SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IS A LONG TERM SOLUTION

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. MONA NICOLICI, COMMUNITY RELATIONS MANAGER AT PETROM

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Abstract
The United Nations Development Programme in Romania discussed with Mrs. Mona Nicolici about the social business competition Made in the country of Andrei, a contest that was launched at the beginning of this year, about the project The Country of Andrei of which this competition is part of, about the corporate social responsibility program of Petrom and about the future plans of the company from this point of view.

Key words: Petrom, social business, Made in the Country of Andrei, corporate social responsibility.

Mona Nicolici, Petrom: Social entrepreneurship is a long term solution, not only because it resolves the social problems of the communities, but because it helps them support themselves in the future.

Petrom is one of the most active companies in Romania from the social involvement point of view of, supporting for over six years social, environmental, educational and health projects, following first of all to have a long term development of the communities. At the beginning of this year (2012), Petrom has launched Made in the Country of Andrei, the biggest social business competition from Romania, offering a financing with a total value of 350.000 Euro to the winner projects. About this initiative, about social entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility, but also about the future plans of the company, we have discusses with Mona Nicolici, Community Relations Manager at Petrom.

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1. Social business and social entrepreneurship represent subjects that are more and more present in the public agenda. Why have you chosen to get involved in such an area of activity?

We have chosen to encourage the development of social businesses because they represent a business model and also a sustainable way to transform social problems into business opportunities. We had the chance to meet social entrepreneurs and we have seen how true change means and looks like. This convinced us that in order to have a long term impact in the disadvantaged communities, social entrepreneurship is a way to be followed.

Social entrepreneurship is a long term solution, not only because it resolves the social problems of the communities, but because it helps them support themselves in the future.

2. What is the purpose of the project Made in the Country of Andrei?

We desire that the project Made in the Country of Andrei creates jobs into the communities we had in view, resolving in the same time a part of the social problems they are dealing with. Also, we would like that all Romanian people, not just the competitors or the winners of the competitions, learn more on social entrepreneurship and undertake this kind of thinking. At the end of the project, we would like to have business Made in the Country of Andrei, we want to have success stories and models to be followed by as many enthusiastic Romanians as possible, eager to change for the better the world they live in, both for them and for those around them!

3. Who has entered the competition and in what areas of Romania will start social business projects?

The competition was open both for the entrepreneurs (natural persons), and also for the NGOs, for the Authorized Natural Persons, for
the Limited Liability Companies and for the individual enterprises, as long as they came with the proposal of a social business for one of the 28 selected communities. In total, over 500 social business ideas were enrolled in the competition by Romanians ready to work for the building of stronger communities.

These are: Merișani, Băbana (county of Argeș); Zemeș, Moinești, Comănești (county of Bacău); Suplacu de Barcău, Abrămuț (county of Bihor); Corbu (county of Constanța); Moreni, Gura Ocniței, Mănești, Șelaru (county of Dâmbovița); Independența, Schela (county of Galați); Clejani, Ghimpați, Bucșani (county of Giurgiu); Bustuchin, Hurezani (county of Gorj); Icoana (county of Olt); Băicoi, Boldești- Scăeni, Telega (county of Prahova); Marca (county of Sălaj); Siliștea, Poeni (county of Teleorman); Gușoeni (county of Vâlcea); Burcioaia (county of Vrancea).

Our partners from the NESsT Foundation shall work with each entrepreneur individually, in order to offer personalized support, depending on the needs and the development phase of each idea or business.

We have taken the decision to travel to the largest cities in the vicinity of the communities for which projects can be proposed. For two weeks we have met with those interested in social businesses, in five of the most important cities of the country - Craiova, Bucharest, Constanța, Bacău and Oradea. The purpose of these meetings was to inform them in detail and to encourage as many people who are open for social entrepreneurship to enroll the competition.

4. How will you assess the performances of the financing program?

After the first year that the program was carried out, we propose to have ten solid social businesses, prepared to change the communities we had in view. We want to know that we have made everything possible, that we have invested all the available resources in those business plans and in those people, so that we can see tangible results. This does not mean that rest of the ideas we received shall be ignored, on the contrary we shall try to support them and redirect them to other potential financiers.
At the end of the program, we want to count the jobs! We want all the financed businesses to have a real impact in the communities and to increase the standards of living and the life conditions of the inhabitants, to reduce the number of the social assisted persons, transforming them into active players of the labor market.

