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COVID-19 and Corporate Social Initiatives in Ghana

The World Health Organization on March 11, 2020, declared coronavirus (COVID - 19) a global pandemic. The virus which attacks the respiratory system is said to be one of the deadliest the world has witnessed in recent times. Governments and the private sector globally have been collaborating to educate, inform, and reduce the spread of the virus. The President of Ghana, through legislation and with support from the various governmental agencies, has issued several directives with regards to the fight of the pandemic. The setting up of the Ghana COVID-19 Trust Fund to raise money to assist government's efforts at dealing with the virus is notable. While several private sector players have contributed to the fund, some other organizations are also engaging in various acts of corporate social initiatives to shore up government's combat of the deadly virus.

Corporate Social Initiatives (CSIs) are deliberate actions taken by organizations with the aim of dealing with social problems and promoting social and environmental impartiality, while enhancing access to opportunities for disadvantaged or marginalized persons, groups, or communities. It is meant to improve the quality of social welfare and contribute to sustainable development in general. Corporate social initiatives are generally categorized into six key types which include cause promotion, cause-related marketing, corporate social marketing, corporate philanthropy, employee engagement, and socially responsible business practices. In Ghana, private entities have resorted to one or a combination of these CSI strategies in a bid to offer support to the battling of

1. <http://ankuram.org/blogs-defining-social-initiatives/>
2. <http://citifmonline.com/2017/01/were-sorry-for-not-crediting-some-quotes-in-nana-addos-speech-arhin/>
3. <https://citibusinessnews.com/calbank-donates-ghs200000-in-support-of-covid-19-trust-fund/>
4. <https://www.gcbbank.com.gh/news-from-gcb/598-gcb-bank-provides-ghs100-000-00-support-for-covid-19-fight>
5. <https://goldstreetbusiness.com/2020/business/stanchart-donates-to-noguchi-and-the-greater-accra-regional-hospital/>

the disease. However, the most predominantly adopted CSI types are, cause promotion, corporate social marketing, and corporate philanthropy.

Cause promotion has to do with using organizational resources to create awareness and/or increase concerns about a social issue. To stem the tide of the pandemic, organizations such as MTN, Vodafone, and AirtelTigo, are all sending text messages to customers creating awareness about the existence of the virus in Ghana. All the major commercial banks in Ghana have sent emails and text messages to clients warning them about the virus. Standard Chartered Bank and Ecobank, in addition, are currently running live presenter mentions on the COVID-19 pandemic while asking customers to resort to online banking as well as to use the banks' mobile apps for transactions to avoid crowding within the banking halls as social distancing has been cited as one of the ways to curb the spread of the disease. These are all course promotion activities by the entities to drum home the awareness of the pandemic.

Another widely used CSI type is corporate social marketing. This involves organizations developing and/or implementing a behavioral change campaign which is geared towards the improvement of public health and safety as well as environmental and community protection. Corporate social marketing is generally aimed at a behavioral change. Currently, several firms are running adverts on all media platforms including the traditional radio, television, and print, as well as all new media channels such as websites and all social media handles. Using the WHO guidelines of washing of hands for at least for twenty seconds with soap under running water and use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers, most organizations are joining government to influence a change in behavior. Unilever Ghana,

manufacturers of Lifebuoy Medicated Soap, have intensified their campaign on hand washing at churches and lorry stations where hand washing stations have been provided to encourage good hand washing habits.

The most used CSI strategy in the fight against COVID-19 in Ghana has been corporate philanthropy. It has to do with firms providing a direct support to a cause, usually by way of cash donations as well as donations of products and/or services. As earlier expressed, the government has set up a COVID-19 Trust Fund to which several companies in Ghana have contributed. Notable donations include GCB Bank Ltd, which was the first financial institution to donate Gh₵100,000 to the fund. Following that, the Consolidated Bank Ghana (CBG) also donated Gh₵100,000 each to the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research (NMIMR) and the COVID-19 Trust Fund. Standard Chartered Bank has also donated portable Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing equipment and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to NMIMR and 2000 PPE to the Greater Accra Regional Hospital. Cal Bank also donated Gh₵200,000 to the trust fund. Total Petroleum Ghana has also supported the COVID-19 Trust Fund with GH₵100,000 worth of fuel. The Despite Group of Companies and the Special Group of Companies together donated a cash sum of US\$100,000 to the Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital to assist in the purchase of supplies for the fight against the pandemic. The University of Ghana has also benefited from these CSI strategies. By virtue of the citing of Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research (NMIMR), the University Hospital received one thousand reusable coveralls from the Ghana Investment Promotion Center (GIPC). MPharma, a pharmaceutical company, also donated molecular workstations to (NMIMR). The workstations are estimated to be in excess of US\$30,000. The University of Ghana, like most public sector actors as well as government, have been the beneficiaries of these philanthropic efforts. These acts of corporate philanthropy have seen firms donating money and other equipment to several public sector institutions in the fight of the pandemic.

