

# Companies operating in South Sudan are ignoring their Corporate Social Responsibilities

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By Isaiah Abraham

August 23, 2012 - Many credible companies and organizations around the globe have heavily invested in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives to put human face in their socioeconomic engagement with consumers of their products and services. This is not the case in South Sudan for reasons best known to those companies. There are few organizations and companies operating in the country before and after independence that ignored this specific responsibility to the people they are purported to be serving.

It is one thing for the government to sign the memorandum of understanding with investors and organizations, but it is another for the companies/organizations to define their social responsibility toward the population they are serving. Given, companies assist the government through fees and taxes; they must also go a little bit further to compliment the work of the government. CSR therefore comes in different forms some of which are roads, schools, health centers, water points, capacity building or skills transfers, employment of local people in that particular organization or company etc

This is critical because companies aren't operating in islands, but around people, and people have enormous needs the government might not cater for them all. If companies and organizations failed to work closely with the government or fill up gaps left behind by the government, there will tendency of tension and resentment that might develop between companies operating in the country and the people. We have seen this is many countries around the world.

We were about to see this situation (tension) in Malut in Upper Nile State against the Chinese Companies operating around there. The oil extractors in that county did a wanting job when it comes to CSR during their many years of oil extractions. They didn't build a single class room, or empower people for oil work; and even power was paid for by the population around production facilities. Though there was three kilometer tarmac road that lead to their offices, the companies have done virtually nothing. They have even damage the environment around Malut, future oil operators must be told to avoid tampering with environmental issues during production.

Khartoum of course wasn't serious about services to South Sudan, the government of South Sudan hence must not allow that mistake to happen again when the oil production come to being again- anytime to next year. That sad situation in Malut should be an eye opener for a foreign investor to play by the books of CSR, otherwise it has no business stepping foot on our land. Government like human being has limitation; it can't be everywhere (omnipresence), hence it is incumbent upon our leaders to go against Hotel Industry, few industries to abide by rules of serving the people besides their own money making schemes. Investors are partners in development.

This argument then brings us to another important question: how are policies and projects selected in this republic? In another word, who made policies for the companies and how are they selected? Of course companies have their own plans or series of goals. Majority of them are money oriented goals, while others are charity organizations. The former are notorious and formed 85% of group that largely ignored their social responsibilities to the people. They must be directed. Even Acts of Parliament will not be enough; some ministerial policies should be there to fine tune the bigger regulatory frameworks. CSR will feature in the details and this is necessary, for people to benefits indirectly, the same way owners of the companies benefit.

Selection of companies also forms an area where the government needs to pay attention. It should not be always Juba deciding unilaterally about the kind of investment the country needs. People through whom the companies operate are to be widely consulted first, so for them to prioritize their needs. If Lobonok Payam people (Juba South-Bari) were asked, they won't have accepted White Bull Company (Beer Company) to fix a tent in their land before water projects. But because of vested interest by some scrupulous personalities around power in Juba such decision are made. Thus, selection of which projects or company must undertake should be jointly made and not government alone to leak it on the throats of the street man willy-nilly. I don't know how much money does the Central Equatoria State levied from that company.

Again we have this element of measurement or monitoring missing on the side of the government. Some projects came to being since 2005, and to date the government isn't in full picture of the breadth and length of the companies in terms of capital they have invested or generated, the successes and challenges faced by the same companies or even the progress. To day we have companies on the moon with huge capital, and nothing is trickling to the population. We are talking here about CSR.

Some companies are becoming tough to the few people they have employed. They are paying peanuts literally, under poor

employment conditions. After Austerity situation in the country, people had expected the companies to increase salaries of their workers, since they have also raised prices. There is exploitation going on, and someone must help the people of South Sudan. The government however is detached from how people are struggling with their daily living. Living conditions of the people have worsened. The government is in denial sadly, that is why they are introducing salary cuts for their civil servants and the forces, and have now move to questionable projects.

I'm hearing that the government is bringing in Chinese to man South Sudan Aviation. Hon. Mayom Kuoch talked of Aviation as another source of national income, and I agree, but the matter at hand needs scrap and dump. Why give such important to a foreigner to man it. The minister got it wrong. Aviation is where the money is, and if to allow Chinese to own 40% of shares, and staggering percentage of 18 to the government, the rest to so-called 'private sector', then something is wrong. What is going on really in the Government of Kiir-Machar?

Such huge investment by the way and even that of a loan requires Parliamentary approval. I want our Law Makers to smack it on the face of the Minister of Road (Mayom Kuoch). No investment with Chinese at the moment, please! Chinese brings along their cooks and cleaners and this is unfair. Malut thing was an ominous experience, and shouldn't be repeated. The minister's project must be thrown out of the window. Council of Ministers has run out of ideas to be exact. Ministry of Road team shouldn't go to China. This is another Dura scam in the making. May be we have ministers with an interest of becoming share holders on the so-called 'private' allotment. The idea must be stillborn!

Moving on, the CSR has become a culture for many international, regional and local able companies, and I for one don't know why South Sudanese companies are running away from their social responsibilities. This is puzzling! The government squarely must be held accountable for failing to follow up the work of the companies. Imagine, the government, say Ministry of Commerce, industry and Investment (RSS) for the past seven years has had neither operation policies for anyone or companies, nor regulatory; companies go through few details, and there is hardly ever any feedback and complaint handling mechanism.

I look forward that stakeholders in our society be it government or private investors or organizations help citizens of this country, people they aim support through their products and services. United Nations agencies aren't also spared, some of them could have led by example to start constructing their houses permanently rather than live in prefabs structures. Private schools aren't sponsoring local students or open few vacancies for free. The same is true with health centers; they should have a day to go to Kondokoro around Juba or just village if in state and help people there, even children

Telecom, water and beverage companies aren't making efforts in that direction and the question is why. The government must step on their toes and demand quality services to our civil population. Look, great delivery doesn't just happen- it has to be led and managed. People don't just behave themselves for common good- they have to be made to. That is where this author got it wrong about the kind of a leader this country has. Mr. Kiir might be homely, humble, reasonable and caring, but these aren't enough for me to waste my vote electing him there again come 2015. His hand off or lay back, empty promises, lack of clarity when making serious decisions, protective, credulous, clueless and meann. SPLM party will have to go back to the drawing board and give us fresh minds. People demand no less from the companies.

On another note, the South Sudan UN Radio (Miraya FM) yesterday launched one of its programs for inmates in Juba, and the stories there were touching if not alarming. The government, especially the Judiciary, Justice Ministry and the Presidency must rescue the status of our prisoners. Prisoners have raised serious cases, and someone must come to their help. If one goes their stories, some of them are unfairly sentenced, while others have short cases, but are languishing in the cell for decades. Women especially those with small kids are under difficult prison conditions.

Some of children 'accompanied' to the cells while toddlers and now they can sign our national anthem. Please great people of South Sudan empty Juba prison for God sake, and then put in place proper services for inmates. The president should have pardoned these people during independence celebrations, but the man sees or hears nothing anywhere down here. It is time the head of state empty Juba prisons through clemency. This is another "CSR' work, yeah? Thanks my daughter (Evano of the Miraya FM) for a superb job!

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