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**Inaugural Abstract**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is also variously referred to as corporate responsibility, corporate citizenship, sustainability, corporate philanthropy, ESG (environmental, social and governance) and RBC (responsible business conduct), among others. Corporate social responsibility encompasses not only what companies do with their profits, but also how they make them. Corporate social responsibility, therefore, goes beyond philanthropy and compliance and addresses how companies manage their economic, social, and environmental impacts. In effect, it is about managing relationships in all key spheres of the organisation’s influence: the workplace, the marketplace, the supply chain, the community, and the public policy realm.

This lecture will provide a thorough review of the meaning, key components, definitions, constructs, theories, models and frameworks that establish the essential DNA of corporate social responsibility. In addition, the lecture will discuss CSR drivers, key arguments for and against CSR and the various CSR options generally available to organisations and how these are exploited or abused. In particular, the lecture will highlight important contributions that Professor Ofori has made to corporate social responsibility theory, practice and policy. Professor Ofori will then propose recommendations to organisations, particularly corporates, national authorities and policymakers, and the University of Ghana.

The history of corporate social responsibility has evolved over the years; moving from the Philanthropic Era of the pre-1950s through the Awareness, Issue and Responsiveness Eras to the Proactive Era of the twenty-first century; constituting a shift in emphasis from philanthropy to strategic CSR. This perceived shift notwithstanding, there is almost complete unanimity amongst both theorists and practitioners alike, that irrespective of the plethora of definitions and their individual points of emphasis, corporate social responsibility encapsulates keywords and phrases like corporate, voluntary, ethical, philanthropy, mitigation of adverse impacts, human rights, social impact, accountability, compliance, transparency, sustainability, environment friendly, green, and positive social impact.

As a result of this multiplicity of emphasis and resolve, corporate social responsibility has become many things to many people because it is looked at, understood and practised in different ways depending on the context. This is even more important in Africa where institutions are not so well developed and, in many cases, do not exist.

Recent research globally suggests that despite the strong antipathy exhibited by some corporates, CSR, when used smartly and wisely does confer numerous benefits: cost reduction and risk mitigation; improved reputation and legitimacy to building a responsible brand; key talent attraction; competitive advantage through opportunity adaptation and leveraging; and creation of synergistic value.

The typology of global corporate social responsibility uptake indicates that broadly speaking, in the global north, ethical motivation, expectations set by buyers and customer demand, increased employee motivation and retention, and meeting requirements set by law predominate corporates’ CSR drivers. Professor Ofori’s research, however, shows that in Ghana, there is an almost haphazard approach to CSR practice, with corporates proffering a gamut of reasons why they are either unwilling or unable to engage in CSR citing among others: a lack of practical knowledge; lack of financial and human resources; lack of awareness of available support programmes; CSR/sustainability not being a priority; and lack of a clear and viable business case for CSR/sustainability.

Professor Ofori’s research also shows that promisingly, pockets of excellence exist in corporate social responsibility practice in Ghana. However, most corporates (especially within the micro, small and medium enterprise segments) tend to favour opportunistic and mechanistic philanthropic actions, with initiatives mainly geared towards socio-economic priorities, governance gaps, crisis response and cultural traditions. Furthermore, the dearth of sustained corporate CSR uptake is also exacerbated by a huge policy vacuum, exemplified by the seemingly complete absence of national policy measures to encourage the uptake of CSR.

Corporate social responsibility has come to stay because organisations too have come to stay, leading to the grim realisation by organisations that they are required to do more – across the entire gamut of their operations – to be more economic, efficient and productive whilst attending to issues of responsibility, which have also risen to the fore. As organisations strive to outperform each other along traditional measures of competition, corporate social responsibility in all its guises has also become a competitive tool from which to squeeze and derive advantage.

Simultaneously, and in its own right, corporate social responsibility has also become more important as corporations are called upon to contribute to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) through their model of the triple bottom line (economic, social and environmental). Therefore, organisations have no choice, as it is no longer a matter of ‘whether’ or ‘if’ corporate social responsibility is to be considered; but rather, a studied and deliberate assessment of the type, framework, model or approach of the triple bottom line that organisations are to adopt to fall in line with stakeholder expectations, including those of their own publics.