

Chapter 11

Stakeholders’ Engagement in the Transition to Sustainable Supply Chains

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ABSTRACT

In the Tunisian context, the topic of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) starts to gain importance, previously in the post-revolution and currently during the “Covid-19” health crisis, due to social pressures which have become increasingly more demanding and threatening. It is in this context that this research is taking place, which seeks to analyze the stakeholders' engagement process and the actions implemented by companies as part of the transition to sustainable supply chains. The qualitative method was chosen to address this issue, by conducting research on the study of five cases from different sectors (chemical, service, agri-food industries, banking, textile). The results reveal that the impact of the crisis has been minimal, due to stakeholder engagement by diverse companies that are no longer limited to their own performance, but are becoming responsible to their stakeholders.

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INTRODUCTION

Faced with today's environmental, social, and economic challenges, companies are being urged to radically overhaul the structure and governance of their supply chains. Beyond a simple operational performance approach, the move towards sustainable supply chains requires a systemic transformation that integrates ethical, environmental and societal criteria. In this context, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives play a key role in helping to build an organizational culture based on collective engagement. In the Tunisian context, the topic of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) starts to gain importance, previously in the post-revolution and currently during the "Covid-19" health crisis, due to social pressures which have become increasingly more demanding and threatening. According to the African Development Bank Group (2012), the persistent political instability that has persisted since 2011 has obstructed the execution of essential economic reforms, restricting Tunisian companies' ability to adequately incorporate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) into their supply chain strategies. Also, companies are not only looking to make a profit where they operate, but also to contribute to the well-being of the society in which they operate (Wirba, 2024). As a result, companies are required to react to these new demands by following an adapted social approach that enables the engagement of stakeholders to ensure their sustainability. In this context, several authors have addressed the subject of CSR and the relationship between companies and stakeholders (Bowen, 1953; Freeman, 1984; Frederick, 1994; Carroll, 1999; Morsing and Schultz, 2006; Bowen et al., 2010). However, few studies have been carried out on this type of issue in the Tunisian context, especially in the context of crisis. One of the major levers of this influence lies in the redefinition of performance criteria. Traditional financial indicators are now being supplemented, or even supplanted, by ESG (environmental, social, and governance) indicators, demanded not only by responsible investors but also by civic-minded consumers. This development is profoundly changing the way supply chains are conceived: it's no longer just a question of producing efficiently but of producing fairly, traceably, and in an ecologically responsible way. A number of initiatives are emerging to overcome this asymmetry. Multi-stakeholder platforms aim to redistribute decision-making power, integrating all stakeholders right from the design stage. Understanding the influence of stakeholders on the sustainability of supply chains requires us to question not only their roles but also the power relationships that structure them.

Stakeholders play a normative and structuring role here by imposing new frames of references that become industry standards. Indeed, Huang et al., (2020) suggest that companies are threatened in the future by the impact of crises on the economy, causing supply chain dysfunction, reduced demand, or even a complete shutdown

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