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CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN TIMES OF CRISIS: BUSINESS ACTIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Between the years 2019 and 2020, humanity was affected by one of the most serious pandemics in recent history, caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The socioeconomic tragedy required the complete mobilization of governments, companies, and other organizations to contain and combat the disease. Shedding light on the role of companies, this article set out to analyze, through descriptive, qualitative and documentary research, the various manifestations of Corporate Social Responsibility in Brazilian companies during the pandemic, with the Agenda 2030 as a backdrop for Sustainable Development and related initiatives. It became evident that, while on the one hand, organizations are strongly invited to act in the containment of world events harmful to human life, by extension, socially responsible companies must bear the commitment to work together to mitigate the impacts of climate change and to eradicating hunger and poverty, equally urgent and necessary demands.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility; Management; Human Development; Sustainable Development; UN Global Compact.



1. INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of the 20th century, there was a significant internalization of responsible practices for business management. These actions, greatly supported by the environmental, social and economic pillars of sustainability, have expanded the performance of companies, inviting them to transform a production model merely focused on economic growth in a humanized administration and, at the same time, attentive to environmental issues.

Taking this context as a starting point, in the midst of global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which profoundly altered human relations between 2019 and 2020, it is understood that companies should assume a prominent role in initiatives that have a positive impact on people's lives, as a way of exercising Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and an expression of organizational sustainability. Companies linked to the Rede Brasil do Pacto Global, an initiative of the United Nations Organization aimed at fostering the confluence between companies and the achievement of sustainable development, as well as other private sector organizations, act in different ways to contain the disease.

Consequently, companies are called upon to also address issues that are equally urgent and harmful to life on Earth, such as hunger, inequality and climate change. Based on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, promulgated in 2015 by UNO member countries, including Brazil, this premise is even truer.

Thus, this article aimed to present the actions of Brazilian companies to face the challenges of the pandemic of COVID-19, with a view to Corporate Social Responsibility. Subsequently, horizons of action were drawn up for a deepening of CSR aimed at the challenges imposed on humanity in the coming decades.

2. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Firstly, we highlight the transformations that business management has undergone - and continues to do - from the beginning of the 20th century to today, guided by the emerging break with industrial logic, with the greed for profit and economic growth and marked by incorporation, to the organizational context, human concepts and, more recently, socio-environmental.

De Moraes et al. (2017) state that social responsibility in organizations has gradually changed, and can be divided into three phases: the first, from 1900 to 1960, marked by concern with personal ethics in the business environment; the second, between 1960 and 1980, when



companies began to be questioned by society about their activities and the obligations they should carry, going beyond the mere maximization of profits; and, finally, the third, from 1980, permeated by the global discussions about sustainable development, which improved the role of companies before the planet, in order to cover environmental and social issues, in addition to economic ones, which were already dealt with.

This metamorphosis improved the performance of companies, making them closer to the people and the realities that surround them. With that, it was possible to endow them responsibility with the planet and with human development.

One of the most widespread graphic representations of this relationship between companies and the external environment is the pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility, proposed by Carroll (1991). The figure is based on economic responsibilities, that is, efficiency and competitiveness; then there are legal responsibilities, which consist of obeying the laws; subsequently, ethical responsibilities, which refer to the obligation to do what is right, fair and honest; and, at the top, philanthropic responsibility, linked to improving the community's quality of life, spontaneously fostered by the company.

From this set of attributions, it is possible to ratify that, currently, not relating sustainability to the organizational context and to the business operation has become something inconceivable. It should be noted that not considering sustainability in business operations can create problems regarding the continuity of the company's activities and its performance in the market, although this point is not the main one.

This set of ideas definitively broke with the “traditional posture” of business administration, in which the only function of corporations would be to generate profits and dividends for their shareholders, admitting that social responsibility oriented to human and ecological demands “would constitute the greatest irresponsibility in terms business” (Guimarães, 1984, p. 215).

In view of this context, organizations started to allocate resources and manpower to issues related to sustainable development, understood as the macro objective achieved through sustainable practices (Elkington, 2012). This took place through the creation of specific departments, such as those of Corporate Social Responsibility, which represents “the company's commitment to minimize or eliminate any harmful effects and maximize its long-term beneficial impact” (Mohr et al., 2001, p 47), or spreading this set of ideas in sectors such as Human Resources, Research and Development, Production and Strategy, for example.



