Let's talk about firm responsibility: the perception of individual Ghanaian shareholders on corporate social responsibility

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Abstract

Purpose – *This paper aims to examine the perception of individual Ghanaian shareholders on corporate social responsibility (CSR).*

Design/methodology/approach – *In consequence of the largely unexplored nature of the issue of CSR, the authors use a qualitative analysis to offer the painstaking understanding needed about this issue. Individual Ghanaian shareholders who have absolute control over what companies they desire to invest were selected as the participants.*

Findings – *The findings show that individual shareholders believe there is the need for corporate directors and managers to take into consideration the interests of all corporate stakeholders-workers, customers, shareholders, suppliers, the local community and the environment- in fashioning out their CSR policies. It also shows the relevance individual shareholders attach to each of those CSRs within each corporate stakeholder group. For instance, the individual shareholders think that it is most relevant for firms to put implementable measures in place to reduce or minimise harm to the environment. Also, with respect to workers, firms are the first and foremost to ensure a hale and hearty and secured work environment. Further, with respect to customers, firms have to offer standard or quality products and services to them. More so, in regards to suppliers, corporate directors and managers have to offer them reasonable prices for their products. Finally, on the part of the local community, firms have to effectively assist them.*

Practical implications – *The practical approach to problems and affairs of individual Ghanaian shareholders is indicated by how much importance they attach to each corporate responsibility matter, and also they appreciate that a firm cannot thrive or survive for long if it refuses or totally abandons the needs of other corporate stakeholder categories. It will thus be of relevance to firms to take executable steps to deal with the needs of other corporate stakeholder groups brought up by the individual shareholders. As a matter of fact, the vivid descriptions of each of the matters concerning CSR of the individual shareholders present an important policy guideline for corporate directors and corporate managers to establish good-natured relationship between their firms and other corporate stakeholder groups.*

Originality/value – *This paper contributes to the knowledge on CSR by establishing that even though individual shareholders are interested in personal economic benefits, they want their firms to be socially responsible to meet the interests of other corporate stakeholder groups.*

Keywords *Corporate social responsibility, Corporate stakeholder groups, Individual Ghanaian shareholders, Perception of shareholders on CSR*

Paper type *Research paper*

Introduction

Within the past decade, business has grown and transcended the expectation that firms are responsible only for making profits for shareholders. Thus, corporate directors and managers face unprecedented pressure to be responsive to the interests of other corporate stakeholders. This pressure on corporate managers and directors draws upon the strategic management theory that claims that corporate managers can best advance

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the long-run viability of a business by finding a balance between the interests of its stakeholders and the financial requirements of sustaining and growing an enterprise (Freeman, 1984). This implies that the goal of an organisation is not solely about making profits or financial gains but also about the entire fabric of the firm being involved in socially responsible processes and procedures that will eventually meet the interests of other social groups (Hopkins, 2003; Cowe and Hopkins, 2008). A firm is undoubtedly a social organisation and by its nature interrelates with other social organisations. This interrelation is not limited to its shareholders, but diffuses extensively via many different social groups.

Businesses must exhibit how and to what extent they discharge their roles and responsibilities towards their stakeholders. These responsibilities are usually, though not in its entirety, described and defined in existing regulations, laws, codes and international accords. As constituents of society, businesses are incrementally being called upon to exhibit assistance for both international law and globally agreed normative declarations; this is unambiguously mirrored in the United Nations Global Compact. Failure to meet expectations of society in these aspects may weaken public acceptability or tolerability. Corollary to this, there has been an inclusion of a certain aspect of corporate governance, which urges businesses to promote fairness, ethics, accountability, responsibility, transparency among others, in their relations and dealings with corporate stakeholders. Thus, activities of businesses need to match up with the interests of shareholders, ethics, laws of society (Jamali *et al.*, 2008) and interests of other corporate stakeholders.

