



Enhancing Business-Community Relations

Corporate Responsibility Movement Case Study

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Corporate Responsibility Movement: Demanding Corporate Responsibility is the Key

Research Project Background

This case study is one of ten that were chosen as part of the 'Enhancing Business-Community Relations' project in Ghana implemented in collaboration with the Association of Ghana Industries. These cases document examples of engagement between businesses and communities and can be used as learning tools for the promotion of responsible business practice and sustainable development.

The Enhancing Business-Community Relations project is a joint international initiative between United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and the New Academy of Business. Implemented in seven developing countries, the purpose of the initiative was to collect and document information on business-community practices as perceived by all stakeholders, build partnerships with them and promote corporate social responsibility practices. It is also intended to enhance international understanding of business-community relations through information sharing and networking with other countries especially those participating in the project - Brazil, Ghana, India, Nigeria, Philippines, South Africa and Lebanon.

The findings and recommendations reflected in the case study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of UNV, the Association of Ghana Industries or the New Academy of Business. It is important to note that these cases were written as examples of business-community initiatives. They do not constitute a comprehensive assessment of the company's social responsibility.

1. Movement's Profile

The Corporate Social Responsibility Movement is the title given to a coalition of youth groups in Tema, Ghana. Inaugurated on Saturday 9 February 2002, the active membership strength has grown from 21 to over 300 in the last year. The mission shared by all members and associates is to encourage the private sector to complement the efforts of government in addressing social problems through the promotion of corporate social and environmental responsibility ideals.

The objective of the Movement is to motivate companies operating in Tema community to:

- Contribute meaningfully to the social and economic development of Tema community
- Employ environmental practices that do not compromise the well-being of residents
- Engage in workplace practices that do not compromise the health and safety of community members

A clearly defined four- pronged strategy guides the coalition in its effort to achieve the above listed objectives. The first is to engage the local media as a strategic ally in the advocacy process. This is because the Ghanaian media wields powerful influence on people, politicians and companies. The second involves strengthening the mechanisms available and the willingness and

ability of civil society to utilise those mechanisms to ensure corporate compliance. Raising public awareness on the social responsibility of businesses constitutes the third. It is hoped that increased public attention on corporate responsibility issues will result in new solutions eventually emerging. That is, the activities of the Movement are intended not as an end in themselves but as catalysts for increasing public awareness on the responsibilities of business and fostering eventual societal change. Finally, the Movement intends to lead the way, typically by acting as an incubator for many CSR issues to be picked up by the media and other communities hosting businesses.

2. Drivers of the Movement's Formation

On the eastern coast of the Greater Accra region is the Tema cosmopolitan town with a population of nearly 300,000. Tema comprises of four main communities, namely, Ashaiman, Tema main, Kpone and Tema Newtown. The town is known as the heavy industrial hub of Ghana, with approximately 20 per cent of the country's industrial activities. The community hosts well known multinational companies like Nestlé, Unilever, VALCO, Alcatel, Nexan Cable Metal, GHACEM, PZ Industries Limited, GAFCO and local giants like Cocoa Processing Company Limited, Irani Brothers, Ghana Textile Products (GTP), and Aluworks among others. There is also a very active international harbour and oil refinery. People are attracted to the town because of the promise of jobs in the industrial sector. As a result, the town is growing rapidly but the social conditions have deteriorated.

The underlying causes of the dismal state of corporate responsibility in Tema can be analysed from 'demand' and 'supply' perspectives. From the supply perspective, analysts like George Agbenu of Friends of the Earth and Joshua Awuku Apaw of Green Earth Organisation attribute the low level of corporate responsibility in Tema community to the prevailing notion that corporate responsibility programmes have a constraining influence on business economic performance. This notion has overshadowed the business benefits of CSR policies and practices. The appalling level of corporate responsibility manifests itself in the poor environmental, sanitary and health care conditions. There is also widespread incidence of workplace health and safety inadequacies.

The demand-side perspective ascribes the dismal state of corporate responsibility to civil society's failure to elicit responsiveness and accountability from corporate enterprises. The most widely accepted reason for this failure is civil society's lack of knowledge on how they (civil society) are affected by the exploits of companies operating in their communities or how they can affect the operations of these companies.

