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Social Responsibility for the Environment of Seafood Enterprises in Vietnam

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Abstract

The issue of corporate social responsibility is increasingly linked to environmental protection in the business activities of companies. Corporate environmental responsibility is a dual-binding and self-aware element in the existence and development of businesses. The environment, with its delicate balance, is a prerequisite for business growth. For seafood businesses in Vietnam, social responsibility towards the environment needs to be emphasized more than ever. Recent statistics show that environmental pollution due to waste and wastewater from seafood businesses is on the rise.

This has a severe impact on the air, water sources, and the ecosystem we live in. Approaching social responsibility for the environment through four dimensions: pollution prevention, sustainable resource use, climate change mitigation and adaptation, environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, and natural habitat restoration, as well as based on a survey of 1,256 employees working in 35 seafood businesses in Vietnam, the research has indicated that the current social responsibility for the environment of seafood businesses requires more attention.

Keywords: Enterprises, Environment, Seafood, Social Responsibility, Vietnam

1. Introduction

Social responsibility of businesses has become a significant concern in recent years. Sustainable business operations not only involve providing products and services but also meeting customer needs while ensuring the preservation and improvement of the environment, all while being based on social responsibility. In the field of environmental responsibility, businesses have both a legal obligation and a voluntary commitment to prevent and minimize adverse environmental impacts in their operations. This responsibility helps businesses meet market demands related to natural resource conservation and environmental pollution reduction. In addition to complying with the law, businesses need to acknowledge their responsibility for the environmental impacts of their activities and take action to modify their operations to be more environmentally friendly. Seafood plays a crucial role in Vietnam's current economy. Government Decision No. 1445/QĐ-TTg^[1], signed by the Prime Minister on August 16, 2013, sets the direction for the basic industrialization of the seafood sector by 2020, modernization by 2030, and continued comprehensive, sustainable development. The goal is to make the seafood industry a major commodity producer with a rational structure and organization, high productivity, quality, efficiency, and strong competitiveness, firmly integrated into the international economy.

At present, the seafood sector faces various challenges, such as environmental pollution, overexploitation of aquatic resources, social welfare, and the rights and benefits of workers. Seafood processing companies have primarily focused on increasing their own value, without adequately balancing the interests of the community, environment, and society. Sustainable development criteria require each business to not only pursue profit but also to consider the welfare of the community, environment, and society, as well as fulfill their social responsibility towards the environment. Therefore, corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a vital factor for enhancing the competitiveness of Vietnam's seafood sector.

2. Theoretical Basis

The term "Corporate Social Responsibility" (CSR) first appeared in 1953 when Howard Rothmann Bowen published the book "Social Responsibilities of the Businessman." The book aimed to promote and urge asset managers not to harm the rights and interests of others and to encourage philanthropy to compensate for the damages caused by businesses to society. Over more than half a century, the concept and content of CSR have evolved into widely applied standards worldwide, including the international standard ISO 26000:2010, which provides guidance on CSR. The core content of ISO 26000:2010 includes organizational governance, human rights, labor practices, environment, fair operating practices, consumer issues, and community involvement and development.

As per the requirements of ISO 26000, the CSR content of businesses concerning the environment includes the following criteria: (1) pollution prevention, (2) sustainable resource use, (3) climate change mitigation and adaptation, (4) environmental protection, biodiversity, and natural habitat restoration. These criteria are reflected in the following analytical framework:

