

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND  
ECONOMICS  
MBA PROGRAM**

**ASSESSEMENT OF SOCIAL  
RESPONSIBILITY IN THE  
LEATHER INDUSTRY  
(A CASE OF SELECTED COMPANIES IN  
ADDIS ABABA)**

A PROJECT REPORT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF MBA

BY YONAS ESTIFANOS

ADVISOR ZEWDIE SHIBRIE (PhD)

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# Abstract

This paper presents an assessment of social responsibility in selected leather processing firms in Addis Ababa prompted by the need to understand its paramount importance in conducting business activities. The paper tried to assess how these companies are discharging their social responsibility towards employees, the environment and the local community. In order to collect data both primary and secondary data collection tools are used. The primary data collection methods are questionnaire and interview and the secondary data are obtained from the Internet, different books, various related documents journals and newspapers.

The project identified that the industry has got a lot to do to be recognized as one which is conducting its business in a socially responsible way especially towards employees, environment and the society. Finally the paper recommended that the industry should try to be more responsible to the above stakeholders so as to be competitive and survive in the business for long.



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# Introduction

## 1.1 GENERAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Ethiopia has witnessed a remarkable change in the business sector since the overturn of the Derg regime which was characterized by the command economy. The political change has brought the economy reform of 1991 which laid a fertile ground for the emergence of many privately owned business organizations. Since then, many businesses have grown in size and expanded their operations.

Most of these business organizations believe that the single most important measure of success is their profitability to maximize owner's wealth. This misconception is mainly down to lack of awareness on the parameters used for measuring success in the modern business world. In the modern business era, the bottom line is not financial performance only; success should also be measured using the company's social and environmental impact.

The concept of social responsibility is actually a fairly recent one in the business world, which began gaining momentum since the 1960s but awareness about the social responsibility of business organizations is rapidly on the rise and many firms are also accepting this concept (Alessandro B, 2003). The leather industry is no exception to this fact. To this effect many leather producing and trading firms worldwide are also realizing their responsibility towards the society and the environment.

Social responsibility is 'an organization's obligation to maximize its positive impact and minimize its negative impact on the society'. In other words, it is 'the concept that businesses should be actively concerned with the welfare of the society at large' (Farmer R and Hogue W., 1995)

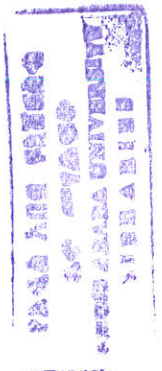


This concept is applicable to individuals and governments as well as organizations. But when it is applied to business environment it is referred to as ‘corporate social responsibility’

The concept of social responsibility can be viewed from two broad perspectives: human responsibility and environmental responsibility. The human responsibility aspect focuses on the responsibility of the organizations towards the various parties associated with it, which are known as ‘stakeholders’ in business terms. These parties include employees, owners (shareholders), customers, investors, suppliers, competitors and the society at large. The other aspect, Environmental responsibility focuses on the organization’s responsibility towards environment protection.

This study tries to look in to social responsibility of selected leather processing companies in Addis Ababa towards employees, the environment and the society (local community). In general the concept of social responsibility holds that business organizations should work in a manner in which the interests of the stakeholders are protected or, at the very least, they are not adversely affected. A point worth mentioning here is the fact that the issue of social responsibility extends beyond the legal requirements of an organization i.e., a mere compliance to different rules and regulations or policies and procedures does not mean that a company is discharging its social responsibility effectively, it is rather something voluntarily fulfilled by the organizations.

Like the firms in other industries, firms engaged in processing of leather should also realize their social responsibility towards the various parties associated with them and the environment. However, the ways by which these organizations choose to fulfil their social responsibility might be different.



The leather industry plays an important role in Ethiopia. The importance of the sector is due to the large base of raw material and the long tradition in leather production which has contributed to the formation of knowledge and capabilities. Ethiopia's livestock ranks among the best both in Africa and the world. The leather processing sector is one of the top three foreign exchange earner (Alessandro b., 2004). The sector is a labor intensive sector employing nearly 10% of workers of the manufacturing sector. (CSA, 2007).

**Table 1.1 Ethiopia's livestock population**

Raw material	Population (In million)
Cattle	34.5
Sheep	20
Goat	16

*Source: <http://www.africanleather.com>*

This sector like many other sectors depends on cooperation; horizontal linkages-cooperation among similar firms and vertical linkages- cooperation between enterprises at different levels in the value chain. (Zewdie.S and et al, 2004). Because of the aforementioned reasons, the leather processing industry is chosen to be the study area for the research topic.

The prime motive of this research project is to assess the concept of social responsibility and the ways with which leather processing firms try to fulfil it. The study focused on the assessment of social responsibility towards employees, the environment and the society.

## **2. Statement of the problem**

The issue of social responsibility is a vital concern for many organizations, because the fate and the overall success of companies is becoming reliant on the potential to discharge their social responsibility. Many business organizations are being motivated to involve stakeholders in their decision making and to address societal challenges because today's stakeholders are increasingly aware of the importance and impact of decisions taken by business organizations up on society and the environment. These organizations are very much aware of the impact stakeholders can have on the organizations too, because these days stakeholders can reward or punish organizations operating around them.

The above statements clearly indicate that the concept of social responsibility is a major concern for many organizations as it means a matter of survival for those that are not effectively discharging it and a means to get a competitive edge for those effectively making use of it. But this does not seem to be the case in the leather industry of Ethiopia.

In view of the above facts the research tried to give an answer for the following basic questions.

- What is the level of awareness towards social responsibility
- What are the various ways used to fulfil responsibility towards different stakeholders
- What are the existing constraints that prevent the companies from discharging their social responsibility
- What remedies should be taken to alleviate problems regarding social responsibility so that both the stakeholders and the company can reap its benefits.



### **3. Objectives of the study**

The prime objective of this research project is to assess the application of social responsibility in selected leather processing firms in Addis Ababa. To this end the project tried to address the following specific objectives:

- i. Describe areas where social responsibility should be taken seriously
- ii. Assess the level of application of social responsibility
- iii. Identify the various ways to fulfil responsibility towards different stakeholders.
- iv. Suggest possible solutions to alleviate the constraints to enhance the role of applying social responsibility.