3. CSR Movement's Formation Strategy

The formation of the Movement was executed through a series of sensitisation programmes between November 2001 and March 2002. The goal of the sensitisation programme was to build the capacity of the youth groups, community and opinion leaders to demand corporate responsibility and accountability from corporate enterprises operating from the community. Central to the sensitisation programme was the construction of corporate irresponsibility as credible risks. That is, youth groups, opinion and community leaders were brought together and sensitised that the low level of corporate responsibility in the community had reached crisis point, with far-reaching and negative societal implications if they were not resolved. In the course of the sensitisation programme, it was realised that most of the people were profoundly irritated by the irresponsible behaviour of companies that were operating in Tema community. They were made to understand that their irritation was legitimate and, that it was shared. In all, eight youth groups and not less than forty opinion and community leaders were identified and sensitised in Tema Municipality.

Community members later suggested ways by which the dismal corporate responsibility status in Tema could be enhanced. There was a general consensus that the most effective way of addressing irresponsible corporate behaviour in Tema was the formation of a Movement to demand corporate compliance and accountability.

4. Accountability and Awareness Creation Initiatives

To ensure that the demand for corporate accountability and awareness creation reached far and wide, the Movement embarked on a number of activities. These included a media attraction event, outreach and advocacy campaigns i.e. (news conference, documentary and seminar), as well as grassroots mobilisation activities (e.g. person-to-person sensitisation, brochure and ID card development).

4.1. Media Attraction Event

The media attraction event was undertaken in Tema on 16 March 2002. It involved knotting together pieces of cloth in an unbroken chain over a distance of about two kilometres. At the end of each knot was a youth, bearing a placard, who was responsible for maintaining the unbroken cloth chain. The purpose of this initiative was to create an event designed to attract the media and raise public awareness of the relationships between community and business. The expectation was that the increased public attention would result in the eventual emergence of new solutions. In essence, the event was intended not as an end in itself but as a catalyst for increasing public awareness of the relationships between community and business and fostering eventual societal change.

The grand vision was a one-time event using the media as a strategic resource to place the issue of corporate responsibility on the public agenda and thereby change the attitudes of corporate enterprises. The event was designed to stimulate others (people and companies) to action, rather than intervening directly to effect a positive change in corporate responsibility.

After a three hour human and cloth chain, nearly a third of the people who participated in the exercise converged at the Tema community centre for a press conference. It was attended by the president of the Tema traditional Council, Tema East Member of Parliament, the chief executive of the Tema Municipal Assembly, the country director of the Fredriech Ebert Stiftung (FES) and representatives from the Trade Union Congress and employers association. Other external groups mobilised for the media attraction event included Tailors and Dressmakers association, Hair Dressers association, and Market women sellers association. Nearly five hundred youths participated in the human and cloth chain.

4.1.1. Media Coverage

Even though the media coverage of the event was not very encouraging, it was featured prominently as news item in about six of out fourteen FM radio stations in the country. The leading paper in the country (The Daily Graphic) also featured the event in the Easter Monday (1 April) edition of the paper.

4.1.2. Event Organisation

Prior to the media attraction event, the youth groups formed an eleven member planning committee towards to oversee planning of the event. The objective of the committee was to mobilise the youth groups to undertake the media attraction event. They were also tasked with the responsibility of filling the entire route of the cloth and human chain. Members of the committee

were well sensitised on BCR issues and tasked to identify schools along the route of the human and cloth chain and enlist their support.

The planning committee met every Wednesday and Friday for two months to deliberate on new ideas and share mobilisation experiences.

4.2. Outreach and Advocacy Campaigns

The focus of the outreach and advocacy campaigns was to inform and educate community members about the level of corporate responsibility in the community, its causes and impacts. It also served as a channel for obtaining suggestions for enhancing business community relations. The activities involved a documentary, news conference and a seminar.

4.2.1. CSR Documentary

A twelve minute documentary on CSR issues was developed with the help of the technical crew of Ghana Television (GTV) breakfast show. The documentary was shown on the May 27 edition of the GTV breakfast show. It captured scenes of social problems in Tema, Ashaiman, Manhia and Kpone.