It is known that, as they are inserted in a certain reality, organizations have a social function to fulfill, acting in order to “reduce the negative impacts on the environment and communities, preserving environmental and cultural resources, respecting diversity and reducing social inequality” (Federal Board of Directors, 2014, s. p.).

Based on this, Savitz and Weber (2007) assertively argue that the sustainable company is the one that, in addition to generating profit for shareholders, protects the environment and improves the lives of people with whom it has interactions.

Complementing this statement, Sousa Filho et al. (2010, p. 307) highlight that there are a number of variables that influence this behavior of companies, such as “the organizational values, the relationship with stakeholders, the external environment and the competitive context, internal resources, the ideologies of top management and community expectations ”.

In fact, the benefits for organizations that invest in social or environmental responsibility strategies are striking. On this, Melo, Yaryd, Souza and Campos-Silva (2017, p. 129) reveal that “CSR has been incorporated into the business reality not only in a reactive way to the laws, but as a source of business competitiveness”.

In addition, high levels of attachment to a particular brand make consumers more sensitive and less critical of their activities, including social responsibility practices (PARK et al., 2010). In this sense, brands can obtain better results by directing efforts to sponsor CSR actions to consumer segments that are attached to it and, at the same time, have a predilection for the themes addressed in the campaigns (Kamiya et al., 2018).

As for corporate reputation, transparency in socially responsible actions emerges as an important tool to smooth the path of good relationships between a company and its stakeholders (Baraibar-Diez & Sotorrio, 2018).

The relationships between companies and their respective employees are also impacted by socially responsible practices. Azim (2016, p. 57) argues that "employees are not only concerned with their payment, they also seek meaning in their work". From this perspective, it concludes that the engagement in responsible activities promoted by the organization offers such a bond for employees, since there is a positive relationship between CSR and the employee's organizational commitment, their dedication and the organizational citizenship behavior related to the company (Azim, 2016).

Then comes the criticism pertinent to the so-called greenwashing, that is, to companies that “paint green” their products and their institutional image so that they appear sustainable.



Also, it is necessary to take a critical look at organizational sustainability, since some companies, despite having extensive knowledge of the principles of sustainability and areas related to social responsibility, allow other interests to prevail, as in the case of mining companies that risk themselves in construction of dams in places that present a risk of catastrophe, but opt for the most economically viable option, or of tobacco companies, known to be harmful to human health (Castro, Campos & Trevisan, 2018).

Even so, it is well known that many organizations effectively invest in a sustainable and socially responsible culture, driven by a real commitment to social and environmental guidelines, going beyond the simple marketing, purely superficial (Abramovay, 2012). In other words, there are companies that “are responsible because they believe that they should be responsible, not because others demand that they be” (Baraibar-Diez & Sotorrio, 2018, p. 15). In the face of emergencies such as climate change and deep and growing inequalities across the planet, since “the concentration of income and wealth on the planet has reached absolutely obscene levels” (Dowbor, 2017, p. 29), the role of companies in together with other actors is imperatively even more essential.

In the worst case scenario, socially responsible practices can act as “brakes” for organizations to have positive impacts on society. “Citizen-consumers” oblige companies to rethink their activities in the community. Even though governments are absolutely necessary to solve most social problems and also to promote educational, public health and environmental policies, it is impossible to detach people's political and consumption preferences. Therefore, it is understood that a citizen who does not take global warming into consideration will not prioritize the purchase of an electric car, for example (Kramer, 2007). For this reason, the private sector can act in the construction of new paradigms, even if driven by new laws or exogenous pressures.

In view of the above, the apparent contradiction between sustainability and the corporate world soon gives way to an evident need for both to walk together towards the construction of an egalitarian and, consequently, developed society, as well as to the generation of opportunities, freedoms (Sen, 2010) and prosperity, “in the context of a decentralized economy in which the markets play a decisive role, although, of course, not exclusive” (Abramovay, 2012, p. 22), because the preponderance of public policies naturally belongs to the State and social actions also fall to third sector institutions or social businesses.



As described by De Moraes et al. (2017), the third phase of the evolution of business administration towards social responsibility is concomitant to the consolidation of sustainable development, conceptualized in 1987, in the Report “Our Common Future”, as “one that meets the needs of the present without compromising the possibility for future generations to meet their own needs”(World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43), initiating a series of other documents, discussions and worldwide meetings to debate the subject.

One of these meetings involved 191 countries and resulted in a document called the Millennium Declaration, drawn up in the year 2000. In it, eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were defined and the deadline was set for reaching them by 2015. However, from the rapid transformations that society underwent at the beginning of the 21st Century, following the mandate emanating from the Rio + 20 Conference in 2012, in 2013, a series of negotiations began to debate a new way to promote sustainable development, involving governments, business and civil society.

