

**CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PRACTICES BY PUBLIC  
LIMITED CONSTRUCTION FIRMS IN MALAYSIA**

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CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PRACTICES BY PUBLIC LIMITED  
CONSTRUCTION FIRMS IN MALAYSIA

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*To my parents  
who have inspired me in many ways  
and who are always there for me through hard times...*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research examines the application of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the Malaysian construction industry with the primary aim of developing a project-level CSR Framework for construction companies. Following the 2006 Budget Speech, CSR disclosure has been made compulsory for Public Listed Companies (PLC) in Malaysia but to date, there has been no sector-specific framework or guidelines for CSR. Considering the nature of the construction industry which involves complex processes and activities and a varied range of stakeholders, having a framework or guideline which is specific for construction companies is imperative. Hence, through literature reviews, content analysis on 26 CSR reports by Malaysian construction PLCs and subsequent interviews with some of the companies involved, the researcher assesses the development of CSR in the Malaysian construction industry, reviews the CSR policies and activities of construction firms in Malaysia and proposes a CSR framework for construction companies at the project level. Findings suggest that although CSR disclosure is compulsory for construction PLCs, the extent of CSR application can vary significantly across the industry as companies' CSR agendas are not governed by any specific framework, standards or guidelines. The proposed framework could assist construction companies in developing their CSR policies and to fully embrace the concept of CSR to achieve the triple bottom-line: economic, environmental and social sustainability.

## ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini dijalankan bagi mengkaji aplikasi “Tanggungjawab Sosial Korporat” (CSR) dalam industri pembinaan di Malaysia dengan matlamat utama untuk mengemukakan rangka kerja (framework) CSR di peringkat projek untuk kontraktor pembinaan di Malaysia. Sejajar dengan Bajet 2006, laporan CSR telah diwajibkan bagi semua syarikat awam berhad (PLC) yang berdaftar dengan Bursa Malaysia. Akan tetapi, sehingga hari ini, rangka kerja CSR yang khusus untuk sektor pembinaan belum diwujudkan. Memandangkan struktur semulajadi sektor pembinaan yang melibatkan proses dan aktiviti yang kompleks serta kumpulan pihak berkepentingan yang luas dan pelbagai, memperkenalkan rangka kerja CSR yang khusus untuk sektor ini adalah sangat penting. Justeru, menerusi kajian literatur, analisis kandungan terhadap laporan tahunan CSR bagi 26 syarikat pembinaan awam berhad di Malaysia dan temu bual dengan beberapa syarikat tersebut, penyelidik mengkaji perkembangan CSR dalam industri pembinaan Malaysia, mengkaji polisi dan aktiviti CSR di kalangan kontraktor pembinaan di Malaysia, dan mencadangkan rangka kerja yang khusus untuk kontraktor pembinaan di Malaysia di peringkat projek. Kajian mendapati bahawa laporan CSR oleh kontraktor pembinaan di Malaysia adalah sangat berbeza antara satu sama lain disebabkan tiadanya panduan atau standard yang khusus untuk rujukan kontraktor. Oleh itu, rangka kerja yang dikemukakan dapat membantu kontraktor pembinaan di Malaysia mengembangkan polisi CSR mereka dan sekaligus merealisasikan matlamat “*triple bottom-line*” – mencapai kemampanan ekonomi, persekitaran dan sosial.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BBC	-	British Broadcasting Corporation
BHD	-	Berhad
BM	-	Bursa Malaysia
CIOB	-	Chartered Institute of Buildings
CSR	-	Corporate Social Responsibility
DTI	-	Department of Trade and Industry
EMS	-	Environmental Management System
ESG	-	Environmental, Social and Governance
GRI	-	Global Reporting Initiative
ILO	-	International Labor Organization
ISO	-	The International Organisation on Standardisation
KPI	-	Key Performance Indicators
LEED	-	US Energy and Environmental Design
MNC	-	Multi-National Company
MRCB	-	Malaysian Resources Corporation Berhad
OECD	-	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLC	-	Public Limited Company
PMBOK	-	Project Management Body of Knowledge
WCED	-	World Commission on Environment and Development
WRAP	-	UK Waste and Resources Action Programme

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background Information**

The concept of sustainable development has been receiving global attention and recognition since the Rio Earth Summit of 1992. Sustainable development, as defined by the Brundtland Commission (formerly known as the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED)), is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). While the definition of sustainable development is clear, achieving its goal in today’s era of unprecedented growth is almost impossible (GRI, 2011). Indeed, one of the most pressing dilemmas for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that positive improvements in the living standards of people around the globe are often counterbalanced by alarming evidence on the worsening condition of the environment and the ongoing problem of poverty and hunger on millions of people.