4.2.2. News Conference

The corporate responsibility demand culture was activated in March with the cloth and human chain. As a follow up to human chain, a news conference was organised on 3rd July, 2002. The news conference, organised by the Corporate Social Responsibility Movement in collaboration with the Tema traditional council and Eastern Naval Command, had a dual objective. The first was to draw the attention of the media specifically to the nature and extent to which companies operating in Tema have polluted the Chemu lagoon. The second was to use the conference as a platform to provide greater visibility to the Movement. The premises of the lagoon served as the venue for the news conference.

4.2.3. Seminar

Chemu lagoon is the most polluted water body in the Tema. On 10 September 2002 CSR Movement organised its maiden seminar to educate community residents about the nature and extent of the lagoon's pollution. Organisations that participated in the seminar included the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other environmental NGOs.

The seminar was used to gather hard data, evidence and facts, as well as perceptions, about the effects of corporate irresponsibility. The seminar was not viewed as the end-goal by itself but rather as a way of finding out how big the problem of corporate irresponsibility was in the community, its causes, and how it was impacting society. The seminar has made substantial contribution to the efforts of the Movement. First, the seminar provided baseline measurement of the Chemu lagoon's problem. It clarified how bad the problem was and how costly it was for society. Second, the seminar provided direction in the development of business-community-relations strategies. It identified areas where corporate irresponsibility was impacting negatively on community and the priority domains where corporate responsibility demand initiatives needed to be taken. Third, the seminar helped to mobilize and motivate community members and develop cohesive constituencies for reform. The data and hard evidence provided by resource persons strengthened the conviction of individuals and interest groups that something really had to be done to change irresponsible corporate behaviour in the community.

The data provided by resource persons established irrefutable information about the nature and extent of industrial pollution in the community. The data detailed the volume, source and pollutant concentration of industrial waste discharge into the Chemu lagoon. It helped people understand the

root causes of the problem and understand the real costs it imposed on the community in terms of reduced quality of air, destruction of aquatic life and inappropriate waste disposal methods. This kind of information helped mobilise people in all sectors of the community to be more concerned and turn their words into deeds.

4.3. Grassroots Mobilisation Campaigns

A group can have the best cause to champion in the world, but without the support of other people it may not achieve the desired objective. In other words, there is strength in numbers and therefore engaging in activities aimed at increasing the numerical strength of the Movement was considered a critical success factor. The mobilisation team made of eight members conducted 27 field visits in its mobilisation campaigns. The aim of the mobilisation campaign was to seek out and inform those who had not heard about the Movement's mission/objectives and solicit their support and commitment.

The first step in developing a realistic mobilisation strategy has involved upgrading the skills of the Movement's leaders. Thus, to be able to effectively and efficiently mobilise community members, an advocacy and presentation training was organised for the leaders. Fredrich Ebert Foundation sponsored the training programme.

To influence the public to express support for the Movement and to facilitate the expansion of the membership base a number of mobilisation tools were developed. These consist of a brochure and an identification card. The purpose for developing the brochure is primarily to inform, educate and communicate to businesses and the general public about the existence of the Corporate Social Responsibility Movement. The brochure was also expected to help the general public make sense of what CSR is and why companies should be socially and environmentally responsible. It also outlines strategies that the Movement is employing to achieve its objectives.

A section of the brochure is the Movement's membership form dedicated to the registration of new members. To become a member, a person is expected to complete that section, detach and submit it personally or through the mailing address of the Movement. When the form is received a member of the Movement's recruitment team is dispatched to contact and issue the applicant the Movement's ID card. No registration fee is required.

5. Support

Fredrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) is a German not-for-profit organisation with offices in many developing countries. The organisation supports activities and programmes that promote social and economic welfare. To date, FES has borne the sponsorship cost of all the activities organised by CSRSM (i.e. media attraction event, news conference, seminar, brochure, advocacy training). A partnership between FES and CSRSM was activated the very day the organisation decided to support the human and cloth chain media attraction event.