### **4 Significance of the study**

The role played by social responsibility is of a paramount importance for business organizations working among different stakeholders. But the idea is not seriously taken in to account by the businesses and its application is impeded by many constraints. Thus, the result of the study has the following importance:

- The concept of social responsibility is little understood by the leather industry as is in the other industries. Therefore, the study will be a contribution to the knowledge on the issue.
- The result of the study also helps to enhance the awareness of the interested reader on the matter.
- The study can also serve as a base for further study and investigation

## **5. Scope of the study**

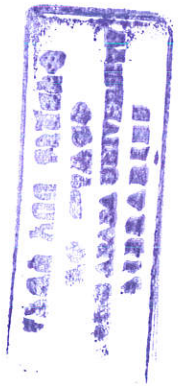
The study is limited to assessment of social responsibility in the leather industry by taking selected companies operating in and around Addis Ababa. It is also limited to assessment of social responsibility towards employees, the environment and the society.

## **6. Limitation of the study**

The time and money allotted for this study was not sufficient to make analysis by taking some more leather processing firms. The continuous power interruption was another challenging aspect where the researcher is forced to visit the companies many times than intended as the required respondents will not be around on these days.

## **7. Research Methodology**

The study was conducted in leather processing companies found in and around Addis Ababa. In total there are nine tanneries working in the area. So as to be representative three out of nine of the companies (Addis Ababa, Batu and Awash tanneries) were selected for the study. To carry out the research project both primary and secondary sources were used. The primary data was collected from the respondents by employing different research techniques. For the secondary data, different published research articles, books and journals were used. In addition to these reports of different organizations working in the research area were referred.



## **7.1 Sample size and Selection**

As mentioned in the preceding section, the study was conducted by taking three leather processing firms found in and around Addis Ababa. Two high level officials (the general manager and personnel section head) from each company took part in the study. In addition to this officials from Ethiopian Environmental Protection Authority were contacted to get data on environmental impacts of these companies. For the assessment of social responsibility towards employees, employees of the selected companies were communicated. In order to complete the study with the time frame and budget samples were taken. In line with this a convenient sampling technique was used which will help in saving time and effort in collecting data from the sample. The average number of employees in the three selected companies is 150. 40 employees from each company took part in the study. With respect to the purpose of the study, it is believed that the study groups are relatively homogeneous and thus the sample size taken is reasonably representative of the population for drawing inferences.

## **7.2 Tools and techniques of data collection**

The following tools and techniques were used in order to collect the necessary data

### **7.2.1 Primary data**

#### **7.2.1.1 Personal Interview**

To generate information from officials of the selected companies and environmental protection authority in line with the research objectives and the research problems, semi

structured interview were administered. The sensitivity of some of the issues raised necessitated the use of semi structured interview.

### **7.2.1.2 Questionnaire**

Questionnaires were used to generate information on some of the research questions. The questionnaires were distributed to 120 employees of the selected companies in order to get information on how the companies are discharging their social responsibility towards their employees.

### **7.2.2 Secondary data**

In the study secondary data was used intensively, particularly to obtain general information on social responsibility and the operation of the industry. Published research articles, books, journals and reports of different organizations working in the research area both from the web and library were also used.

## Literature Review

### What is social responsibility?

Social responsibility is an evolving term that does not have a standard definition or a fully recognized set of specific criteria. With the understanding that businesses play a key role on job and wealth creation in society Social responsibility is generally understood to be the way a company achieves a balance or integration of economic, environmental, and social imperatives while at the same time addressing shareholder and stakeholder expectations.(Industry Canada, 2007)

More comprehensively, Social Responsibility can be defined as a company's obligation to be accountable to all of its stakeholders (customers, suppliers, employees, shareholders, communities and others, as well as the environment) in all of its operations where activities are aimed to achieve a sustainable development not only in the economical dimension but also in the social and environmental dimensions. (Tepper Marlin. A, J. Tepper Marlin, 2003). This obligation is seen to extend beyond the statutory obligation to comply with legislation and sees organizations voluntarily taking further commitments to improve the quality of life for employees and their families as well as for the local community and society at large. A key feature of the concept is the way businesses engage/involve the shareholders, employees,



customers, suppliers, governments, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, and other stakeholders in their business decisions.

The concept of social responsibility is generally seen as the business contribution to sustainable development which has been defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", and is generally understood as focusing on how to achieve the integration of economic, environmental, and social imperatives. (Industry Canada, 2007)

The practice of Social Responsibility is subject to much debate and criticism. Proponents argue that there is a strong business case for Social Responsibility, in that companies benefit in many different ways by operating with a perspective broader and longer than their own immediate, short-term profits.(McKibben.B.,2006). On the other hand critics argue that the whole issue of Social Responsibility distracts many companies from the fundamental economic role of businesses; in that companies are fundamentally entities responsible for generating a product and/or service to gain profits to satisfy their owners, thus these group of people believe that there is no place for social responsibility as a business function.(Milton.F,1970)

In recent times, though, there is a growing recognition of the significant effect the activities of business organizations have on society- on employees, customers, communities, the environment, competitors, business partners, investors, shareholders, governments and others. It is also becoming increasingly clear that firms can contribute to their own wealth and to overall societal wealth by considering the effect they have on the world at large when making

decisions. Many business leaders believe that doing good for others means doing good for owners as well. Social responsibility activities that integrate broader societal concerns in to business strategy and performance are increasingly seen as an evidence of good management. In addition to building trust with the community and giving firms and edge in attracting customers and good employees, acting responsibly towards workers and others in the society can be in the long term interest of firms and their shareholders. Businesses are an integral part of the communities in which they operate. There is no escaping the fact that their success is based on continued good relations with a wide range of individuals, groups and institutions.(Industry Canada, 2007)

Companies are motivated to involve stakeholders in their decision-making and to address societal challenges because today's stakeholders are increasingly aware of the importance and impact of corporate decisions upon society and the environment. The stakeholders can reward or punish corporations. The following are some of the potential promises that motivate companies to do their businesses in a socially responsible way.

1. Stronger financial performance and profitability (e.g. through eco-efficiency),
2. Improved accountability to and assessments from the investment community,
3. Enhanced employee commitment,
4. Decreased vulnerability through stronger relationships with communities, and
5. Improved reputation and branding.