The demand for new and innovative choices as well as ways of thinking has always been one of the key challenges in achieving sustainable development. Improved knowledge and innovations in technology, management and public policy have placed a challenge on organisations, as key forces in society, to make innovative choices in the way their operations, services, products and activities

impact the environment, economy and society. The advent of globalisation, the ever-increasing environmental problems, shortage of resources and increasing demands and awareness from stakeholders have all lead to corporations being under immense pressure to operate and conduct business in a more sustainable, responsible and ethical manner. Consequently, the notion of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has started to gain considerable attention as a vital 'tool' to achieve sustainable development and is now being integrated into every aspect of business operation by corporations worldwide.

Barthorpe (2010) refers to CSR as a 'relatively recent, but rapidly expanding high-profile phenomenon', influencing organisations to take into account how their operations affect the environment and society at large. In the past decade, CSR activities and reporting have been gradually increasing across all industries throughout the world (Brown *et al.*, 2009). Besides offering organisations with the opportunity of addressing stakeholders' concerns, CSR activities and reporting act as a way to demonstrate that the business operates in a sustainable and ethically responsible manner. However, since most CSR activities are carried out voluntarily, with a variety of guidelines on the subject, the quality, uptake and effectiveness of its implementation as well as reporting could vary significantly within and between industries.

The construction industry is often regarded as one of the main contributors towards a nation's development by providing both the public and private with necessary infrastructures and physical structures for activities such as commerce, services, utilities and others (Mackley, 2001). The industry generates employment opportunities for unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled labour, and injects money into a nation's economy by creating foreign and local investment opportunities (Wibowo, 2009). However, in spite of these contributions, construction activities have been terribly affecting the environment and the society, causing public concern on sustainability issues within the construction industry (Siti Nurhuda Abd Wahid, 2010). According to Murray and Dainty (2009), the interest in CSR, both research-wise and industry-wise, has been growing and Brown (2012) suggests that increased understanding on the aspects of CSR can help in reducing the negative impacts of the industry and offers more benefits for future development.



Nonetheless, there has been very limited academic literature on CSR in the construction industry to date with Murray and Dainty (2009) noting that their book is the first text ever to examine the various aspects of CSR with specific reference to the construction sector. This provides an indication that although organisations within the construction industry are aware of CSR and its importance, very few researches have been conducted and much less has been published with relation to CSR in construction. Hence, this research seeks to expand upon the currently available and relatively limited information in the area of CSR within the construction industry, specifically focusing on CSR activities and reporting by construction firms in Malaysia.

## **1.2 Significance of Research**

In the past few years, there has been a growing level of awareness, globally, for the concept of sustainable development to be regarded as an utmost priority across all sectors (Myers, 2005) and this has already beginning to have an immense effect on the construction industry worldwide (Wadell, 2008). Stakeholders have been voicing their concern on the traditional nature of the construction industry which is regarded as both beneficial and destructive at the same time (Brown, 2012) and urged construction companies to adopt sustainable and collaborative approaches through the practice of CSR (Myers, 2005).

There has been a comprehensive academic literature on the extent to which CSR is being practiced by corporations in other sectors such as pharmaceuticals (Adams and Kuasirikun, 2000) but such is not the case for the construction industry (Murray and Dainty, 2009). There has been a limited number of academic literatures which relates CSR to the construction industry (for instance, Herridge (2003); Petrovic-Lazarevic (2008); Murray and Dainty (2009) and Barthorpe (2010)) with much fewer that review, analyse or compare construction companies' CSR activities (notable researches include that of Myers (2005) and Brown (2012)). According to

Brown (2012), this indicates that although the construction industry is not entirely ignorant of the concept of CSR, the limited literature suggests that it is lagging behind other industries such as finance, pharmaceuticals and food with regard to CSR.

With respect to the Malaysian construction industry, there has been no research, to date, which analyses and reviews the implementation of CSR by Malaysian construction companies by looking at the disclosure practice despite the fact that CSR reporting has been made compulsory for all Public Limited Companies (PLCs) in Malaysia (Bursa, 2008). The only study that was found which relates to CSR by construction companies in Malaysia was that of Athira (2012) which investigates the awareness on CSR, barriers to its implementation and strategies to overcome them. However, this research does not examine the CSR practice by construction firms in terms of the extent to which CSR is being implemented and reported upon by the companies. Other studies which have been carried out on the subject include that of Chan *et al.* (2009) and Nik *et al.* (2003), both of which are not specific for the construction industry.