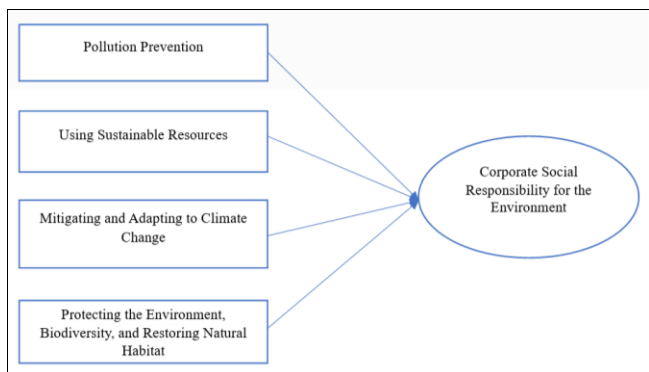


Fig 1: The Content of Corporate Social Responsibility for the Environment

Pollution Prevention

To improve pollution prevention from their activities, businesses need to: Identify the aspects and impacts of their decisions and operations on the surrounding environment; Identify sources of pollution and waste related to their operations; Implement measures to prevent pollution and waste, use waste management systems, and ensure appropriate pollution and waste management to avoid harm; Engage with the local community regarding actual and potential pollution emissions and waste, health-related risks, and mitigation measures; Disclose the quantity and type of significant hazardous materials used and released; Avoid the use of prohibited chemicals, such as ozone-depleting substances, persistent organic pollutants, hazardous pesticides, chemicals causing cancer, mutagenicity, reproductive toxicity, endocrine disruption, or long-lasting and harmful bioaccumulative chemicals.

Using Sustainable Resources

To sustain resources for the future, the scale and volume of current consumption and production need to change so that they operate within the Earth's capacity. Using resources sustainably means they are utilized at a rate less than or equal to the rate of replenishment for renewable resources, and for non-renewable resources (such as fossil fuels,

metals, minerals), long-term sustainability requires a usage rate lower than the rate at which the resources can be replaced. Organizations can move towards using sustainable resources by employing electricity, fuels, raw materials, post-consumer recycled content, land, and water more responsibly.

Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change

The emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs) from human activities, such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide, is one of the primary drivers of global climate change, which has significant impacts on the natural environment and humanity. Every organization has a responsibility for GHG emissions and will be affected by climate change in a certain way. To reduce the impacts of climate change related to their activities, businesses need to: Identify direct or indirect sources of GHG emissions and determine their scope of responsibility; Measure, profile, and report significant GHG emissions from the organization; Implement optimal measures to gradually reduce direct and indirect GHG emissions within the organization's control and encourage similar actions within the organization's sphere of influence; Implement energy-saving measures; Apply measures to respond to current or predicted impacts and contribute to enhancing the adaptive capacity of relevant stakeholders within their sphere of influence.

Protecting the Environment, Biodiversity, and Restoring Natural Habitat

Organizations can enhance their social responsibility by actively working to protect the environment and restore natural habitats, as well as other functions and services provided by ecosystems (such as food and drinking water, climate regulation, soil formation, and renewable opportunities). Key aspects of this issue include: Identifying and preserving biodiversity values; Recognizing, safeguarding, and restoring ecosystem services, practicing sustainable land use, and natural resource utilization; Developing urban and rural areas with a focus on a healthy environment.

3. Research Method and Scales

3.1 Scales

The author inherited and developed the measurement scale from previous research conducted by Carroll (1999) [2], Baird Gey Lani & Robert (2012) [3], Qinghua Zhu, Junjun Liu *et al.* (2015) [4], Korathotage Kamal Tilakasiri (2012) [5], Suhazeli Wan Ahamed *et al.* (2014) [6]. Specifically:

Table 1: Scale for Environmental Social Responsibility

Variable	Observation	Content
Pollution Prevention	PN1	We integrate environmental goals into our business plans.
	PN2	We regularly assess the impacts of our production and business processes on the surrounding environment.
	PN3	We implement pollution prevention measures and reduce environmental pollution.
	PN4	We frequently upgrade our technology to create more environmentally friendly products.
Using Sustainable Resources	SD1	We use non-renewable resources sparingly.
	SD2	We use sustainable, renewable resources with minimal environmental impact.
	SD3	We utilize recycled materials and maximize water reuse.
Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change	TN1	We measure and report greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions regularly.
	TN2	We have policies that encourage GHG reduction initiatives.
	TN3	We use energy-efficient products.
	TN4	We produce products using renewable energy or energy-efficient technologies.
Protecting the	BV1	We prioritize actions that avoid harm to ecosystems.

Environment, Biodiversity, and Restoring Natural Habitat	BV2	We have policies for ecosystem restoration.
	BV3	We are willing to invest in costs to restore ecosystems.
	BV4	We plant trees to prevent soil erosion and enhance the landscape.