In view of this scenario, negotiations were concluded in August 2015, culminating in the adoption, in September, of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as Global Goals, on the occasion of the United Nations Summit for Sustainable Development, which brought together all UN member countries at its headquarters in New York. The SDGs should guide national policies and international cooperation activities in the following fifteen years (2015 to 2030, therefore, shaping the so-called Agenda 2030), succeeding and updating the Millennium Development Goals, which comprised Agenda 21.

In Figure 1, the SDG icons are shown.



Figure 1: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) chart of official icons
 Source: United Nations (2015)

In 2020, the world entered the so-called “Decade of Action”, in order to intensify actions based on the Sustainable Development Goals. For each of the 17 SDGs, there are a series of goals to guide actions to be taken by governments, private organizations and civil society, 169 in all. Through these guidelines, it is possible to guide policies that work, together, the environmental, social and economic dimensions.

In these goals, the term “company” is cited numerous times, highlighting the need for partnerships that involve different actors that share the same purposes, something that is very encouraged by the document. Consequently, in many companies, social responsibility actions started to be guided by the Sustainable Development Goals.

Addressing the context of the pandemic, from the point of view of public health, Freitas, Napimoga and Donalsio (2020, p. 4) consider COVID-19 to be a highly dangerous disease, both in terms of transmissibility and in terms of its clinical severity. For this reason, they warn that, due to the lack of strategic plans ready to be applied to a coronavirus pandemic, it is essential that the “scientific community and national and international epidemiological surveillance teams be very careful when monitoring the trends of the epidemic, critically analyzing the instruments available to understand the situation”.

The severe human tragedy, with thousands of lives lost, added to the global destabilization of the economy, required governments, civil society and, also, the private sector, a total focus on combating the new coronavirus. For the latter group, this performance could be seen as an extension of the CSR practices already carried out.

In the case of Brazilian companies, the construction of collective alternatives to combat the coronavirus outbreak (SARS-CoV-2), which causes COVID-19, is discussed below, taking as a backdrop initiatives by the United Nations Organization (UNO), such as Agenda 2030 and the corporate sustainability initiative Rede Brasil do Pacto Global, in addition to other actors destined for the confluence between business operation and sustainable development.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research method adopted in this study is descriptive research. Richardson (2007) highlights that the descriptive study aims to describe the characteristics of a phenomenon. As for the approach, it is characterized by being a qualitative study. Silva and Menezes (2000) report that the qualitative approach is characterized by the dynamic relationship between the real world and the subject.



For data collection, we opted for the documentary methodological procedure, which, according to Severino (2016. p. 131), “has as its source documents in the broad sense, that is, not only of printed documents, but especially of other types of documents”. In this context, the main source of data for this work was the special report “COVID-19 - How companies are facing the pandemic”, prepared in 2020 by Rede Brasil do Pacto Global and by the global communication agency Edelman, with participants, in the majority, companies that are signatories to the UN Global Compact.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Brazilian companies operation in the Covi-19 pandemic

In the 2030 Agenda, some Sustainable Development Goals directly impacted by the pandemic and related to it, such as public health and economic growth, addressed by SDGs 3 and 8, respectively, stand out. Perrings, Levin and Daszak (2018) explore the intrinsic relationship between both, in the sense that productive activity itself is at the heart of the emergence and spread of zoonotic diseases, driven globally by the growth of trade and travel, and the negligence on accelerated measures for disease containment at an early stage, as seen in the spread of SARS-CoV-2.

However, other themes present in Agenda 2030 also permeate the pandemic. For example, empirical evidence was highlighted on the “COVID-19 Response” page of the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), revealing the latent correspondence between the potential for transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and poverty: the lack of infrastructure, such as basic sanitation, can work to increase the number of disease cases, since hand washing is a first-rate basic defense (Nações Unidas Brasil, 2020a), this is related to SDGs 6 and 11; workers, usually informal ones, prevented from suspending their activities, are forced to submit to the pandemic (Nações Unidas Brasil, 2020b), therefore, people far from heteronomous education may be exposed to greater risks, due to the lack of means of transmission, in connection to SDG 4; and an increase in the numbers of gender-based violence is expected if confinement continues, as well as an increase in difficulties for poor women to access contraceptives (Nações Unidas Brasil, 2020c), referring to SDGs 5 and 10.

