip Koh Teng Heng, senior partner at Mah-Koh-Mahal lookout (MKT). “He Ors Mang Hui Transit Corp Sdn Bhd (MRT Corp) centralised labour quarters for foreign workers, which can fit up to 3,500 beds – involved in the construction of the MRT Sungai Buloh–Seri Putra – (SSP) line in 2015.

"Efforts by companies to enrich the lives of their foreign workers may seem small but in a way, you are empowering them. It’s always good to have some sort of recognition for the dignity of these employees," Koh says. "I have been told of cases where a large group of these foreign workers are living in just one small dorm room, when it is bad enough that they are not even earning much. It’s a sad state that they are living in."

Efforts by United Plantations Bhd also won praise. "United Plantations impressed the judges this year with its social initiatives – the construction of a home with a trampoline for the Tokunaga family, the renovation of the renowned mansion by its founder and also the education of 120 children attended by the Killim Centre," says Koh. "They are doing a good job in reporting on it. We hope more companies will follow suit."

Dorothy Tan, former judge, says the judges also urged companies to be more creative in being better corporate citizens and good employers.

"An annual environmental initiative of plastic bottle recycling programme called "The Billion Ringgit Club," BRC which was last year collected 27,000 plastic bottles to turn it into recycled paper for use in their corporate publications," noted Dorothy Tan. She also liked Vito Corp Bhd’s way of encouraging volunteers by donating RM50 to NGOs for every hour contributed by staff volunteers.

"In terms of the environment, THB’s Kom-pung Kampung Firefly Conservation Project is a success case study. According to a judge, this is an "extreme initiative" that, if it were not there, would enable a greater percentage of the less fortunate community to be assisted."

"There is an etching line (that divides companies and those who can actually reach out to). If you see certain companies ... they are more focused on specific ethnicities," Koh notes. "While it is not wrong, it would be better if companies adopt a more multifaceted approach in their CR practices. That way, they are able to connect with different groups of the community," she says. The judges also called for greater gender diversity.

In recognition of the importance of CR, the component constitutes 30% of the score for The BRC Company of the Year award. The judges panel of judges this year are Dorothy Tan, Koh and Jeffrey. Koh's vice-president and head of corporate and commercial banking of OCBC Bank Malaysia Bhd. "Sustainability, in every sense of the word, must be recognised as the unifying thread that will guide the collective actions of the members of The Billion Ringgit Club. It is by modelling a sustainable mentality that socially responsible companies can contribute more to society and then entrenched in society. This gathering of the top businesses is an opportunity to set an example and set a new standard in corporate business culture and to have best practices cascade," says Jeffrey.