The respondents indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements using a 5-point Likert scale (1. Strongly Disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. Neutral; 4. Agree; 5. Strongly Agree).

3.2 Research Method

To achieve the research objectives, the author employed a quantitative research method through a survey of 1,300 laborers working in 35 enterprises within the seafood industry in Hanoi, Vietnam. The results yielded 1,277 responses, including 12 invalid ones. Therefore, a total of 1,265 valid responses from 35 enterprises were used. The distribution of survey responses per enterprise is shown in Table 2.

4. Research Results

Based on the survey results from 1256 employees working

in 35 seafood enterprises, the current status of social responsibility for the environment is as follows:

4.1 Pollution Prevention

Enterprises are the building blocks of the economy and active members of society, so it is imperative to address the corporate social responsibility towards the environment and society.

This responsibility should not be limited to mere ethical obligations or image considerations but must be intrinsic and substantial. Each enterprise should enhance its awareness and actions in environmental pollution prevention. In this regard, 1256 employees have provided a relatively positive assessment of the company's environmental pollution prevention efforts. Table 3 illustrates this clearly.

Table 2: Survey Sample Structure

Human Resource Size	Number of Enterprises	Number of Responses	Percentage
Less than 100 employees	7	247	19.5
From 100 to less than 300 employees	10	375	29.6
From 300 to less than 500 employees	11	359	28.4
500 or more employees	7	284	22.5
Total	35	1265	100

Table 3: Current Status of Pollution Prevention by Seafood Enterprises

Code	Observation	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	St.D
PN1	We integrate environmental goals into our business plans.	1256	1.00	5.00	3.00	0.386
PN2	We regularly assess the impacts of our production and business processes on the surrounding environment.	1256	1.00	5.00	3.43	0.391
PN3	We implement pollution prevention measures and reduce environmental pollution.	1256	1.00	5.00	3.21	0.375
PN4	We frequently upgrade our technology to create more environmentally friendly products.	1256	1.00	5.00	3.10	0.35

Employees rated the level of pollution prevention by seafood enterprises relatively high. All observations have mean values greater than or equal to 3.0. The highest-rated statement was "We regularly assess the impacts of our production and business processes on the surrounding environment" with a score of 3.43. Following that is the statement "We implement pollution prevention measures and reduce environmental pollution" with a score of 3.21. The third among the four observations is "We frequently upgrade our technology to create more environmentally friendly products" with a score of 3.10. Lastly, the statement "We integrate environmental goals into our business plans" received a score of 3.00. This indicates that seafood enterprises have taken actions to prevent pollution and have suitable solutions for prevention. However, it can be seen that the average scores of PN1 and PN4 are not particularly high, even equal in the case of PN1. Therefore, alongside those enterprises proactively preventing environmental

pollution, many others are not concerned and do not consider pollution prevention as one of the strategic objectives of seafood enterprises.

4.2 Using Sustainable Resources

Natural resources come in various types but can be broadly categorized into two main groups: those that are renewable and those that are non-renewable, like mineral resources. Selecting the right potential, advantages, and the efficient, sustainable use of natural resources, primarily non-renewable natural resources, for development has become an urgent requirement in the modern world. Using sustainable resources contributes significantly to environmental protection. In essence, many seafood enterprises have taken and are taking positive actions to contribute to environmental protection through the use of sustainable resources. Specifically:

Table 4: Status of Using Sustainable Resource

Code	Observation	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	St.D
SD1	We use non-renewable resources sparingly.	1256	1.00	5.00	3.22	.636
SD2	We use sustainable, renewable resources with minimal environmental impact.	1256	1.00	5.00	3.15	.629
SD3	We utilize recycled materials and maximize water reuse.	1256	1.00	5.00	3.06	.634

According to the aforementioned observations, many enterprises have positive ideas and actions to conserve resources and use them efficiently. The observation "We use non-renewable resources sparingly" received a rating of 3.22. Next is "We use sustainable, renewable resources with minimal environmental impact" with a rating of 3.15. Lastly, the observation "We utilize recycled materials and maximize water reuse" had an average score of 3.06. Similar to the "Pollution Prevention" variable, the "Using Sustainable Resources" variable is also rated at a relatively average level.