The rising prominence of CSR within the industry which is due to the significant impact of construction activities upon many areas, coupled with the limited availability of academic literature on the subject provides sound justification for this research to be carried out. A review on the practice of CSR by Malaysian construction companies listed in the Bursa Malaysia will offer some baseline information with regard to CSR activities and reporting in the Malaysian construction industry which can be built upon and expanded via future research.

### **1.3 Aim and Objectives**

The primary aim of this research is to develop a project-level CSR framework for construction companies in Malaysia through a review of the companies' annual

CSR reports and current available guidelines on CSR. The aim described will be realised through achieving the succeeding objectives:

1. To review available literature on CSR across general business sectors to provide a background information on the subject, along with the current international standards in relation to reporting and implementation
2. To assess the development of CSR within the construction industry and specifically in relation to the Malaysian construction sector
3. To investigate and analyse the CSR activities and reporting practices of construction companies in Malaysia to identify trends in reporting and their possible drivers

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

Based on the review on the available literature as presented in Chapter 2 and the objectives stated in section 1.3, the following research questions have emerged which will help to further direct the study and ensure the overall aim of this research is achieved:

1. Why has CSR become a vital aspect in today's businesses?
2. Is CSR an important aspect of the work of construction companies, and why?
3. What areas of CSR are most commonly reported upon by companies within the industry, and why?
4. How do these topics vary within the construction industry and why might such variation occur?
5. How should construction companies address CSR at construction project level?

## **1.5 Thesis Structure**

In order to achieve the aim and objectives mentioned above, this research has incorporated information from previous literatures, employed a number of methodologies and presented the findings in the relevant chapters of this thesis. This section provides a brief summary of each of the chapter.

### **1.5.1 Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this chapter, the author presents a detailed review on the literature on CSR, providing an introduction on the subject, developing a definition and looking at the evolution of the concept across general sectors and the purpose of its implementation in general. The drivers for CSR implementation across general business are also presented and discussed. In addition, the reason for the rising prominence of CSR within the construction industry globally is also explained, focusing on the nature of the industry which is very complex and different than the other sectors and highlighting the current issues facing the construction industry worldwide. The chapter also elaborates on the possible drivers for CSR in the construction industry as well as the practice of CSR disclosure by construction companies in general. The researcher then reviewed available literature on CSR reporting in the Malaysian construction industry followed by a review on the current available guidelines and framework for CSR, both internationally and in Malaysia. At the end of the chapter, the writer develops an initial framework which would be the basis for the analysis of the reports and presents the research questions which were derived from the literature review. This chapter helps achieve objectives 1 and 2 as stated in section 1.3.

### **1.5.2 Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

Chapter 3 of this thesis elaborates on the data collection and the methods applied in conducting this research, which includes literature review, content analysis and personal interview, providing an introduction to these methods and justification for their selection. A list of the companies whose annual CSR reports are part of the primary data of this research and a brief background on the practitioners that were interviewed will also be presented. At the end of this chapter, the author discusses the limitations to the primary data collection and the methods used to carry out this research and justification as to why such limitations occur.

### **1.5.3 Chapter 4: CSR Reporting Trends in Malaysian Construction Industry**

In this chapter, the overall results of this study are presented and discussed. The author first presents the results of the content analysis of the sample reports which include determining the extent of CSR disclosure by the sample companies and the general reporting trend which appears to be emerging within the industry. The author then proceeds with the interview results which include information that are not available from the analysis of the reports such as drivers behind CSR practice, the companies' view of the importance of CSR in the future, importance of a sector-specific framework and their view on project-level CSR. This chapter achieves objective 3 as stated in Section 1.3 and answers research question 3 and 4 as listed in Section 1.4.

#### **1.5.4 Chapter 5: CSR Framework for Construction Companies in Malaysia**

In this chapter, the author proposes a project-level CSR framework for construction companies in Malaysia based on the findings from the reviews of the reports and the available guidelines and framework on CSR. The outcome of this chapter helps in answering research question 5 (refer Section 1.4), as well as achieving the final objective and the overall aim of this research (refer Section 1.3). A critical review on the proposed framework will also be included at the end of this chapter.

#### **1.5.5 Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations**

This chapter presents a discussion of the key themes derived throughout this study and provides an overall summary of the research findings with relation to the overall aim and objectives. It also elaborates on the limitations to this study and offers recommendations for future research relevant to this topic.

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