

VRA Among Top Eight Organisations for Best CSR Practice

The Volta River Authority's (VRA) knack for excellence and good business practice with a touch of responsibility continues to gain recognition at the local and international fronts.

The latest of which is the Authority's selection among Ghana's top eight organisations for Best Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practice case studies by the United Nations Global Compact Ghana Network.

The UN Global Compact is a strategic policy initiative for businesses that are committed to aligning their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption.

The VRA and the seven others – Standard Chartered Bank, Stanbic Bank, Guinness Ghana Limited, Coca Cola Bottling Company of Ghana, Ghana Manganese Company, Goli Ghana and Interplast Ghana Limited - have been selected as best practice case stories to be circulated in a special publication this year.

Beyond the public relations and marketing opportunities that this publication will offer the organisations, it is also largely aimed to serve as an inspiration for other companies to sign on to the UN Global Compact.

Under the Compact, VRA and other signatory organisations are expected to publish their annual report, known as Communication on Progress (COP), regarding their actions within the Compact's framework.

This report is a demonstration of a member's commitment to the Compact and its principles, while adhering to values of transparency and disclosure. Failure to communicate will result in a change in participant status and possible delisting.

As a member, VRA's benefits include adopting an established and globally recognized policy framework for the development and implementation of governance policies and practices, and disclosure of environmental and social impacts. In addition, it presents the Authority the opportunity in sharing best and emerging CSR practices to advance practical solutions and strategies to common

challenges as well as gain access to the UN's extensive knowledge and experience with sustainability and development issues.

In November last year at an international course on CSR in Ghana, VRA's name was trumpeted by many speakers as an organisation with a long solid history of good corporate citizenship that other companies could learn from. Of particular interests to the speakers were the VRA community development initiatives for its impacted communities and the effort to incorporate CSR into its business processes.

CSR Today

Organisations are beginning to accept that CSR can no longer be seen as only corporate social assistance or philanthropy. Being socially responsible also means taking care of your staff and creating the right environment for them to be productive and thereby have greater value for your business.

Wayne Dunn, a professor of CSR practice at the McGill University, Canada, commenting on modern CSR, argues that CSR must permeate the full range of organisational activities, projects, programmes and strategies. "Limiting the scope of CSR by narrowly defining it or attempting to parse CSR activities into arbitrary categories can inhibit the overall value creation for a company and for local stakeholders," Professor Dunn adds.



VRA Staff dialogue on new CSR with local and International players in the industry

The recognition of VRA's CSR record over the years by the Government's Taskforce on the Drafting of a National CSR Policy speaks volumes.

VRA, with its cherished history of excellence in setting standards for others, can only lead the crusade within its overall corporate vision.

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VRA PUTS GHANA ON THE WORLD MAP OF RENEWABLES

The Volta River Authority's (VRA) 2.5 Megawatts (MW) Photovoltaic Solar Plant, inaugurated in May last year at Navrongo, has positioned the country on the world map of Renewable Energy (RE) supply.

The plant, making Ghana the first in West Africa to produce the biggest PV solar energy on mainland, was solely financed by VRA as part of a 10-year RE programme driven by the commitment to promote clean energy and sustainable power supply in the ECOWAS sub-region.

VRA's effort advances Ghana's attainment of the UN Millennium Development Goals (Goal 7) for 2015 and is anchored on the principle of sustainability in the generation of electricity.

Although VRA is better known for hydro generation, solar generation has been identified as another important source with numerous advantages in terms of greenhouse gas reduction and sustainable power supply.

The plant works by converting the sun's radiation into direct current (DC) power by use of photovoltaic cells, offering a viable alternative to fossil fuels, primarily coal, fuel oil and natural gas due to its cleanliness and supply.

"Our solar project is helping us keep our emissions very low. We are trying not to be emitters even though we are yet to start setting targets."



Ing. Kojo Antwi of the Engineering Services Department.