Although most of the firms have donated cash to the trust fund or bought PPEs for frontline workers, other are also giving products. FanMilk Ghana Limited donated 15,600 bottles of drinking Yoghurt (FanMaxx) to the Ridge Hospital and Noguchi Medical Research Institute as their contribution to the fight of the pandemic. Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Ghana Limited (TCCBCGL) also donated 3,000 packs of assorted beverages to frontline workers in support of government's efforts at controlling the spread of the novel coronavirus. Additionally, Latex Foam also donated one thousand pieces of medical mattresses to the Ministry of Health to help support medical care delivery in hospitals during this pandemic.

6. <https://www.companiesandcausescanada.com/initiatives/>

7. <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/health/awake-water-supports-korle-bu-cardio-centre.html>

8. <https://www.modernghana.com/news/932377/hundreds-join-mtn-health-walk.html>

9. <https://www.myjoyonline.com/business/economy/total-ghana-offers-free-fuel-to-fight-covid-19/>

10. <https://www.peacefonline.com/pages/local/news/202003/403947.php>

Employee Engagement activities support and encourage employees to engage with nonprofit organizations and causes. These efforts may include employees volunteering their expertise, talents, ideas, and/or physical labor. Firms support may involve providing paid time off from work, matching services to help employees find opportunities of interest, recognition for service, and organizing teams to support specific causes the firm has targeted. Every year, staff of MTN join the MTN Foundation, the charity arm of the firm, to engage in community volunteerism. The annual celebration has seen the staff paint special schools and health facilities, among others. In the fight against COVID-19, Citi TV has partnered with Zoomlion, the leading waste management company in Ghana, to engage in community volunteerism to disinfect selected public and private universities in the country. Some of the universities include, the University of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Cape-Coast University, Koforidua Technical University, Central University College, as well as the Ghana Technology University. This gesture of employee engagement or community volunteerism is phenomenal since the employees who hitherto would have to be under the partial lockdown were brought in to give their expertise at the expense of the company providing the disinfectant and other supplies needed to carry out the exercise.

The other two CSIs which have not been explored in the fight of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana include cause-related marketing and socially responsible business practices. Cause-related marketing links monetary and/or product donations to volume of sales or other consumer actions. In other words, it pegs a firm's level of giving to consumer action. Awake Purified Drinking Water, a subsidiary of Kasapreko Company Limited, runs the One4Life campaign which donates GH¢75,000 quarterly to

the Cardiothoracic Centre at the Korle Bu Teaching Hospital in Accra. The One4Life campaign is aimed at donating one Ghana pesewa to the center for every bottle purchased.

Socially responsible business practices are discretionary business practices that a firm adopts and conducts to support social causes that improve community well-being and/or protect the environment. Key distinctions include a focus on activities that are discretionary in nature and not necessarily mandated by laws or regulatory agencies. Generally, firms aim at being socially responsible as that may give them legitimacy to operate within certain communities.

It would seem from the evidence that some firms have combined two or more CSI strategies to support the fight of the COVID-19 pandemic. While some have done cash donations which we can term as cash philanthropy, others have supported with product donations or product philanthropy. Also, a good number have also combined cash philanthropy with product philanthropy. This we describe as hybrid philanthropy. Hybrid philanthropy will involve a combination of two or more philanthropic gestures to pursue a social cause.

Ghana's bid at dealing with the pandemic has witnessed the use of corporate philanthropy, which is either cash philanthropy, product philanthropy, or the hybrid philanthropy. However, whichever direction a firm decides to take is largely dependent on how the firm wants to be perceived by society. In the case of Ghana, the pandemic has brought about a lot of corporate philanthropy as the go to CSI strategy. The question to ask though is: Are the plethora of CSI activities a reflection of the internal social responsibility predispositions of these firms as well? Are institutions allowing nonessential staff to say at home? And are others who can work from home have being provided with the needed digital tools? Are those in sales working with supervisors to revise overly ambitious targets to accommodate the present circumstances. Generally, organizations would have to review their 2020 strategic and operational plans to reflect the COVID-19 reality and start scenario planning for 2021.

Although the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic has not yet been won, there is considerable evidence of fruitful private-public partnerships and if Ghana continues to demonstrate this level of shared support, philanthropy, and cooperation, it could reap the benefit of a good path to recovery in the wake of this global pandemic.

11. <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>
 12. <https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/national/fanmilk-ghana-donates-to-noguchi-ridge-hospital-in-support-of-covid-19-fight/>
 13. <https://citinewsroom.com/2020/04/covid-19-coca-cola-ghana-donates-3000-packs-of-beverages-to-frontline-workers/>
 14. <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/latex-foam-supports-covid-19-fight.html>
 15. <http://www.ug.edu.gh/news/gipc-donates-university-hospital>
 16. <http://www.ug.edu.gh/news/mpharma-donates-molecular-workstation-support-noguchi>