In fact, as pointed out by researchers from the University of São Paulo (USP) and the State University of Campinas (Unicamp), the COVID-19 pandemic would have had less social impact if Agenda 2030 had advanced in recent years, precisely because the Sustainable



Development Goals are aimed at repairing the problems listed in the previous paragraph (Jornal da USP, 2020).

Observing this scenario, from the alignment of private sector organizations with the global agenda for sustainable development, it appears that, in the face of an emergency that puts people's health at risk on a global scale, enterprise acting is required, expanding and increasing the social responsibility already practiced by companies, in order to complement public policies conducted by government entities and, also, the participation of the third sector, through civil society organizations.

Therefore, in April 2020, the Rede Brasil do Pacto Global applied a questionnaire answered online by 86 organizations in the sectors of energy, fashion and beauty, health, chemical industry, legal services, third sector, infrastructure, food, financial services, education, agribusiness and consultancies, allowing the preparation of the special report "COVID-19 - How companies are facing the pandemic".

Through this instrument, some measures were adopted by companies in order to contain or limit the progress of COVID-19, such as the donation of equipment or supplies to hospitals, for example (Rede Brasil do Pacto Global, 2020a). Chart 1 highlights the organizations' perception of measures to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, based on the report.

Chart 1: Perception of organizations in relation to measures to face the Covid-19 pandemic

CATEGORY	ANSWERS
Companies' point of view and the role of brands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 97% of respondents in companies agree that brands have an obligation to contribute to solving the challenges that come with the pandemic; • 94% agree that companies have a responsibility to collaborate with the government in the crisis; • 88% agree that not acting to help during the COVID-19 crisis can damage the company's reputation; • 63% agree that consumers will reward the company that adopts measures to help the COVID-19 crisis by buying or promoting its products and / or services.
Collaborators first	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 87% of respondents in companies agree that companies are responsible for the physical and financial well-being of their employees even if they face financial problems during the pandemic; • 72% say they have policies to keep jobs; • 42% say their company is conducting educational and social actions, such as financial and / or equipment donations; • 9% say their company is working with government agencies.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37% believe that companies are at risk of being judged as opportunistic if they communicate their actions to help in the crisis.

Source: Rede Brasil do Pacto Global (2020b)



As pointed out by the literature addressed in the previous topic and endorsed by the evolutionary trajectory of CSR, practically all the leaders who answered the questionnaire understand that companies have a responsibility to contribute to the solution of the challenges that come with the pandemic, and likewise they must help the government. in this endeavor. At the same time, they recognize that failure to do so can negatively impact the image of their brands, as well as the identification of brands with their consumers and shareholders.

On the other hand, the document also revealed some contradictions. Despite the preference for the home office (or telework) to contain the spread of the virus, in addition to the adoption of channels to clarify doubts and the development of ways to map symptoms among employees, who receive guidance on how to proceed in case of risk of contamination, less than half of the respondents stated that their respective companies are conducting educational and social actions, such as financial and / or equipment donations. In addition, only one in 10 state that the company is working with government agencies (Rede Brasil do Pacto Global, 2020b), which reinforces the pressing need to carry out efforts that can mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The organization also developed a guide for business leaders, in order to “reinforce some of the essential care so that companies can overcome this difficult moment with the minimum of negative impacts on their teams or their operations” (Rede Brasil do Pacto Global, 2020a, s. p.), in line with the Ten Principles of the Global Compact.

Among the actions suggested by the Rede Brasil do Pacto Global (2020a, s. p.) There are:

1. Financial support: contributing funds such as the Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP), which describes activities and resources needed by international health organizations worldwide, including the World Health Organization (WHO), to implement priority public health measures in support of countries' response to the outbreak.
2. Raise awareness: share information from the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) on precautions and other preventive measures.
3. Be flexible: exercise flexibility in terms of remote work arrangements for employees who want to limit their contact with others and work from home. Support companies and suppliers affected by the outbreak by taking a flexible and comprehensive approach to their business negotiations. Be flexible on delivery times and pay invoices immediately.
4. Be compassionate: get in touch with friends and colleagues to ask what they need and offer support.
5. Provide help and support: explore how the company can support, including leveraging its global supply chain, to increase the supply of



essential items in affected areas and countries. Companies can also offer assets, resources and financial support to provide medical supplies and increase support for assistance efforts.