The following excerpt taken from Michael Porter at the April 2005 Business and Society conference on Corporate Citizenship, sums up the increasing importance of social responsibility.

*“There is no way to avoid paying serious attention to the issues of social responsibility: the costs of failing are simply too high. ... There are countless win-win opportunities waiting to be discovered: every activity in a firm's value chain overlaps in some way with social factors — everything from how you buy or procure to how you do your research — yet very few companies have thought about this. The goal is to leverage your company's unique capabilities in supporting social causes, and improve your competitive context at the same time. The job of today's leaders is to stop being defensive and start thinking systematically about corporate responsibility.”*



## **Historical background of Social responsibility**

The view that a business can have obligations that extend beyond economic roles is not new in many respects. Throughout recorded history the roles of organizations producing goods and services for the marketplace were frequently linked with and include political, social, and/or military roles. For example, throughout the early evolutionary stages of company development in England there was a public policy understanding that companies were to help achieve societal objectives such as the exploration of colonial territory, setting up settlements, providing transportation services, developing bank and financial services, etc.. During the nineteenth century, the corporation as a business form of organization evolved rapidly in the United States. It took on a commercial form that spelled out responsibilities of the board of directors and management to shareholders (i.e. fiduciary duty). In this later evolutionary form, public policy frequently addressed specific social domains such as health and safety for workers, consumer protection, labor practices, environmental protection, etc. Thus, corporations responded to social responsibilities because they were obligated to be in compliance with the law and public policy. They also responded voluntarily to market demands that reflected consumer morals and social tastes.

By the mid-point of the twentieth century, which marks the modern era of social responsibility, corporate social responsibility was being discussed in the United States by business management experts such as Peter Drucker and being considered in business literature. In 1970, economist Milton Friedman outlined his view that the social responsibility of corporations is to make profits within the boundaries of societal morals and laws (but cautioned that socially responsible initiatives by corporations could lead to unfocused management directions, misallocations of resources, and reduced market competition,

opportunity and choice). Social Responsibility emerged and continues to be a key business management, marketing, and accounting concern in the United States, Europe and other nations.

In the last decade of the millennium, Social Responsibility and related concepts such as corporate citizenship and corporate sustainability have expanded perhaps in response to new challenges such as those emanating from increased globalization on the agenda of business managers as well as for related stakeholder communities. It is now more a part of both the vocabulary and agenda of academics, professionals, non-governmental organizations, consumer groups, employees, suppliers, shareholders, and investors. (Tepper Marlin, A, J. Tepper Marlin, 2003)



## **Diversity of Perspectives**

As has been explained above, there are different views on social responsibility around the world. The following summaries of perspectives of different organizations serve to indicate the diversity of views on Social Responsibility. The different views indicate the challenges and opportunities to develop the most appropriate relationships between shareholders and other stakeholders as well as to use the optimal policy mix of legislative and voluntary instruments. (Industry Canada, 2005)

### **1. Business Actions for Sustainable Development**

Integrates and places Social Responsibility in the context of sustainable development. Social Responsibility is viewed as being one of three key responsibilities that also include economic responsibility and environmental responsibility. To this organization, Social Responsibility is "the continuing commitment by businesses to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large." The priority Social Responsibility elements are identified as:

- human rights
- employee rights
- environmental protection

- supplier relations
- community involvement

## **2. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)**

Takes the view that Social Responsibility can mean different things to different groups, sectors and stakeholders and that it is evolving. The OECD believes that "there is general agreement that in a global economy, businesses are often playing a greater role beyond job and wealth creation and Social Responsibility is business's contribution to sustainable development and that business behavior must not only ensure returns to shareholders, wages to employees, and products and services to consumers, but they must respond to societal and environmental concerns and values. The organization developed guidelines to establish voluntary policies that promote transparency and accountability, specifically addressing:

- disclosure of material information
- employment and industrial relations
- environmental management
- bribery
- competition
- consumer interests

## **3. Business for Social Responsibility (BSR)**

Defines Social Responsibility as business practices that "strengthen accountability, respecting ethical values in the interests of all stakeholders". BSR also proposes that "responsible

business practices respect and preserve the natural environment" and that by "helping to improve the quality and opportunities of life, they empower people and invest in communities where a business operates. Social Responsibility if addressed comprehensively, can deliver the greatest benefits to a company and its stakeholders when integrated with business strategy and operations." The key Social Responsibility issues challenging businesses, according to BSR include:

- business ethics
- community investment
- environment
- governance and accountability
- human rights
- marketplace
- workplace

#### 4. The Commission for European Communities

The commission views Social Responsibility as "essentially a concept whereby companies decide voluntarily to contribute to a better society and a cleaner environment." For an organization to be socially responsible means not only that legal expectations be fulfilled, but it also means "going beyond compliance and investing more in human capital, the environment, and stakeholder relations". It describes Social Responsibility in two categories:

- 1) The internal dimension, and
- 2) The external dimension.

The internal dimension is interpreted to include human resources management, health and safety at work, adaptation to change, and management of environmental impacts and natural resources. The external dimension is projected to include local communities, business partners including suppliers and consumers, human rights, and global environmental concerns. Social Responsibility is defined to include:

- social responsibility integrated management
- social responsibility reporting and auditing
- quality in work
- social and eco labels
- socially responsible investment



## **Business Benefits of Social responsibility**

A business doesn't exist in isolation, simply as a way of making money. Its employees depend on the business. Customers, suppliers and the local community are all affected by the business and what it does. Its products, and the way it makes them, have an impact on the environment. This all dictates the company to do the right thing. Social Responsibility is not just about doing the right thing. It also offers direct business benefits.

Building a reputation as a responsible business sets the company apart. Many consumers prefer to buy from ethical businesses. Companies often favor suppliers who demonstrate responsible policies as this helps them to minimize the risk of any damage to their own reputations. There are strong business cases that a company could enjoy by being socially responsible. The following are benefits attributed to being socially responsible business.

