

CAMEROON SEAMEN UNION AND ASSIMILES

Douala, 20 July, 2000

The Chairman
International Commission on Shipping

Re: Submission by the SYNIMAC

The Social Role in Business Management (Social Audit)

Mr. President,

In our view, the social structure of businesses in Africa, in general, and in the Cameroon, in particular, play an important role in the efforts to be undertaken in order to straighten out businesses and make them more competitive - initially, within the African context and subsequently at global level. Having said that, the difference appears to reside very often within very few things: "The Human Resources Formed and Integrated in the Business."

"What distinguishes a successful business from an unsuccessful one are the people, their enthusiasm, their creativity. Everything else can be bought, learnt or copied."

This remark - made by a leader of a renowned business in California - underlines the importance that must be given in present times to the management of "human capital" within a business. The above observation denotes the evolution that the social function has experienced within businesses.

In fact, a business has generally two main functions:

- an economic function;
- a social function;

The majority of business leaders are only interested in the economic function, which contributes undoubtedly to the business's profitability, indeed to profit itself. They very often forget that, if taken into account, the management of the social function can likewise contribute to the increase in productivity and profit. In other words, the two big functions of a business have society's profitability as the ultimate objective: *"the social responsibility has to be taken into account to the same extent as the economic responsibility. It has to be assumed with means and methods in the same fashion as all other responsibilities of a business leader"*

It is an error from the part of business leaders to privilege the economic aspects to the detriment of the organization's social aspects. Both have the same weight, the same value. That emerges from the conclusion of BESSEYRE's (1990) work: *"the social policy has to be recognized as an element in the strategy of a business, in the same capacity as its marketing policy, its financial policy or its production policy, with which it has to maintain a relationship of co-ordination and not subordination."*

The negligence of the social aspect can have ill-fated consequences for a business's profitability, since *people* are at the beginning and at the end of the production process. That's within this perspective that the social audit, which is a diagnostics method, proves to be an indispensable tool in detecting the social problems of a business and in studying the impact the social factor has on the productivity of Cameroon's businesses.

In addition, within the actual context of globalization, the conduct of social audits proves to be indispensable for African businesses. These businesses need to be competitive both in terms of quality and quantity, which they would not be able to claim without a conclusive social audit.

Also, within the actual context, the issue of employment has to contend with it [the social audit] when businesses are restored, privatized, liquidated and/or disengaged from the Government. The importance of conducting social audits does not need to be proven since there is a co-relation between the business's social policy and its productivity.

The particularity of the social audit resides in the place it occupies within a business's strategy. Indeed, for a long time, the strategic reflection of businesses rested essentially on the "product" aspect in a competitive environment. Since several years, businesses have understood that they could not define their strategies without taking closely into account one of their resources that is *people*.

On this basis, a social audit has to answer the following fundamental questions:

- Which human resources can be mobilized and for which projects?
- Which are the social threats that weigh on the business and the dysfunctions that causes them?
- Are the decisions taken by the business's management in harmony with the business's socioeconomic objectives?

These questions make it possible to diagnose the social strengths and weaknesses of a business whose aim is to increase its productivity.

The object of our recommendations is assistance in:

- Conducting Social audits of Organizations;
- Carrying out studies of economic and social nature;
- Providing recruitment advice;
- Organizing the management of human resources;
- Providing and improving professional training;
- Assessing the social plans of businesses.
- The Ambassadors of each country must work in strict co-operation with the ITF and its affiliates.
- The creation of a "penalty book" on the non-compliance with the regulations governing the social audit.

In order to achieve our goal, which, in the final analysis, is to allow businesses in Cameroon to increase their productivity by means of a rational management of the human resources available, we benefit from a network of specialists in several specialties within the fields addressed above.

Hoping that our suggestions will get your attention, we look forward to hearing from you for a further discussion.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Ceheumassi
National President
Cameroon Seamen Union and Assimiles