The document points out that “companies are at the center of these efforts - both because they are directly affected by the consequences of COVID-19, which have caused problems in the supply, distribution and consumption chains, and because of their responsibility in limiting contagion among their employees, customers and other contact people”. But as it warns, “in addition, they are also vulnerable to the likely medium-term consequences that will be caused by the pandemic - such as a possible global economic recession” (Rede Brasil do Pacto Global, 2020c, p. 2).

Gathering the actions passed over by the UNO to companies and the 2030 Agenda, the report “Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19” detailed actions and developments for each Sustainable Development Objective, fostering and reinforcing the need for partnerships between the most varied actors so that the impacts of the pandemic are mitigated, as highlighted in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Impacts of the pandemic on each of the Sustainable Development Goals
 Source: United Nations (2020)

Including other actions of great depth and which received prominence, it is possible to mention global companies linked to the sugar sector or products related to alcohol and its derivatives, which voluntarily and free of charge manufactured alcohol gel for hand and surface hygiene; giants from the cosmetics niche have also announced similar measures. Another outstanding project was promoted by the Brazilian Association of the Machinery and Equipment Industry (Abimaq), which made production lines available to the government to increase the manufacture of mechanical respirators for the hospital network (Estadão, 2020).

In retail, large supermarkets and hypermarkets have limited the capacity of their stores, establishing the minimum distance of one meter between people in the queues, limited the number of products purchased so that there is no shortage, and acted in educating their consumers and preventing the transmission of the virus in stores (Instituto Ethos, 2020).

There is also private social investment and philanthropy, practices that have emerged in Brazil around two non-profit organizations based in São Paulo: the Group of Institutes, Foundations and Companies (GIFE) and the Institute for the Development of Social Investment (IDIS). For the first organization, private social investment consists of “voluntary transfer of private resources in a planned, monitored and systematic way for social, environmental, cultural and scientific projects of public interest” (Grupo, 2020a, s. p.).

In this way, it is understood that initiatives such as the GIFE, with the publication of guidelines for action in the COVID-19 crisis, contribute to manage the impacts of the pandemic (Grupo, 2020b).

That said, it is important to highlight the creation of the Emergency Health Fund, whose donations were destined to Fiocruz, Hospital das Clínicas de São Paulo, Santa Casa de São Paulo and Comunitas, an organization responsible for buying respirators to be donated to SUS hospitals (Grupo, 2020b). In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic is based on the idea that the support to institutions has taken a targeted and immediate form in view of the public health benefits.

In addition, it is important to consider the creation of programs for donations and transfers from companies, institutes and foundations to the organizations responsible for combating the pandemic and the creation of lines of credit transferred by public banks with interest rates and terms that meet to companies in paying their bills, in order to guarantee business continuity and avoid unemployment in the “post-coronacrisis”. However, so far, this



information is not quantifiable, given its spontaneity and continuity while this research was carried out.

The collective construction of alternatives led by the private sector was also verified at the Ethos Institute. As an example, it is possible to mention the partnership involving organizations active in the most diverse sectors of the economy, having as a common point the declared directioning towards sustainable development, which resulted in Covid Radar, distributed on three fronts: Covid Radar Panel, containing anonymized data and information on the pandemic; Connection Covid Radar, which establishes a market place between companies that want to make donations - equipment or raw material to produce essential supplies and the main demands for supplies and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) - and institutions that need help; and Health Covid Radar, a basis for health and mobility monitoring applications (Instituto Ethos, 2020).

On a local scale, the partnerships proved to be fruitful. With the worsening of the crisis and the lack of hygiene products in supermarkets and pharmacies, which are essential to fight the disease, drug and cosmetic manufacturers obtained permission to produce and market antiseptic preparations or sanitizers without prior authorization from the National Health Agency. Health Surveillance (Anvisa). In this case, government coordination was essential to streamline the production and sale of these items, proving the state's indispensability in conducting the market.

Sectors not directly linked to the containment of the pandemic were also activated. In the case of telecommunications, national and global companies operating in Brazil devoted hundreds of hours to the production of journalistic content and the dissemination of digital content to raise public awareness and encourage social isolation in the most critical period of the disease.

4.2. Corporate social responsibility performance horizons

As evidenced by the literature, Corporate Social Responsibility often represents a way for companies to obtain a competitive advantage. Therefore, it is natural that the doubt arises about the genuineness of the aforementioned attitudes. Are these organizations looking for visibility by investing a tiny part of their profits in containing the pandemic in Brazil? Predicting the imminent economic crisis, would the disclosure of socially responsible actions be an attempt to guarantee the continuity of business, betting on the identification and loyalty of consumers with the brand?



