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Construction firm discusses ways to strengthen partnerships with NGOs at inaugural forum, writes **Nora Tong**

Candid and constructive communication with partners in the non-profit world is crucial to the success of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes.

Realising this, Gammon Construction organised a forum last September where 40 company staff and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) shared their views. NGO attendees were drawn from partners such as Hong Chi Association, Haven of Hope Christian Service, Christian Zheng Sheng College, Crossroads Foundation and T.W.G.H.s Tuen Mun Integrated Service Centre.

"The forum was held to communicate the initiatives and their outcomes to senior management, foster team spirit between Gammon managers and NGOs, and let our staff understand more about

building partnerships across sectors," says Shirley Algire, group sustainability and CSR manager at Gammon, a construction firm with an annual turnover of more than US\$1 billion.

Algire says Gammon has built partnerships with a number of NGOs over the past few years, providing funding support, volunteers and resources such as company vehicles, stationery and venues. She adds that the company intends to make the forum an annual event.

At the forum, which was hosted at Hong Chi Pinehill Village in Tai Po, participants learned more about the company's CSR initiatives and the



(Left) In the CSR forum, key aspects to develop successful cross-sector partnerships with participants are reviewed. (Below) 150 Gammon volunteers participate in the 2010 Hong Kong International Coastal Cleanup Challenge, for which they won the gold medal in the 'Largest Corporate Team' category and the grand prize for collecting the most trash.

Roll call

- Gammon joined the Hong Kong International Coastal Cleanup Challenge in an effort to save the environment
- Supported the "Corporate Sustainability For School" programme organised by the Business Environment Council
- Raised funds for the Sedan Chair Race in support of local charities
- Was the top fundraiser in the Central Rat Race
- Donated to Community Chest events such as the Green Day, the Skip Lunch Day and the Community Chest Challenge Marathon

experiences of NGO representatives and Gammon staff.

They were also taught how to assess the merits of a project and develop effective partnerships at a workshop conducted by CSR Asia, a group promoting corporate responsibility.

Participants then broke into small groups and discussed the resources required or actions to be taken for the programmes to run more effectively.

Among the participants' suggestions was the need for the company to step up internal and external communication about its projects, find ways to measure the impact of the programmes more precisely, and arrange mentoring for employees to help them understand NGOs and the projects better.

Cliff Leung, a senior project manager at Gammon, appreciates his employer's initiative to create a platform for open communication with its NGO partners.

"We realised that a more concrete measurement of impact is needed, and that key performance indicators must be incorporated into the design of a project [in the initial phase]," he says.

Vivian Ho, communications and fundraising manager at Hong Chi Association, says it is important for an NGO to keep a cordial line of communication with its corporate partners in order to meet each other's needs and expectations. "It is [also] important to show them [the] impact their contribution has made to the beneficiaries. [Companies] appreciate a timely report that can show measurable, quantifiable results," she adds.

Has your company launched an innovative corporate social responsibility initiative that you would like to share with our readers? Write in and tell us about it at: editor@classifiedpost.com