5. What is in fact the Country of Andrei? Who is Andrei and how does he look like?

Andrei is each of us, regardless of age, gender or religion. Andrei is an individual who, together with the people around him, tries to create a better country each day. Through his ideas and his behavior, Andrei is inspiring the people he has contact with, motivates them to get involved in the building of a better future. Why Andrei? Because this is one of the best known names in Romania and because, each of us has an Andrei or an Andreea around him worth fighting for.

In the same time, Saint Andrew is the Apostle who christened the Romanian people and he is the protector of Romania. We have considered these are important reasons for each citizen of this country can see in Andrei a symbol in which he can strongly believe in, Andrei being a child’s name that reflects respect for the future. When we have designed the corporate social responsibility campaign, we wanted to show respect to what will come. We desired and we undertook the commitment that, through our today’s actions, we ensure a better future for the generation to come – the children of Andrei.

The country of Andrei is a large community orientated towards solutions. A community made of people who are not backing out of the fight of transforming their initiatives into reality. A community that reunites people with an entrepreneurial spirit and motivates the communities of Romania to act for changing their lives. The Country of Andrei proposes to transform into reality the projects that are ingeniously using the resources that the communities have in order to produce sustainable values for these.
6. The project the Country of Andrei exists for more than three years. What did this project had as objectives and where is it now?

More than three years ago we have started with enthusiasm, a few people having the confidence that it is worth the fight to build a country where each of us, through small gestures or big projects have the power to build the future where we desire to live in.

Also for three years, the Country of Andrei is the place where beautiful and relevant projects for Romania are born, grown and getting alive. We have managed to get together with us over 200,000 people whose sustained efforts were transformed into visible changes in the communities:

- 150,000 trees planted in several communities of the country;
- over 4,000 volunteers who joined Petrom in the projects that are transforming the communities, from 2009 until now;
- over 1,600 projects, initiated by people of all ages who shall improve the life of the community they belong to, were enrolled in the competitions Your City, the Petrom City and the School of Andrei;
- over 90 ideas for changing the communities financed by Petrom with over 480,000 EUR within the same competitions;
- over 25,000 students and over 1,750 professors have submitted projects for bringing a positive change in their communities within the School of Andrei competition;
- over 2,300 children have participated in the Camp from the Country of Andrei.

7. How would you measure the impact of the actions that you take?

Each project within the Country of Andrei is thought in such a way that it brings a real, long term change in the local communities, but also at national level. Depending on the field we are approach, we are setting precise and measurable objective that we review during the assessment periods.
We are thinking the impact of our actions in terms of:

• **social changes within the community**, such as the opportunities for creating jobs. At the end of the 3 years of the process for selecting, financing and supporting the winners of the competition Made in the Country of Andrei, we desire to have 10 strong and independent social businesses that provide jobs, opportunities and business markets, raising the standard of living in the area. Right now, we are in a full process of assessing the over 500 social business ideas enrolled in the competitions by Romanian people who are ready to work for building stronger communities. The enthusiasm and the large number of people with initiative spirit that have joined us in adopting social businesses as a long term solution for the development of communities has impressed us and made us accountable. Because of them, we are sure that our initiative shall have a considerable impact in the 28 selected communities;

• **a higher educational level** - through informal education, the School of Andrei has offered over 25,000 student and to over 1,750 professors the opportunity to think projects and to transform them into reality in order to bring a positive change in the communities they live in;

• **Sustainability** - the more than 1,600 projects enrolled in the competitions Your City, the Petrom City, the School of Andrei, but also the social enterprises Made in the Country of Andrei, initiated by citizens with the purpose of improving the lives of the community they belong to, have a strong component of sustainable development. We want that the help we have given to this project to be supported in time by the initiators and by the authorities, so that their results can be seen on long term.

8. Throughout time you have involved in environmental, educational and health projects, therefore a large scope of fields. What is the social responsibility strategy of Petrom? How do you choose the projects you invest in?

Six years ago, when we started going on the road of social responsibility, we have identified the key-areas where Romania needs
support. Environment, education and health market stood out as the areas that are in need of the Petrom contribution the most. Alongside with these, the field we operate in, the energy field has determined us to focus our efforts in four directions:

- **Environment** – planting activities in communities within the country, with an emphasis to protect the communities from the extreme meteorological conditions – massive snowfalls, landslides but also activities to educate the employees and the communities we operate in with regards to the protection of environment and the responsible use of the natural resources;

- **Community development** – supporting and financing the initiatives that resolve a problem or respond to an important need of the communities;

- **Education** – non-formal education and personal development activities that contribute to the development of the Country of Andrei citizens’ initiative spirit, the support of education within the communities we operate in, ensuring decent conditions for the education of the children and of the professors but also supporting the performances of the pupils and students from Romania;

- **Health** – over half of the Romanian population enjoys access to emergency medical services through the telemedicine network to which Petrom has contribute within the program “Access to life”. Also, we have presented to the Romanian public the success stories of over 1.600 doctors throughout the country within the campaign “Doctor, you are e hero!”