### ***Reputation management***

Attitudinal surveys show members of the public prefer companies that are seen to be positively contributing to the environment and society. A good reputation is one of the most valuable intangible assets a company can have, and maintaining it is a key motivation for companies to engage in responsible business. By being responsible

- Companies can enhance brand value by managing and influencing the expectations of their customers. In crowded marketplaces, companies strive for a unique selling

proposition which can separate them from the competition in the minds of consumers. Social responsibility can play a role in building customer loyalty based on distinctive ethical values.

- Companies can build trust through actions that increase customer satisfaction and add to shareholder value.
- Companies can enhance positive relationships that deliver business advantages that maintain and improve market share.

### ***Employee satisfaction, retention and recruitment***

There is a “war for talent” - businesses are dependent on their employees to deliver and create value. Responsible business practice:

- Is increasingly a contributing factor in attracting and retaining a talented and diverse workforce, and in being an employer of choice.
- Builds employee morale and loyalty
- Creates a more motivated, engaged and inspired workforce that can improve long-term productivity.
- Adds to the bottom line by improving staff retention - eliminating recruitment costs and reducing absenteeism – helps maintain or improve productivity.(The Economist, 2005)

### ***Innovation and learning***

Responsible business is increasingly being used to stimulate learning and innovation within organizations. This helps to:

- Identify new market opportunities
- Establish more efficient business processes
- Maintain competitiveness

- Ensure long-term survival

### ***Risk, change and total management***

Managing risk is a central part of many corporate strategies. Reputations that take decades to build up can be ruined in hours through incidents such as corruption scandals or environmental accidents. These events can also draw unwanted attention from regulators, courts, governments and media. Building a genuine culture of 'doing the right thing' within a corporation can offset these risks. (Kytle B.; John Gerard R., 2005)

Responsible business practice helps companies to better understand and manage risk, which:

- Reduces avoidable losses and identifies new emerging issues
- Attracts investors who believe social and environmental risk management can have a significantly positive impact on a company's long-term market value
- Reflects a management style that is forward looking and more able to manage uncertainties in the future.

### ***Cost of capital***

A company that effectively manages its social or environmental performance is also demonstrating its quality of management through:

- Forward looking thinking, adopting transformational strategies and tackling risk and uncertainty which are all attractive to investors.

- Adopting this holistic approach to performance so a company will be considered to be well managed with lower risks which may be represented by a lower share price volatility which in turn could affect the cost of capital.

### *Financial performance*

Responsible business opens opportunities to reduce present and future costs to the business

by:

- Improving competitiveness, market positioning and profitability
- Anticipating impending legislation and so reduce future costs of compliance
- Understanding how it uses natural resources and energy and the operational benefits of managing these more effectively
- Integrating environmental specifications into new assets, which can reduce life-cycle costs and improve efficiency.

## **KEY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY INSTRUMENTS and PRINCIPLES**

As it has been discussed in the earlier parts, there is a divergent view on social responsibility, thus the social responsibility instruments and principles are not universal in their nature. There are varieties of instruments and principles set out by different institutions which can be used to assess whether a company is discharging its responsibility towards different stakeholders or not. The two widely applicable set of instruments are:

United Nations Global Compact and

Principles set by Center for Ethical Business Cultures

## **United Nations Global Compact Ten Principles**

The Global compact's 10 principles (<http://www.globalcompact.org/>) in the areas of human right, labor, the environment and anti corruption enjoys a relative consensus. The compact asks companies to embrace, support and enact, within the sphere of influence of the companies, a set of core values in the areas of human right, labor standards, the environment and anti corruption.

### ***Human rights***

*Principle 1.* Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights

*Principle 2.* Make sure that they are not complicit in human right abuses.

### ***Labor standards***

*Principle 3.* Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining.

*Principle 4.* The elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labor

*Principle 5.* The effective abolition of child labor

*Principle 6.* The elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation

### ***Environment***

*Principle 7.* Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges.

*Principle 8.* Undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility

*Principle 9.* Encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

### ***Anti corruption***

*Principle 10.* Businesses should work against all forms of corruption

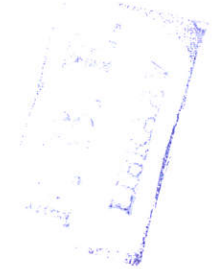
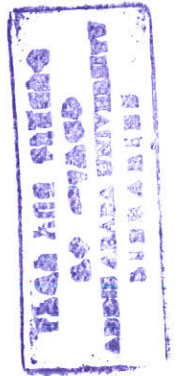
## **Principles set by Center for Ethical Business Cultures**

These principles also known as the Minnesota principles were developed by a group of business leaders to foster the fairness and integrity of business relationships. The principles are not meant to mirror reality but to express a standard against which business performances can be held accountable.

The stakeholder principles set forth by the center are:

### **Customers**

Businesses should have a responsibility:



- To provide customers with the highest quality products and services consistent with their requirements;
- To treat customers fairly in all aspects of our business transactions, including a high level of service and remedies for customer dissatisfaction;
- To make every effort to ensure that the health and safety (including environmental quality) of customers will be sustained or enhanced by the products or services;
- To respect the integrity of the cultures of the customers.

### **Employees**

Businesses should believe in the dignity of every employee and therefore have a responsibility:

- To provide jobs and compensation that improve and uplift workers' circumstances in life;
- To provide working conditions that respect employees' health and dignity;
- To be honest in communications with employees and open in sharing information, limited only by legal and competitive constraints;
- To be accessible to employee input, ideas, complaints, and requests;
- To engage in good faith negotiations when conflict arises;
- To avoid discriminatory practices and to guarantee equal treatment and opportunity, in areas such as gender, age, race, and religion;



- To protect employees from avoidable injury and illness in the working place;
- To be sensitive to the serious unemployment problems frequently associated with business decisions;
- To work with governments and other agencies in addressing these dislocations.

### **Owners/Investors**

Businesses should honor the trust investors place in them. Therefore they have a responsibility:

- To apply professional and diligent management in order to secure a fair and competitive return on owner's investment;
- To disclose relevant information to owners/investors subject only to legal and competitive constraints;
- To conserve and protect the owner/investors' assets;
- To respect owner/investors' requests, suggestions, complaints, and formal resolutions.