In fact, considering that the socially responsible behavior of companies does not challenge the essence of the capitalist system, the question is pertinent. On the other hand, the actions show the undeniable and indispensable potential of private companies to devote part of their energies in favor of a reorientation of the current production and consumption model, as well as for other issues that are presented to humanity. On this, Kamiya et al. (2018, p. 573) consider that, “as social problems become more complex, the participation of a greater number of people in CSR actions led by brands becomes more relevant”.

So, what lessons does this experience present for society? When considering companies capable of mobilizing in a pandemic situation, in search of the common good, would they be willing to act together to mitigate the impacts of climate change, for example, even if this does not imply short-term financial benefits? Can this behavior be considered illustrative of a social responsibility action?

Private investment in actions that provide health, not only to contain a pandemic, as explored in this article, but in the search for the physical and mental well-being of human beings, highlights that, in a reality of crisis and uncertainty, the effects on economies are challenging, demanding the participation of actors who, in essence, would not be willing to make such decisions.

Based on this, Marina Grossi (2020, s. p.), President of the Brazilian Business Council for Sustainable Development (CEBDS), addresses the need for a profound change in the actuation of companies when writing that

The moment points to a sense of urgency in changing the direction of business and the way we handle our business. An encouragement in this regard has been the capacity for rapid reaction shown by a significant part of the business sector, both with internal measures to adapt their work routines and in the development of voluntary actions to contain the disease in the country.

The discussion runs through the conflict between growth and development, present in the conception of sustainable development and in challenges to the dominant economic model, such as Ecological Economics (Daly, 2004), for example. About this, Cavalcanti (2010, p. 57) argues that

Ecological economists - appealing to the principles of physics and ecology - consider the size of the cargo to be fundamental. In the conception of a possible macroeconomics of the environment, the carrying capacity, therefore, plays a key role. It will define the scope of sustainable development.



As presented in the previous topic, the pandemic demanded that humanity emerge values based on ethics, solidarity and care for people and the natural environment. Although not being equally fought, problems such as climate change and social inequalities, which generate hunger, violence and thousands of deaths annually, have been dormant for more than fifty years and carry with them a destructive potential far more worrying than that of the pandemic. However, actions to exterminate the causes and mitigate the consequences of these problems have never effectively involved such a cohesive and widely disseminated global cooperation network, as seen in the fight against COVID-19.

Even agendas for sustainable development, such as the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement, despite having the signatures of hundreds of leaders, financial resources and legitimacy before society, were not enough to mobilize populations across the planet and, mainly, change government and business policies previously oriented exclusively to profit and human and environmental exploitation.

It appears, then, that the action horizons for the private sector interweave an improvement on the social responsibility already exercised by the companies, with a focus on the establishment of partnerships and through a solid reorientation in favor of sustainable development, as advocated for more than three decades. Otherwise, the survival of organizations and the human species itself will be irreversibly compromised.

5. CONCLUSIONS

At the end of 2019, people started to be infected by the severe acute respiratory syndrome virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), so that in 2020 humanity would be affected by an unprecedented pandemic, causing problems not only in health area, but also socioeconomic. The serious situation prompted the actions of governments, companies and other organizations to fight the disease.

Among the 169 goals that make up the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, to which all UN member countries are signatories, highlights the need for companies to shoulder their responsibilities towards society and the planet, taking into account dimensions such as environmental, social and economic, among others. For this reason, companies are invited to play a relevant role in the preservation of human lives during the pandemic, by implementing Corporate Social Responsibility actions.

In Brazil, companies linked to the Rede Brasil do Pacto Global and other organizations in the private sector acted to contain the disease in several ways, for example, with the creation



of donation programs, credit lines and flexible working regimes, with the aim at reducing the displacement of workers and the consequent containment of the advance of the pandemic. In addition, private social investment and philanthropy were encouraged as alternative ways to help those most in need. All of these initiatives were based on the 2030 Agenda.

The situation faced by the pandemic showed that it is necessary to invest more in the sector of human health and well-being. A considerable part of these investments can be achieved through companies that practice CSR, which was evident in a reality of crisis and uncertainty. Also, the cooperation of companies in the elaboration and implementation of public policies proved to be fundamental and still little explored.

As horizons of action for the “post-coronacrisis”, there are other issues equally important, imperative and with high destructive power, such as hunger, inequalities and climate change, which, in short, are not being taken seriously by the socially responsible companies. Therefore, the role of companies, together with governments and civil society, in the search for sustainable development is challenging.

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