

## GSD teams up with Trust to boost community relations

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Unit has initiated action to collaborate with the VRA Resettlement Trust Fund to share ideas towards deepening the Authority's community outreach programmes.

Both parties have agreed to trade ideas on community issues, partner each other on community development projects and ensure that all socially responsible interventions in VRA impacted communities are documented measured and reported for strategic policy decision and direction.

The overall objective is to position VRA as a highly socially responsible organisation ready to create value through investments and activities.



(VRA team from Left) Ms Abia Fiafio, GSD Director; Mrs Tandy Chotia, GSD Admin Manager and Francis Boateng, CSR Unit's Community Relations Officer at the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter meeting

The collaboration, which started February this year, became necessary because of the growing negative perception of the VRA by some impacted communities. Whereas some communities feel neglected by the Authority, others are of the view that VRA has been slow in helping them address their needs and challenges.

This negative perception has persisted perhaps due to the lack of adequate data/information on community issues and social interventions and poor communication of such issues.

The CSR Unit and the Trust Fund believe that through effective community engagement strategies, the communities' expectations would be better managed.



(Trust Fund's team from Left) Ms Patience Asem, Executive Director; Mrs Margaret Tetteh, Administrative Officer and Anthony Agblevor, Senior Technical Officer at the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter meeting

The partnership will help to avoid duplication of efforts, ensure complementarity in community engagement issues, and capture all activities being performed by the two parties towards the overall reputational enhancement of the Authority.

Every year VRA gives the Trust Fund the equivalent of USD 500,000 to cater for the development needs of the 52 Resettlement communities under the Akosombo project.

"A lot of the activities of the two entities are complementary but because there has not been effective dialogue, a full picture of activities being performed are not known to each other," Ms Abia Fiafio, Director, General Services Department said at the maiden meeting.

Ms. Patience Asem, the Executive Director of the Trust Fund, said a major challenge in the Trust's delivery of projects had been the reluctance of communities to undertake minor wear and tear repairs on projects that have been handed over to them to manage.

This, she said, could not be sustainable given the growing demands from the communities and VRA as the main source of the Fund. According to her, the district assemblies as agents of development see the resettlement communities as "VRA Babies" and so have excluded them in the Assemblies' basic needs programmes.

The two entities now hold quarterly meetings and hope to organise an annual meeting involving departments of the VRA with the Trust Fund before the end of the year.

## CSR Practice: Why VRA Can't be a Backbencher

Corporate Social Responsibility, commonly called CSR, has been defined differently at different times.

For a long time CSR meant corporate philanthropy, with companies giving back to society and the communities where they operate through donations and sponsorships.

Today, although donations and sponsorships are still common features in CSR actions, the term has an expanded definition.

The emphasis is now on the range of activities critical for ensuring that an organization can remain in business.

In that context, CSR is sometimes referred to as responsible corporate citizenship, corporate sustainability, sustainable responsible business, responsible business, creating shared value and social performance.

This translates into such responsible actions as reducing the carbon footprint and doing social good, leading to positive impact on the environment, consumers, employees, communities and other stakeholders.



CSR experts, including Professor Wayne Dunn of the CSR Training Institute, believe that the concept is taking the world of business by storm and companies and organizations that remain less sensitive will have themselves to blame.

Their position is supported by CSR-mishaps that have dented the reputations of such corporate giants as IKEA, Barclays Bank and lately VW.

Globally, CSR is taking on a bigger dimension as the main theme for many recent world gatherings during which demands are made on governments, businesses and private sector organizations to take actions that contribute to a safer world.

On September 27<sup>th</sup> this year the world came together to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and adopt 17 new global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the next 15 years.

And already the call has gone out to the corporate world to contribute its quota to attain the SDG goals and thereby make the planet a better place.

But it is not all about giving to benefit the society. Good CSR should have clear benefits for the organization as well if it is well integrated into its profit-making strategies.

For example, VRA's good CSR actions embrace reducing negative impacts on people and the physical environment. If properly situated within corporate strategy, then VRA could gain social license, attract the right calibre of manpower, and guarantee sustainable use of natural resources.

The resultant reputational gain and brand visibility will be invaluable. VRA can then stand on that platform to pursue aggressive customer retention strategies to earn customer loyalty and penetrate new markets.

In finding more efficient ways to use materials, even if using less toner, paper and water for energy and sewerage, the Authority can help reduce the costs of inputs and utility.

Studies have shown that organizations that undertake CSR programmes get in return increased morale and highly motivated employees. This usually translates into high productivity.

A good testimony of such a morale booster programme is the VRA Employee Volunteer Programme, which has created the platform for staff to give back to their communities through teaching and counselling.

With a strong record of performance management anchored on a vision of setting standards for public sector excellence in Africa, VRA cannot afford to be at the back seat of CSR practice. Not when a draft national CSR policy is also soon to be adopted for all public and private sector companies and organizations in the country.



CSR creates shared value for both businesses and society. It is not an end in itself but a journey and a process with sustainability as its ultimate goal.

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