Solid Beginning

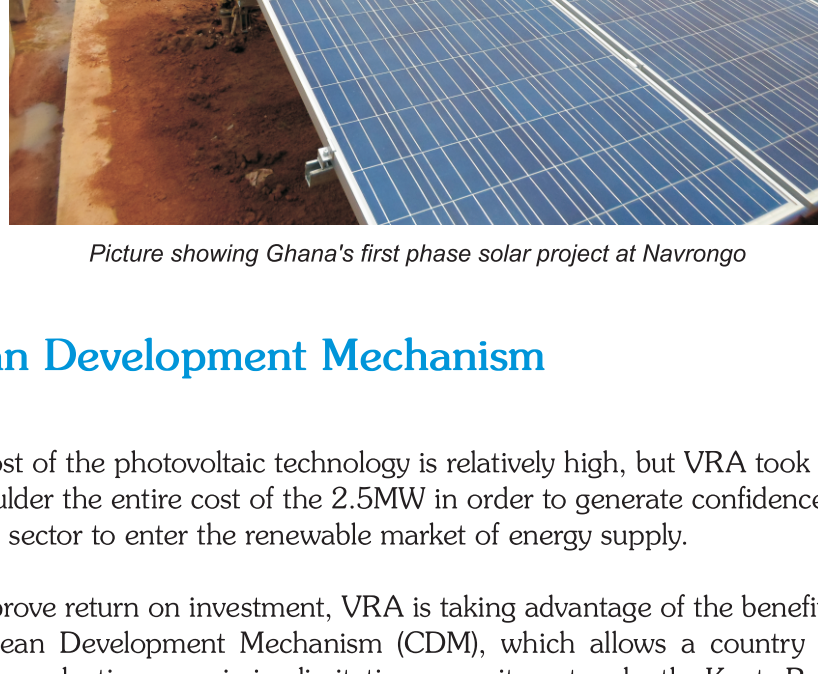
VRA's RE policy is fashioned in line with the Government's renewable programme to diversify the generation portfolio to meet the soaring energy demand of its rapidly growing population and the West Africa sub-region in an environmentally friendly manner.

At present 'clean' electricity from the 11.79-acre land size solar plant amounts to lower than 1% of Ghana's total generation mix. By 2020 Ghana seeks to have 10% of its electricity needs met from renewable sources.

In West Africa, Cape Verde has the biggest PV plant of 7.5MW located on an island, avoiding an estimated emission of 13,000 tons of CO2 annually.

Bright Spot

Navrongo, an important market town, known for its cathedral and grotto, has a terrain that is flat and ecology that is typical of the Sahel areas. It has abundant sunlight, making the area suitable for the project.



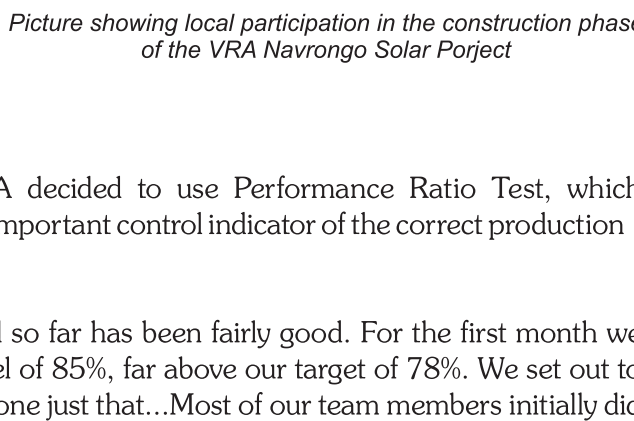
Picture showing Ghana's first phase solar project at Navrongo

Clean Development Mechanism

The cost of the photovoltaic technology is relatively high, but VRA took the lead to shoulder the entire cost of the 2.5MW in order to generate confidence in the private sector to enter the renewable market of energy supply.

To improve return on investment, VRA is taking advantage of the benefits of the UN Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), which allows a country with an emission reduction or emission limitation commitment under the Kyoto Protocol to implement an emission reduction project. Such projects can earn saleable certified emission reduction credits, each equivalent to one ton of CO2.

"For our project, CDM analysis came in when the PV solar plant contract was awarded to the China Wind Power, an investment holding company. The CDM team was involved in reviewing the design and other things as well as visiting the Navrongo community to sensitize people on the project," Ing. Antwi said.