The survey results show that many enterprises have understood the specific characteristics of their production and the main waste of their business: liquid waste in the production process is the main concern, and there is also solid waste (by-products from seafood processing). Therefore, businesses in this sector have gradually focused on environmental protection work. They have started to renew their technology and processes to minimize environmental pollution. This includes controlling waste, investing in waste treatment, budgeting for environmental protection, and using eco-friendly packaging and additives. However, for various reasons, there are still many seafood

enterprises that do not pay enough attention to using sustainable resources. Some businesses still use plastic bags, plastic boxes, and nylon bags during processing, and discharge wastewater directly into rivers and streams. This has led to the accumulation of difficult-to-manage waste, which has a serious impact on the environment.

4.3 Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change

Climate change has significant impacts on the production and business activities of enterprises, causing disruptions, reduced labor productivity and revenue, distribution bottlenecks, increased production costs, and more. For the seafood industry, climate change is having adverse effects on various economic sectors, including seafood. It directly affects and alters the ecological environmental factors for seafood species both in natural environments and within seafood ponds. Climate change is responsible for extreme weather conditions, which affect temperature, rainfall patterns, and sea-level rise. These changes have a major impact on seafood practices, resulting in decreased productivity and seafood yields. Furthermore, climate change also has serious consequences for the logistics of the fishing industry.

Table 5: Status of Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change of Seafood Enterprises

Code	Observation	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	St.D
TN1	We measure and report greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions regularly.	1256	1.00	5.00	2.98	.462
TN2	We have policies that encourage GHG reduction initiatives.	1256	1.00	5.00	3.35	.498
TN3	We use energy-efficient products.	1256	1.00	5.00	3.10	.416
TN4	We produce products using renewable energy or energy-efficient technologies.	1256	1.00	5.00	3.02	.445

The survey results on the climate change mitigation and adaptation status of seafood enterprises show that, among the four observations provided, the statement "We have policies that encourage GHG reduction initiatives" is rated the highest with an average score of 3.35. Following that is the statement "We use energy-efficient products." The third position is held by the statement "We produce products using renewable energy or energy-efficient technologies" with a score of 3.02. This also indicates that businesses are becoming more conscious of providing solutions for climate change mitigation and adaptation. However, the enterprises have not been proactively conducting research, analysis, calculations, and clear reporting on greenhouse gas emissions levels. Therefore, the statement "We measure and regularly report greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions levels" has a relatively lower average score of 2.98. This is an area

that seafood enterprises should pay more attention to in the near future.

4.4 Protecting the Environment, Biodiversity, and Restoring Natural Habitat

Environmental protection activities involve preserving a clean and healthy environment, preventing and limiting adverse impacts on the environment, responding to environmental incidents, addressing pollution and degradation, restoring and enhancing the environment, and improving its quality. It also includes the sustainable and responsible use of natural resources and the protection of biodiversity. The survey of 1,256 workers in seafood enterprises sheds light on the extent of environmental protection at both individual and enterprise levels.

Table 6: Status of Protecting the Environment, Biodiversity, and Restoring Natural Habitat

Code	Observation	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	St.D
BV1	We prioritize actions that avoid harm to ecosystems.	1256	1.00	5.00	3.27	.292
BV2	We have policies for ecosystem restoration.	1256	1.00	5.00	3.05	.289
BV3	We are willing to invest in costs to restore ecosystems.	1256	1.00	5.00	3.48	.341
BV4	We plant trees to prevent soil erosion and enhance the landscape.	1256	1.00	5.00	3.51	.374

The survey results indicate that all the observations have an average value greater than 3.0. This demonstrates that businesses are increasingly focusing more on environmental protection and ecosystem conservation. In particular, "We plant many trees to prevent soil erosion and enhance the landscape" has the highest average score of 3.51. This is an activity that many businesses are deeply concerned about. Annually, companies launch tree planting campaigns, not only for beautification but also for cooling the environment

and preventing soil erosion. Businesses are also prepared to allocate funds for ecosystem restoration with an average score of 3.48. The observation "We prioritize actions that avoid harm to ecosystems" has an average score of 3.27. Although it has the lowest score of 3.05 among the five observations, "We have policies for ecosystem restoration" still indicates that businesses are putting more effort into developing environmental protection policies.

