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# Cambodian companies aim for corporate social responsibility

Anne Renzenbrink | Publication date 25 September 2012 | 05:00 ICT

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Dr Beat Richner, of the Kantha Bopha Children's Hospital, accepts a donation from Manulife chief executive Robert Elliot. Photograph supplied

Four companies in Cambodia — EZECOM, Manulife Cambodia, Angkor Gold and Unilever — have demonstrated their commitment to corporate social responsibility this month by giving support to schools, a hospital and sustainable living.

CSR Asia, the leading provider of information, training, research and consultancy services on sustainable business practices in Asia, defines corporate social responsibility as “a company’s commitment to operating in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner while balancing the interests of diverse stakeholders”.

Communication services provider EZECOM agreed to a deal with the Cambodian Ministry of Education to provide free internet services and computer equipment to 50 schools around the country.

“This particular project will allow us to put our network of 9,000 kilometres of fibre-optic to use by providing educational opportunities to young people across the country,” EZECOM chief executive Paul Blanche-Horgan said.

Manulife Cambodia, a division of the Canada-based financial services group Manulife Financial, announced a donation to the Kantha Bopha Children’s Hospital, following Canadian mining company Angkor Gold’s pledge to give any profit it makes back to the Cambodian people.

Unilever, a supplier of consumer goods, said it had sat down with the Cambodian government in an effort to teach ordinary Khmers about environmentally friendly practices, with a focus on reducing water waste.

“Unilever has many different sustainable living goals, and reducing water waste is just one of them,” Unilever Indochina managing director Maks Mukundan said.

“Unilever thinks this is a good place to start, especially in view of the fact that drought has been mentioned regularly this year — even during the rainy season.”

According to KPMG Cambodia senior partner Craig McDonald, there is an increasing trend to CSR activities among international and local clients.

John Brinsden, country representative at Jardine Matheson and vice-chairman of IBC’s external affairs committee, said; “The perception that there is an increase in what we in the West call ‘CSR’ is, I think, largely based on the fact that it is now becoming more overt.”

Given the number of hospitals, schools and pagodas playing a key role in supporting the needy that had been sponsored by wealthy individuals and families, Cambodia had a long tradition of benefaction, Brinsden said.

“Generally speaking, however, it is not the local culture to publicise it but merely to obtain merit in the afterlife.”

“On the other hand, foreign organisations believe it should be more transparent. Not only is it good PR, but it sets standards by which they can be judged and, perhaps, to encourage others.”

NGO Forum executive director Chhith Sam Ath said companies were profit-making organisations and he did not see their need to invest their income in CSR unless it was required by the state.

“The country needs to have a legal framework to ensure companies need to pay for their externalities cost and be held accountable on environmental issues,” he said. “So it requires them to contribute for social responsibility.

“At this stage, it is difficult for me to see an increase in CSR in Cambodia.”

To contact the reporter on this story: Anne Renzenbrink at [anne.renzenbrink@phnompenhpost.com](mailto:anne.renzenbrink@phnompenhpost.com)

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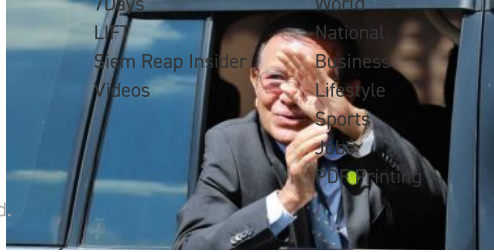
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