Our actions have in view first of all the employees of Petrom, without whom this change of attitude would not take place. But our partnership is directed also towards all those with whom we interact daily: clients, shareholders, investors, the media, business partners, authorities, non-governmental organizations, local communities. Eventually, the future is a concern for all of us, this is why we are obliged to respect it.

Starting with November 2012, all the steps regarding the social responsibility of the Petrom Company are integrated under the platform The Country of Andrei that set the objective to promote and support the entrepreneurial vision through the new projects we have started this year.
The Country of Andrei supports those who know, can and want to inspire the people around them, those who want to make a future on their own and want to create, together, a better country each day. The Country of Andrei believes in people and in the power of those who are ambitious, who succeed in growing with their own forces and in the power of those who know how to guide and inspire them.

Furthermore, since the beginning of 2013, Petrom has reached a new level in the commitment it undertook in this direction, by getting involved in a large project in the field of social entrepreneurship – Made in the Country of Andrei. Because, from our position as leaders, we are not just promoting performance, but we desire to inspire the other Romanian people to get this process further. Therefore, the communities shall become stronger and independent, and they will be able to support themselves in a sustainable manner.

9. What does the concept of social responsibility mean for Petrom?

According to the Petrom vision, „social responsibility” means more than a set of sporadic, disparate measures. It is a long term commitment, a common effort, both from the part of the company and from the part of the Petrom employees and from the part of our partners.

For us, corporate responsibility has meant, from the very beginning, an attitude of business ethics, but also a responsible behavior from the part our employees. We knew this is a long road and that change will not come over night, but as long as the involvement of the management was constant all these years, the results have already started to show.

Throughout the years we have built parks, we have re-build schools, we have offered quality education, we have reforested, we have supported the civil society, we have invested in people, and we have placed the volunteer work in Romania on an honorable position. But even more that, we have won the trust of the Romanians with regards to the fact that we are a company that is involved, that cares about people and keeps its promises. Our organizational culture has changed a lot for the better together with the development of our projects, and the management of the company has continued to support this activity and strategy.
10. Some companies are still looking at social involvement with mistrust, and when they decide to do it they approach social responsibility more from the perspective of an exercise of image. What would you recommend to these organizations?

To the companies that still remain unconfident with regards to corporate social responsibility (SCR) I recommend them to think beyond philanthropy, beyond the “let’s do good” and especially beyond the image laundering. SCR is nothing of these, but it is a business function that regards the healthy development of a company, of its partners and of the communities in which that business operates in. It is correct that, in the same time, it is a process which, if carried out in a proper and constant way, shows its benefits in time and not rapidly like a public relations (PR) campaign or an image campaign. This means that, once undertaken, social responsibility must be proved on long term. Otherwise, the results that are obtained shall be lost soon.

In order to have SCR, you don’t necessary need to allocate huge budgets. It depends on the size of the business, on the risk it involves. But it also means, first of all, to undertake in an honest and public way this commitment and the analysis of the needs that the company has in the relationship with its stakeholders. Then, you can make your own policy in this field and put it into practice.

I believe that soon, no company will be able to overlook this area, so, beyond the allocation of some budgets, I consider they should start thinking in these terms and find solutions that are more efficient and more strategic, which could help the long term development of their business.

11. What are the future plans of Petrom with regards to social responsibility?

Under the slogan „The Country of Andrei – a better country each day“, Petrom sets out to promote and support the entrepreneurial spirit through the projects that are currently carried out and which will continue in the future.
The Country of Andrei shall continue the projects of getting involved into the community on the three main directions: environment, education and community development.

- Environment: the planting from The Country of Andrei shall emphasize the protection of the communities from extreme meteorological conditions – massive snowfalls, landslides, but also shall involve the people of the communities to maintain the plantings;

- Community development: through two project contests ("Made in the Country of Andrei" and "Your City"), Petrom shall support the solutions for communities build on criteria of sustainability and criteria that generate long term value, from an economic and social point of view;

- Education: The School and the Camp from the Country of Andrei shall emphasize the development of the entrepreneurial spirit of the students and of the professors and shall offer incentives for their civic involvement with the purpose of developing the Romanian communities.

We shall encourage both individual initiative and also the ones coming from organizations that create economic value for the communities, but that are also addressing social problems. We strongly believe that by encouraging the entrepreneurial spirit integrated with a community approach, we shall truly succeed in making Romania a better country each day.