However, some companies are not fully implementing the necessary environmental protection measures, failing to build comprehensive and standard systems for wastewater treatment, and insufficiently investing in the proper operation of treatment systems. The waste is not collected and treated thoroughly before it affects the environment. One of the major sources of pollution in seafood processing is wastewater. The investigation reveals that the proportion of seafood processing facilities with wastewater treatment systems remains very low compared to the requirements. Moreover, due to various reasons, the water quality after treatment from some systems still does not meet environmental standards. Therefore, environmental protection is not solely the responsibility of individuals or businesses. It is a collective effort that requires comprehensive awareness, consciousness, and actions from society as a whole.

5. Policy Implications

In reality, the situation of environmental law violations by seafood enterprises in our country has reached a "red alert" stage. Therefore, enhancing the social responsibility of seafood businesses for environmental protection in our country is an extremely important and necessary task. To achieve this, attention needs to be paid to the following key solutions:

First and foremost, raising awareness of the social responsibility of seafood enterprises, starting with the leadership and management of these businesses, regarding production and environmental protection. This is a vital task because having the correct attitude and understanding is the first step for them to take positive, proactive, and conscious actions in environmental protection. Thus, seafood enterprises must first have the right awareness to have the correct attitude and awareness in their environmental protection activities. For this reason, raising awareness of the social responsibility of seafood enterprises means making them understand their position and role in the relationship with nature. Only when people understand the value of the natural environment for human life will they refrain from harming the environment, thereby contradicting its natural development. It is the awakened consciousness of human beings that guides their actions in protecting the environment.

Secondly, it is essential to continuously improve, amend, and supplement regulations and sanctions related to environmental protection and rigorously address violations of environmental laws. Environmental protection laws play a crucial role in controlling the behavior of seafood enterprises in their relationship with the natural environment. Therefore, perfecting the legal framework on the environment and environmental protection is essential to raising the social responsibility of these enterprises in protecting the environment. Alongside the improvement of the legal framework, it is necessary to strengthen and enhance the organizational structure from central to local levels for environmental protection. Increasing environmental protection activities, upgrading the state management agencies responsible for environmental protection at the central level, and creating the necessary conditions in terms of organization, human resources, technical facilities are essential. This ensures that these

agencies can effectively carry out their responsibilities in environmental management and closely coordinate with the development of sustainable policies, as well as the rational use of various natural resources, especially forest resources, water resources, mineral resources, and aquatic resources.

Thirdly, it is important to harness the role of the public in detecting, reporting, and litigating against activities of enterprises that violate environmental protection laws. This is a significant and essential solution, as the violations of environmental laws by enterprises directly impact the lives of the local community, affecting their health and, in some cases, their lives. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance and harness the role of the public when they discover enterprises violating environmental regulations. They should report these violations to the competent authorities for timely action.

Finally, technical and technological solutions should also be prioritized. This is one of the primary and most effective solutions to reduce and eliminate the depletion of natural resources, environmental pollution. Implementing technical solutions means applying advanced scientific and technological achievements, clean technology production lines in manufacturing processes to minimize resource and energy consumption and reduce waste released into the environment. Environmental protection activities will not be effective if they do not keep pace with the economic and social development. Increasing research and development of environmental science and technology, training environmental experts and specialists, is a crucial solution to support the protection of the environment with higher efficiency.

Currently, in the realm of business operations, it is crucial to recognize that green and circular economies have become an irreversible trend, a necessity that all of us must adhere to. Enterprises that do not prepare for and embrace this trend may face obsolescence. Therefore, the implementation of a business's social responsibility for the environment must be resolute, comprehensive, and a focal point to ensure equity within the business community and responsibility for a green, clean, beautiful, and sustainable environment.

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