

# Companies must look beyond narrow perception of social responsibility

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Guest viewpoint

As Kenyan companies continue to warm up to the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), it is time to pause and ask if CSR is part of their strategic goals or is it merely a public relations opportunity to exploit?

Generally, CSR is understood by many to mean business 'giving back' to the community. However, this is not what CSR stands for. From a wider perspective, CSR means the willingness by companies to take responsibility and be accountable for the impacts created by its activities and decisions. By companies taking responsibility and being accountable, they adhere to basic principles such as respect for the rights of workers, consumer rights, environmental protection and community engagement.

Some companies continue to do 'public good' yet treat their employees and communities with contempt. For instance, while the Employment Act provides mechanism for determination of minimum wages, some companies have not adhered to this.

Similarly, issues like the restriction to freedom of workers to register and join trade unions of their choice, right to organise and bargain collectively, continued employment on casual basis, unfair dismissal, work-life balance, the right to strike, and lack of safe and healthy working conditions continue to haunt the corporate world.

One wonders why this should be the case yet these are basic human rights and freedoms stipulated in many human rights instruments and that companies are bound by their provisions.

That companies should take full responsibility in conservation of the environment in which they operate is a matter that needs no elaboration.

Environmental stewardship means a company is concerned about the direct and indirect impact of its activities on living and non-living natural systems including ecosystems, land, air, biodiversity and water.

It is sad companies continue to engage in community initiatives geared towards environmental conservation externally while ignoring internal initiatives geared towards ensuring the environment is not affected by their activities.

While mitigation of climate change should be part of the company's strategic goals, this has not been the case in many companies. According to find-

ings by Ufadhili Trust, 80 per cent of companies are not conversant with climate change and do not even have a policy statement on climate change.

Their involvement in climate change initiatives is just to comply with the law; the National Environmental Management Authority gazetted Air Emissions Regulations, which require that industries undertake measurements of the emissions to comply with the set standards. The practice should be that companies should use resources in a sustainable manner and rate the earth can replenish them.

In undertaking their activities, companies should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery. Companies should have anti-corruption strategies failure to which they risk losing business opportunities.