### **Suppliers**

Businesses have a responsibility:

- To seek fairness in all their activities including pricing, licensing and rights to sell;
- To ensure that business activities are free from coercion, and unnecessary litigation, thus promoting fair competition;
- To foster long-term stability in the supplier relationship in return for value, quality and reliability;
- To share information and integrate suppliers into their planning processes, in order to achieve stable relationships;
- To seek, encourage, and prefer suppliers whose employment practices respect human dignity.

## **Communities**

Businesses have responsibilities in the communities in which we do business:

- To be a good citizen by supporting the communities in which it operates; this can be done through charitable donations, educational and cultural contributions, and employee participation in community and civic affairs;
- To respect human rights and democratic institutions;
- To recognize government's legitimate obligation to the society at large and to support public policies and practices that promote harmony between business and other segments of society;
- To collaborate with less advantaged areas in raising their standards of health, education, and workplace safety;

- To promote and stimulate sustainable development;
- To play a lead role in preserving the physical environment and conserving the earth's resources;
- To support peace, security, and diversity in local communities;
- To respect the integrity of local cultures.

## **Data Analysis and Presentation**

The data for the analysis is obtained from questionnaires distributed to the employees of the companies under study and interviews conducted with officials of the company and environmental protection authority. The data collected from the above sources were used to analyze the following:

Social responsibility towards employees

Social responsibility towards the environment and

Social responsibility towards the society (local community)

In light of the above issues, the study was organized in a manner that the first part discusses about the social responsibilities of the companies towards their employees, the second part discusses about the social responsibilities towards the environment and the last part discusses about the social responsibility of the companies towards the local community which they are working with and the society in general.

## **Social responsibility towards employees**

To measure the companies' social responsibility towards their employees, questionnaires were distributed to 120 employees (40 from each company) in equal proportion to both production department staff and support department staff. In an attempt to make the questions clear and understandable for everyone participating, the questionnaires were administered in Amharic. The questions were designed to get data on the following group of social responsibility issues towards employees, each group having different specific questions.

- Reasonable benefit and compensation and training and advancement opportunity
- Healthy and safe working atmosphere
- Communication and consultation
- Sensitivity to unemployment problems associated with business decisions
- Equal opportunity and treatment
- Human right issues

### **Reasonable benefit and compensation and training and advancement opportunity**

To find out the level with which the company is discharging its social responsibility by giving deserved, comparable and reasonable compensation and benefit to its employees and an opportunity for training and advancement, two questions were asked which are summarized as follows in the table below.

**Table 2**

**Summary - Reasonable benefit and compensation and advancement**

Questions	Responses					
	Yes	%age	No	%	Don't know	%age
Q. 4 Does your company provide its staff training opportunities for maximizing promotion with in the organization?	19	15.83	99	82.5	2	1.7
Q.11 Do you believe that you are provided with reasonable, comparable and satisfactory compensation?	7	5.8	113	94.17	0	0



The question ‘Do you believe that you are provided with reasonable, comparable and satisfactory compensation?’ (Q.4) was asked in an attempt to determine the employees’ views on training for promotion with in the company and the companies’ responsibility to do so. The result was that 15.83%, most of them working as a support staff responded that their company is offering them further training for promotion with in the ranks in the companies, while the majority (82.5%), largely from production department, responded that they were not given any sort of training whatsoever for promotion with in the company. 1.7% of the sample said they do not know if the company is offering training opportunities to its employees.

The respondents were also asked if they were provided with 'reasonable, comparable and a satisfactory benefit and compensation' (Q.11). The result showed that only 5.8% of the respondents believe that they are given a reasonable, comparable and deserved benefit and compensation, while a whopping majority (94.17%) responded that they are not provided with a satisfactory compensation and benefit.

The above figures from the two questions regarding reasonable benefit and compensation and training and advancement show that most of the employees of the companies are not satisfied with the fact that they did not get any chance for promotion by further developing their skill and with the fact that they are not provided with reasonable benefit and compensation.

This same fact will eventually haunt the company to keep hold of its staff and retain them for long. It is clear that low retention means high cost in replacing the departed employees. In addition to the expected low level of employee retention, as the above figures reflect it, the companies may find it difficult to attract new employees whenever they are in need.



## **Healthy and safe working conditions**

The second group of questions the respondents were asked were those relating to the health and safety of employees in the working place. The questions were asked to find out the safety of the job the employees are working on, protection mechanisms used by the companies to protect their employees from avoidable injuries and illness related to what they do, the availability of any policies and procedures established by the companies to protect their employees from on the job injuries and to assess whether the policies and procedures, if any, were made known to the employees.

The five questions asked in this category and the responses from the respondents are summarized as follows.

**Table 3**

**Summary- Healthy and safe working atmosphere**

Questions	Responses					
	Yes	%age	No	%	Don't know	%age
Q.1 <i>Do you feel that your job is dangerous in causing illness or injury?</i>	63	52.5%	54	45%	3	2.5%
Q.8 <i>Is there any protection mechanism to protect you from avoidable injury and illness in the work place?</i>	102	85%	12	10%	6	5%
Q.9 <i>Do you believe that you are provided with a favorable working condition?</i>	20	16.6	96	80	4	3.3%
Q.12 <i>Are there any established policies by the company to ensure your health and safety?</i>	84	70%	24	20%	12	10%
Q.13 <i>are the policies made known to all employees?</i>	19	22.6	47	56%	18	15%

Q.1 'Do you feel that your job is dangerous in causing illness or injury?' was asked to know the employees feeling towards the safety of their job. 52.5 % (87% of which are production

department staff) claimed that the job they are doing is hazardous for their life. On the other hand 45% (90% of which are from support department) believe that what they are doing does not have any harm to them.

For the question 'Is there any protection mechanism to protect you from avoidable injury and illness in the work place?' (Q.8), 85 % responded that there are protective mechanisms to protect employees from avoidable injuries and illness. 12% of the respondents claimed that there is no enough protection mechanism put in place while 5% do not know the availability of protection.

The data from the two questions showed that most of the production department staff believe that their job is dangerous in causing injury and illness. This is due to the inherent nature of the industry itself where a lot of chemicals (such as chrome, sulphides, chlorides and etc) which are harmful to the health of the employees are used for dehairing and tanning of hides and skins. Due to the above facts the companies were needed to address the health and safety issues by using protective mechanisms, like using gowns, gloves and masks to protect the employees from avoidable injury and illness resulting from the work environment. In this regard, the majority of employees are satisfied with the protection they are offered by the company.