Picture showing local participation in the construction phase of the VRA Navrongo Solar Project

For the plant's output, VRA decided to use Performance Ratio Test, which according to Ing Antwi, is an important control indicator of the correct production of the PV power plant.

"The performance in general so far has been fairly good. For the first month we measured a performance level of 85%, far above our target of 78%. We set out to build the plant and we have done just that...Most of our team members initially did not have the capacity and now we have. It has set us on course to do our other RE projects.

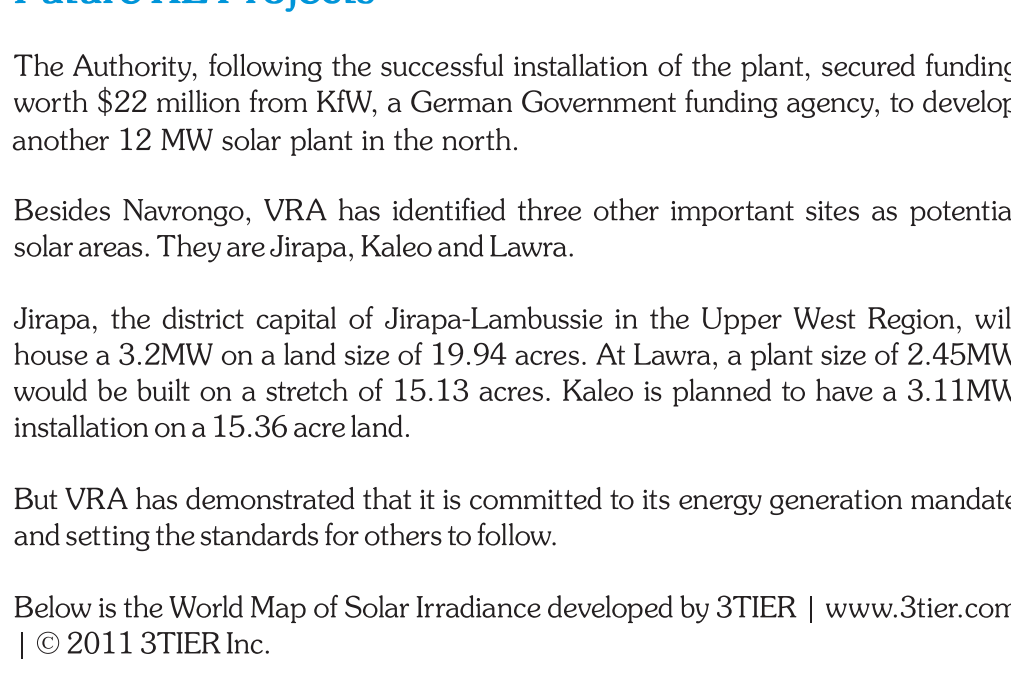
Community Involvement

The people of Navrongo are particularly proud to host the first solar plant in the country. Their acceptance and support were born out of a series of community engagement, which fits well into the Authority's CSR policy framework.

The project team worked closely with the local authorities, the leaders and chiefs of Navrongo to ensure that all stakeholders understood the project, its impacts and benefits.

Solar energy projects are more labour intensive than fossil fuel technologies which are typically mechanized and capital intensive and according to Ing Antwi, "we took people in the community on board during the project.

"The place has also become a tourism attraction," he added.



Picture showing completion of the VRA Navrongo Solar Project

Future RE Projects

The Authority, following the successful installation of the plant, secured funding worth \$22 million from KfW, a German Government funding agency, to develop another 12 MW solar plant in the north.

Besides Navrongo, VRA has identified three other important sites as potential solar areas. They are Jirapa, Kaleo and Lawra.

Jirapa, the district capital of Jirapa-Lambussie in the Upper West Region, will house a 3.2MW on a land size of 19.94 acres. At Lawra, a plant size of 2.45MW would be built on a stretch of 15.13 acres. Kaleo is planned to have a 3.11MW installation on a 15.36 acre land.

But VRA has demonstrated that it is committed to its energy generation mandate and setting the standards for others to follow.

Below is the World Map of Solar Irradiance developed by 3TIER | www.3tier.com | © 2011 3TIER Inc.

