

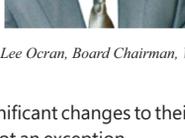
VRA makes significant stride in strategic CSR

In an era of significant improvement in the approach to the practice of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), a corporate citizen like the Volta River Authority is even more desirous to champion sustainable solutions.

The Authority in 2013 made conscious effort to align CSR activities to its business strategies and the communities where it operates, which dovetails into its corporate vision of setting standards for responsible business practice in Africa.

The alignment process began with the introduction of a draft CSR policy and the establishment of a special unit to coordinate all CSR actions within the Authority.

At the just ended 5th VRA Stakeholders Interface in November 2014, Board Chairman Mr Lee Ocran expounded saying: "As a corporate citizen, VRA's CSR initiatives are aimed not only at contributing to the wellbeing of communities; but also towards skills development, education and enterprise development and in turn promoting jobs, alleviating poverty and improving employability.



Mr Lee Ocran, Board Chairman, VRA

Although VRA's social responsibility actions can be traced back to the establishment of the resettlement communities during the creation of the Akosombo Dam, today there has been a shift in the concept (CSR) from when activities were unrelated to a company's core business.

Multinational companies recognizing this important development in the way CSR ought to be approached, have made significant changes to their CSR policies in the past two decades and VRA is not an exception.

Now companies know that incorporating CSR activities into business model and goals would effectively improve their competitive advantage

and open new opportunities for growth and development.

Public performance reporting has become the tool for disclosing and measuring a company's level of CSR activity.



By reporting on CSR actions, a company is able to engage with stakeholders, maintain a meaningful dialogue on the direction of the business and help build a positive image.

In 2013 VRA started its CSR performance reporting based on defining issues that are of importance, taking into account the United Nations Global Compact guiding principles on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption, the VRA Code of Ethics and Core Values as well the Ghana Business Code.

The Authority's overall expenditure on CSR activities in that year amounted to GH¢ 87.9 million as against GH¢62.3 million in 2012, representing an increase of 41%

Major interventions included award of scholarships to 60 youths in VRA communities tenable at second cycle and tertiary schools, signing of a

Memorandum of Understanding with Safe Water Network to provide potable water to VRA communities and implementation of an employee volunteer programme on career guidance and teaching for students of Osu-Doku Senior Secondary and Technical School in the Dangbe West District.

Under environmental sustainability, the Authority's strategy is to diversify generation sources towards more renewable energy development which is one of the most constructive, cost effective ways to address the challenges of high energy prices, energy security, air pollution, and global climate change.

"We are equally planning to identify projects whose carbon emission can be reduced to qualify the VRA to benefit from emission credits. These projects include fuel switching of the Mines Reserve Plant, the fuel switch and expansion of the Takoradi plant, fuel switch at the 50 MW Tema Thermal II Power Plant," Mr Ocran intimated.

In the draft VRA CSR policy, sustainability initiatives are to be driven by the Authority's right to exist, which depends on the responsiveness to the external environment and the people who live in it.

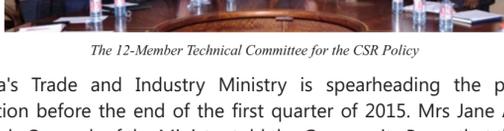
Taking an active interest in the well-being of impacted communities, its employees and the environment, VRA believes it will produce many long-term benefits such as community support, loyalty, and goodwill.

Ghana's CSR Policy takes off early 2015

Come early next year, public and private organisations and businesses in Ghana, whose activities and actions demonstrate poor corporate social responsibilities (CSR) will be exposed following the adoption of a comprehensive new national CSR policy.

The policy, which places Ghana among nations committed to responsible business conduct, is designed to guide and promote the practice of strategic CSR among enterprises.

Under the policy, all investments and activities of businesses, public sector, traditional authorities and civil societies will be monitored to ensure optimization of socio-economic and environmental impact towards sustainable development.



The 12-Member Technical Committee for the CSR Policy

Ghana's Trade and Industry Ministry is spearheading the policy's adoption before the end of the first quarter of 2015. Mrs Jane Abena Mensah-Onumah of the Ministry told the *Community Pages* that the 12-Member Technical Committee had already submitted its final draft of the policy and would soon receive ministerial and cabinet's approval.

The decision to draft the policy followed the recommendation by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in 2005 to clarify the concept of CSR in the country.

The guiding principles of the policy are taken from the International Standards Organisation's guidance on CSR [ISO 26000:2010], which stipulates seven key principles of accountability, transparency, ethical behaviour, respect for stakeholder interest, the rule of law, international norms of behaviour and human rights.

Currently in Ghana, CSR practices as indicated in the introductory chapter of the draft policy framework, are ad hoc and only provide a basic CSR framework, which gives minimum standards for business performances.

The Government in 2013 initiated the policy draft process in partnership with the German Development Organization (GIZ-Ghana) and the Centre for Cooperation with the Private Sector, South Africa. A broad national stakeholder consultation was held nationwide to seek inputs for the development of thematic areas of the policy driven by the Centre for Corporate Responsibility of the University of Ghana Business School.

The Volta River Authority, Ghana's major utility provider, was among the key stakeholders that were invited to share their CSR experience during the series of workshops to gather inputs. In all over 1,600 representatives participated in the dialogue sessions.

Conclusion

Studies all over the world have shown that companies which pursue CSR as part of their corporate strategic plan do not only achieve their corporate goals, but also benefit from improved efficiency, cost savings, stronger branding, increased public trust, improved employee health and better market access. Many developed nations today especially in the European Union (EU) had introduced national policies on CSR. In the case of Ghana, the absence of a clear policy over the years had made it difficult for individuals and public agencies seeking to hold corporations responsible and accountable for their social responsibilities.

VRA opens CSR Unit office to champion sustainability

The Volta River Authority (VRA) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Unit, which is championing corporate social activities and sustainable development solutions on behalf of the Authority, has opened its office within the Ridge Tower building in Accra.

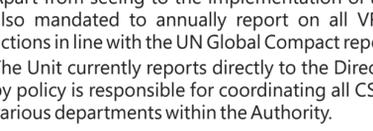
The CSR Unit's office, which falls under the General Services Department of the Authority, was opened in January 2014.

The Unit is currently being manned by a Publicity/Information Officer, a Community Relations Officer and an Administrative Assistant.

All over the world today the importance of CSR is pushing more and more companies to take keen effort to ensure that their practices and processes, products and services and procedures are carried out in an ethical, sustainable and environmentally friendly manner.

The VRA as a recognised reputable institution living its core values of accountability, commitment trust, integrity and teamwork, cannot afford to lag behind, hence its management's decision to create the unit to champion all CSR actions.

The Unit's mandate includes defining and developing the strategies which underpin VRA's CSR objectives; conduct research and come up with ideas to develop policies; build relationships with partner organisations and communities; implement and coordinate a range of activities and initiatives designed to have a positive impact on the environment and impacted communities as well as generate the needed awareness on the Authority's commitment to CSR and publicity around its altruistic endeavours.



CSR Unit Office at the Ridge Tower

The VRA's draft CSR Policy mandates the Unit to ensure the Authority conducts its business in a socially responsible and ethical manner; protects the environment and guarantees safety in its operations as well as respects and supports the impacted communities in their development efforts.

Apart from seeing to the implementation of all CSR actions, the Unit is also mandated to annually report on all VRA's CSR and sustainable actions in line with the UN Global Compact reporting requirements.

The Unit currently reports directly to the Director, General Services, who by policy is responsible for coordinating all CSR activities undertaken by various departments within the Authority.

VRA CSR
"Championing Sustainable Solutions"