Prior to FES-CSRSM partnership, the major concern of FES was CSRSM's ability to sustain its outreach and advocacy activities. The country director (Joerg Bergsterman) made it clear to the leaders of CSRSM that he would support them on condition that the demand for corporate responsibility would not be a nine-day wonder. For a start, FES requested the leaders of the Movement to present a plan of action for the rest of the year. This, according to the Country Director of FES would give a strong indication that the media attraction event was not a never-to-be-repeated exercise. The Movement's leaders and initiators presented the activity plan which was overwhelmingly approved by FES.

6. Key Issues

6.1. Effects of Movement's Activities

Where did this work on creating accountability and awareness of responsibility lead the Movement? There were motivational tools that provided the hard evidence that served as a catalyst in mobilising constituencies in media, non-governmental circles and society to act. The essential lessons are that there are clear linkages between conducting outreach and advocacy campaigns and developing effective constituencies to fight corporate irresponsibility. The demand-creation activities provided a common foundation of information and understanding about the nature, extent, and impacts of irresponsible corporate acts.

In so doing, these campaigns had the power to transform tolerance for corporate irresponsibility into outrage and mobilise the political will in society to demand corporate accountability. The demand creation provided the data that helped motivate these changes and continue to help build coalitions of interest groups inside and outside of the community to fight corporate irresponsibility.

Overall, the Movement's activities have contributed significantly to improving business community relations in the country as a whole. Specifically the achievements have expression in the following:

- Appreciable increase in media coverage of issues concerning business-community relations (more room for improvement though)
- Improved public awareness on relationship between community and businesses
- Increase in demand for corporate responsibility
- Company initiatives in the community on the increase

6.2. Youth Volunteering Culture

For the past one year, the youth groups have contributed not less than seven hundred thousand man hours in planning and implementing the Movement's activities. The youths undertook these activities by donating their own time, energy and efforts without demanding financial reward or compensation.

Initially some of the youths who were actively involved in the activities of the Movement considered volunteering as selfless activity. One year into the Movement's activities, the youths no longer regard volunteering as a purely unselfish activity. They have publicly admitted that volunteering has filled a need in their lives as well as making a valuable contribution to their community. The Vice President of the Movement, Mr. Richster Nii Amarfio, has expressed personal satisfaction about his volunteering activities. He stressed, "volunteerism has offered me the chance to grow both personally and professionally. It has broadened my horizon and enabled me to learn new skills as well as meeting new people and building social networks".

The consensus is that, the creation of this Movement has contributed immensely to the promotion of volunteering among youth groups in Tema. This has resulted in widespread 'volunteer-friendly' youth groups.

7. What's Next

7.1. Registering Movement as NGO

To formalize the operation of the Movement, members have taken steps to register it as a Non-governmental Organisation (NGO). FES has pledged to provide office equipment and furniture as soon as the Movement is registered. To facilitate the registration process, a constitution for the Movement has been drafted. The registered organisation would be expected to undertake activities that would promote positive/healthy business community relations in the country. These activities would include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Sanction irresponsible companies by organising boycotts to ensure corporate compliance
- Reward socially responsible companies by organising “buycotts” and/or award schemes
- Conduct opinion surveys and identify trends on CSR issues and practices in the country
- Develop tools to monitor and measure the social and environmental performance of companies. This would serve as input in award scheme
- Organise training for companies on how to develop community initiative programmes
- Develop newsletters to inform and educate the general public as well as international audience about the social and environmental performance of companies in the country

7.2. Activities for 2003

The next stage of the Movement's strategy is to attack the problem of corporate irresponsibility from all perspectives – including law enforcement, preventive actions, and public education campaigns. This will involve the mobilization of all interested sectors – government reformers, non-governmental organizations, business, and the media together to brainstorm what can be done in a non-confrontational way. CSR activities that have been approved by FES for the year 2003 are:

- Demand Walk
- Workshop for Assembly Members
- Photo exhibition on corporate environmental concerns
- Public forum on companies' CSR practices
- Stakeholders dialogue
- Workshop for multi-national companies and Trade Unions Congress
- National Conference on CSR practices in Ghana
- Workshop for selected members of parliament and District Chief Executives

Endnotes

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