Employees were also asked about the availability of favourable working condition (Q.9). 16.6 % of the respondents claimed that the company has provided them with a favourable working condition by availing the necessary facilities. But a staggering 80% of the sample responded that their company has not created a favourable working condition for them.

It is quite clear that creating a favourable working condition enhances employee performance and will lead to high level of productivity, thus to get the best out of its employees a company



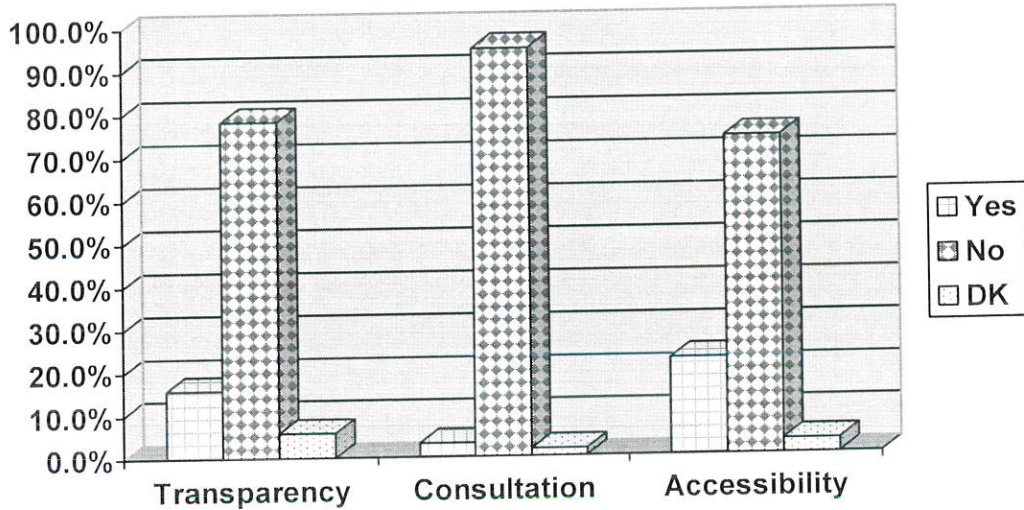
should be able to furnish employees with the necessary facilities and should create an enabling atmosphere. In view of this the companies under study are not in a position to have high performing staff as most of them are not satisfied with the working conditions made available to them.

When asked whether their companies have established policies and procedures to protect the health and safety of employees (Q.12), 70% of the respondents responded that there are established policies and procedures while the 20 % of the respondents said their company does not have any policy or procedure to protect their health and safety and 10% of the sample claimed they do not know anything about any policy or procedure. Among those who responded claiming that there are established policies and procedures, only 22.6% of them feel that these policies and procedures are made known to the employees. This shows that, even though most of the employees are convinced that there are policies and procedures to protect their health and safety, the policies and procedures are not known in greater detail to the employees, which made many think that the policies and procedures are of little or no use. While the establishment of policies and procedures to safeguard employees' health and safety is a right thing to do to show some sense of care and boost employee moral, they should have been communicated to the intended beneficiaries.

## **Communication and consultation**

This group of questions were asked to assess how much employees are being involved in decisions affecting them and the accessibility of the company to employee inputs, ideas and

requests. Three questions were asked in this regard and the responses are summarized as follows:



**Chart 1. Summary- Communication and Consultation**

Employees were asked if there is a transparent communication between the companies and themselves (Q.2) and the response came out that 15.83%, largely from support department said there is clear and transparent communication while 78.3% claimed that their companies are not engaged in clear and transparent communications with them and a small percentage of people responded that they do not know about the companies transparency in communicating with the employees.

To assess whether the companies handle downturns in business by consulting their employees or not (Q.3) 'Will the company consult you to handle downturns in business' was asked and only 3.33% responded that they would be consulted to handle the situation, while 95% of the participants said there is no consultation whatsoever in decisions affecting them.

The third question 'Is your company accessible to your input, ideas and requests?' (Q.5) was asked to measure the degree to which the company entertains ideas and inputs from its employees in making business decisions. 22.5% claimed that their ideas are considered in

making decisions while the majority (74.17%) responded that their companies are not in a position to take their input for making business decisions.

The above analysis shows that the majority of workers in the companies selected for the study believe that their company

Lacks transparency in communicating with them

Does not consult them to handle downturns in business and

Is not accessible to their contributions and requests

The problem for these companies is that, they will have employees with low morale because employees will not develop a sense of belongingness and feel they are less important to the company and in addition to this the companies will find it difficult to lure high quality job applicants in the future. Employees would have had a better self image and be motivated and more productive if they had been made to feel important by having transparent communication, open consultation and by being more accessible to their inputs, ideas and requests.



### **Sensitivity (concern) for unemployment problems**

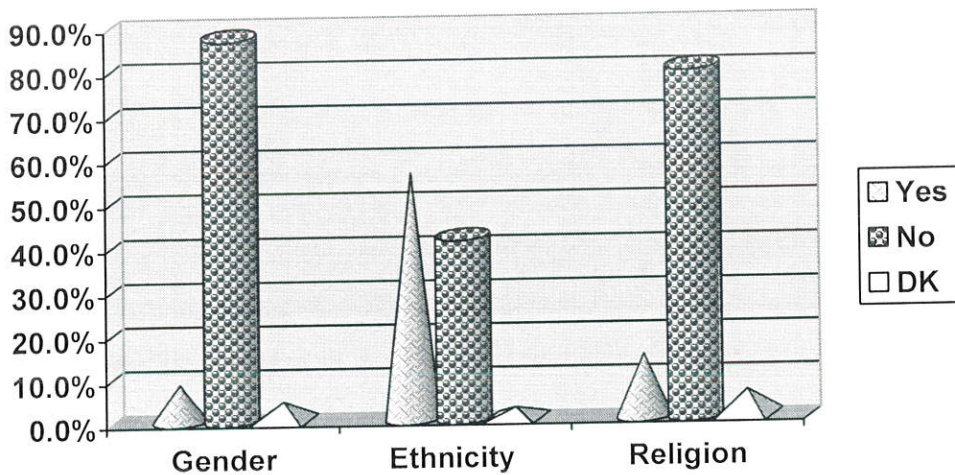
A question was designed to assess the concern of the companies towards serious unemployment problems resulting from the companies' business decisions. To find out this, employees were asked 'Is your company sensitive to serious unemployment problems as a result of its business decisions?' (Q 10) and only 1.7% believe that their company takes unemployment problems as a concern while 93.3% of the respondents rest assured that their employer does not have a concern for unemployment issues. This was fuelled by the fact that

the cost of input is rising currently and the companies are laying off many employees which has created unrest with the rest of the employees thinking that it could be them next term.

## Equal opportunity and fair treatment

To assess the social responsibility of the companies from the point of view of this variable four major questions were asked. The first three questions are related in that they all tried to measure equal opportunity regarding gender, religion and ethnic group and the last question tried to determine fair handling of conflicts in the companies. The responses from the questions regarding gender, ethnic group and religion are summarized in the following chart.

Chart 2. Summary-Equal Opportunity and Fair Treatment



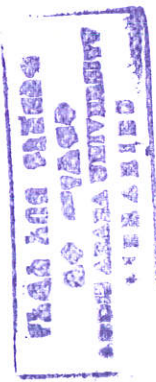
Employees were asked if they ever sensed that there is discrimination in gender (Q7.1), Ethnicity (Q 7.2) and Religion (Q 7.3) and their response revealed that there is little discrimination (8.3%) in gender and religion (14.17%), but when it comes to ethnicity a

significant number of employees (55.8%) are convinced that there is discrimination in hiring and unfair treatment of employees based on their ethnicity.

Though the companies are doing right on gender and religion, they should work on eliminating discrimination based on ethnicity. If the problem persists for long it will have an impact in building teams with in the organization, because employees will have grudge on one another.

### **Human Rights and labour standards**

Three questions were designed to assess the level with which the companies under study embrace, support and enact a set of core values in the areas of human rights and labour standards. The responses from the three questions are summarized as follows:



In an attempt to determine whether the companies uphold freedom of association or not, the respondents were asked Q. 14 ‘does your company respect your right for forming an

association' and a large majority (95.8%) responded that their freedom of association is intact while a small group of people (4.2%) claimed that they do not know if the company respects their freedom of association.

The employees were also asked if there is any forced or compulsory labor (Q.15) and there was a unanimous response from all of the respondents saying that there is no forced or compulsory labor in their respective organizations.

The last question the respondents asked were 'the use of child labor in producing their products' (Q.16) and the majority (90.8%) of the employees said that they have never witnessed the company making use of child labor while (9.2%) said they do not know if the company is using child labor or not.

The data from the last three questions shows that the companies under study have a good respect for human rights and labor standards set by such international organizations as the United Nations.

## **Social responsibility towards the Environment**

Many Industries are characterized by extraction and processing of natural resources as raw materials. These same raw materials find their way into the environment indifferent forms as finished products and waste products. The leather industry is no exception to this fact. Natural resources are fragile and need to be managed rationally so that, in meeting the needs of the present generations, the welfare of future generations is not compromised.

Industrial development at the cost of environmental pollution and degradation is unsustainable. In the past, industry was responding to pollution and environmental degradation in three ways: by ignoring the problem; by diluting or dispersing the pollution so that its effects are less apparent and by trying to control the pollution and the wastes through 'end-of-pipe' pollution control approaches at the best. During this period, most industrial wastes were disposed of with out proper evaluation of their environmental consequences. Different types of wastes, including toxic or hazardous, were being dumped in large rivers, lakes, in open spaces or in dumping sites within the premises of factories. It is believed that the relentless efforts of Ethiopian Environmental Protection Authority and other concerned organizations will improve the current behaviour of industries on industrial waste management.



To assess the social responsibility of the companies under study towards the environment, an interview was administered with the company officials and an official from the Ethiopian Environmental Protection Authority. In addition to the interviews different documents relating to environmental protection were reviewed.

The purpose of the interview with the Environmental protection Authority official and the review of the related documents was to find out whether the industry has any negative impact and to know if there are any guidelines and standards set out by the authority to minimize environmental impact. The interview with the company officials was made to find out the mechanisms, by which the companies limit the negative impact of their operation on the environment and the different ways by which they discharge their social responsibility towards the environment (E.g. using a recyclable input, reduction or efficient utilization of energy, water and natural resources etc).

In an attempt to find out the environmental impact of the firms under study and the industry in general a question ‘What are the major emissions from the industry having undesirable impact on the environment’ was asked. The environmental protection authority of Ethiopia has identified the leather industry as a pollutant through its major emissions. The major emissions of the industry are classified in to two:

- Waste water from tanning of skin & hides containing chrome, sulphides, ammonium salts, chlorides, etc.
- Solid waste from dehairing, fleshing & trimming of hide & skin.

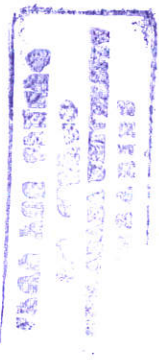
After getting an insight about the negative effects of the leather industry’s operation on the environment, a question was asked if there are any guidelines and standards set by the Ethiopian Environmental Authority to limit these negative effects. The authority has set out

permit requirements to start a business and guidelines on industrial waste handling. The authority requires firms having negative operational impact on the environment to submit environmental impact study report so that they can get approval. After the approval of the environment impact study report by the authority licensing agencies will issue trade and operational license.

The authority has also formulated guidelines that are meant to facilitate the adoption of a basic waste management program. Companies will be required to come up with a detailed Waste Handling Plan.

Company officials were interviewed to assess how they limit the environmental impact of their operations and they claimed that they are following the guidelines set by the environmental protection authority for waste handling.

They were also asked the different ways with which the companies' discharge their responsibility towards the environment. Even though they do not have clearly articulated guidelines or procedures for reducing consumption of energy, water and other natural resources, they all said that they encourage their employees to do so.



## **Social responsibility towards the local community**

Working with local community brings a wide range of business benefits. There are many different ways by which companies discharge their social responsibility towards the local community. In this regard, officials from the four selected companies were interviewed on how they are being responsible are discharging their responsibility to their local community. Their responses are outlined as follows:

- Financial contribution: The companies make frequent Financial contributions to different charities, government (specially to help the government whenever disaster strikes)
- Offering work experience for students (Apperentship): During the last months of every calendar year, the companies accept a handful of students attending colleges for an apperentship program, where students can get first hand experience relating to their field of study.

- Supporting community groups, especially those that are working around HIV/AIDS: The companies help groups that are voluntarily helping people with HIV/AIDS by making contributions in kind.
  
- Encouraging employee volunteering in the community E.g. Planting trees.  
The employees of the companies have actively participated in planting trees in areas around Addis Ababa during the turn of the new Ethiopian Millennium.
  
- Hiring people from the localities (most of the employees working in production department on contractual basis are hired from the localities where the companies are operating)



## **Conclusion**

The concept of social responsibility is an evolving concept where there are very divergent views on its application and potential benefits it brings to a business. There is growing recognition of the significant effect the activities of the private sector have on society -- on employees, customers, communities, the environment, competitors, business partners, investors, shareholders, governments and others. It is also becoming increasingly clear that firms can contribute to their own wealth and to overall societal wealth by considering the effect they have on the different stakeholders at large when making decisions. It is with this idea in mind that the study was conducted.

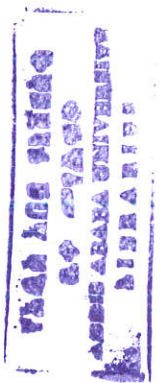
The result of the study shows that the leather industry, as many other manufacturing industries, has its own undesirable impact on the environment and the society in general in pursuit of their major objective. The study tried to assess how the industry is discharging its social responsibility towards its employees, the environment and the local community. As far as the responsibility towards employees is concerned, the industry is far from responsible in the counts of benefit and compensation, sensitivity to serious unemployment issues resulting from business decisions and open and transparent communication and consultation. But it is

not all doom and gloom, as the industry is found more responsible towards employees in the area of health and safety, Human right issues and Equal opportunity and treatment.

The leather industry is not working too much towards the environment, what is observed is a mere compliance to different guidelines set out by the Ethiopian Environmental Authority. The companies should have the initiative to do more to the environment. There is a general lack of awareness by the companies as to what more to do for the environment. The industry is better engaged in philanthropic activities to the local community even though there is still a lot more to be done.

## Recommendations

Social Responsibility is not just about doing the right thing. It also offers direct business benefits. Of course there are considerable costs in building a socially responsible company, but the costs are believed to bring future benefits for the businesses in pursuit of their major objective, maximizing owners' wealth. In the modern times there are a host of factors such as, globalization and market forces, social awareness and education, government laws and regulations and crises and their consequences that drive the adoption of social responsibility in a company's operations. Thus companies should be able to respond to these pressures. To better respond to these pressures and to get the best out of being socially responsible, the following recommendations are forwarded.



1. Companies should be more responsible towards their environment by taking measures such as reduced consumption of energy, water and natural resources, by using recyclable inputs and materials and by using environmentally friendly technologies for production and operations. This will help reduce the negative impacts of the industry.
2. Working with the local community beyond philanthropic activities. Working with the local community brings a wide range of business benefits. By improving their

reputation, companies can find it easier to recruit employees. A good relationship with local authorities can also make their business life much easier.

3. For a company to be successful and stay in business for long, the motivation, commitment and stability of its staff members have a paramount importance. For this to come true, the company's under study should try to be more responsible towards their employees, specially in the areas of paying comparable compensation and finding a way for career advancement and helping families of workers in Education, transportation, medical care and etc; transparent communication and consultation of employees to handle downturns in business. For example, consulting employees for a pay cut rather than a complete layoff.

4. There should be a government body to nurture existing socially responsible companies by providing incentives such as preferential access to capital at low cost of capital and providing subsidies . This will raise awareness of the concept of social responsibility and help companies already doing their business in a socially responsible way to be a role model for others.



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**Addis Ababa University**  
**Faculty of Business and Economics**  
**MBA Program**  
**Research Questionnaire**

The purpose of this questionnaire is to obtain data for a research conducted on the topic “Assessment of Social Responsibility in the Leather Industry”. The major objective of the study is to investigate the applicability of the issues of social responsibility in the industry.

Based on the experience you have and your personal view about the issue try to give the appropriate response by putting a check mark (✓) in the box corresponding to your choice

The researcher assures you that it is not a test of your ability; and all the information you provide will be confidential and is to be used only for academic research purpose.

Thank You  
Yonas Estifanos



**GENERAL INFORMATION**

1. Name of employee (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_
2. Job title/ position \_\_\_\_\_
3. Educational status \_\_\_\_\_
4. Work experience in the organization ( in years)
  - Less than a year \_\_\_\_\_
  - One to Five years \_\_\_\_\_
  - Five to Ten years \_\_\_\_\_
  - More than Ten year \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you feel that your job is dangerous in causing illness or injury?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_
2. Do you believe that your company is honest in communicating with you and open in sharing information?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_
3. Will your company consult you on how to handle a downturn in business?  
E.g. offering the option of pay cut instead of layoff  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_
4. Does your company provide its staff training opportunities and mentoring for maximizing promotion with in the organization?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_
5. Do you think that your company is accessible to your input, ideas, complaints and requests?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you think that your company engages in good faith negotiations with employees when conflicts arise?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_
7. Is there equal treatment in your company in the areas of:  
Gender Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_  
Religion Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_  
Ethnic group Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_
8. Is there any protection mechanism to protect you from avoidable injury and illness in the work place?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you believe that you are provided with a favorable working condition?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_
10. Is your company sensitive to serious unemployment problems frequently associated with business decisions?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_
11. Do you believe that you are provided with reasonable, comparable and satisfactory compensation?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_
12. Are there any established policies by the company to ensure your health and safety?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_
13. If your answer for item (4) is yes, are the policies made known to all employees?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_
14. Do you believe that your company supports the freedom of association?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_
15. Is there any forced or compulsory labor in your company?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_
16. Have you ever witnessed that your company is making use of child labor?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't Know \_\_\_\_\_