Extant literature suggests that the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is progressively becoming an extension of corporate governance (Dobson, 2003; Ingley, 2008; Jamali *et al.*, 2008) and that shareholders (who consider themselves as *Homo Sociologicus*) are more often than not becoming conscious of the relevance of this concept (Muller, 2001; Tippet, 2000; Ryan, 1994; Epstein, 1992). An argument has been raised against the assumption that the maximisation of shareholder value is the ultimate goal of individual shareholders. Dobson (2003, pp. 384-386) contends that it is "unjustified and injustifiable" from both ethical and economic viewpoints for society to believe that individual shareholders always act in a manner, which is only in line with economic consistency. If this argument were to be a fact, individual shareholders would have to always purchase and sell stocks. However, this is not a reflection of reality. Sometimes, individual shareholders have the tendency to invest for the long haul (Muller, 2001; Kennedy, 2000); and several individual shareholders have the tendency to be inactive and barely trade (Wärneryd, 2001).

We argue that individual shareholders' interests are not always about making economic gains; they transcend to meeting the needs of other corporate stakeholder groups. This implies that the interests of individual shareholders are not only focused on personal economic gains; they (i.e. individual shareholders) require their firms to socially behave to meet the interests of other corporate stakeholder groups (Boatright, 2000). And the assumption that individual shareholders always behave as *Homo Economicus* could possibly be flawed (Söderbaum, 2000). Pava and Krausz (1995, p. 147) in their work contend that "*ntuition [. . .] [. . .] .suggest [s] that shareholders, even in their roles as shareholders, behave much like the rest of us in terms of meeting perceived ethical as well as economic obligations". However, the issue of whether individual shareholders' interests transcend personal economic gains to the meeting of socially desirable needs of other corporate stakeholders is fundamentally empirical.*

A number of studies on the perception of shareholders on CSR has been carried out (Ryan, 1994; Ryan and Gist, 1995; Epstein, 1992; Tippet, 2000; Muller, 2001). However, a review of these studies points out some relevant issues. First, there are disparities among individual shareholders in regards to what they consider as a major concern in corporate responsibility. Individual shareholders in the study of Epstein (1992) highlight that safeguarding the environment is most relevant. However, other individual equity capital owners in the studies of Ryan (1994) and Muller (2001) perceive environment as least relevant. Second, these studies do not painstakingly highlight a list of corporate responsibilities – how suppliers must be handled by corporate organisations does not form part of their studies. Finally, unearthing the issues of corporate responsibility based on a review of the extant literature could lead to incomprehensive representation of shareholders' perception on corporate responsibility. Thus, we contend that obtaining a list of corporate responsibilities from individual shareholders could lead to a comprehensive list of corporate responsibilities than getting them from the extant body of knowledge. Finally, these studies have been limited to advanced countries with very little known outside these economies.

In this paper, we provide evidence from a developing country, Ghana, on the perception of individual shareholders on CSR, given that individual shareholders' interests are not only concentrated on individual economic benefits but also they usually expect their firms to be socially responsible to meeting the interests of other corporate stakeholders. Without any doubts, our paper offers insight into how individual shareholders perceive CSR. Our aim therefore, in this paper, is to examine the perception of individual Ghanaian shareholders on CSR.

Our choice of Ghana is not uninformed. Recent developments have added active momentum to the issue of CSR in regards to how individual Ghanaian shareholders perceive CSR. Further, the recommendations of the extant rules and regulations on how companies should be governed in Ghana all point to the assertion that CSR is increasingly receiving the relevant attention in Ghana. Also, understandably, it is an ideal research context, as its citizens comprise a representative community of individual shareholders with different cultural beliefs but with related demographic profiles in other developing countries. We believe that with this diverse background of its citizens, they would be able to point out how they perceive CSR based on their individual beliefs.

Accordingly, our paper aims to make both theoretical and empirical contributions. First, the findings add to the existing knowledge on CSR in developing countries particularly, African countries, which lag behind in studies of this sort. Second, our paper strives to contribute to the extant literature on the stakeholder perspective of corporate governance by establishing that individual shareholders are not only interested in personal economic benefits but also want their firms to be socially responsible to meeting the interests of other corporate stakeholder groups. Our paper proceeds as follows: the next section presents a review of literature on CSR. Subsequently, the methodology of the study will be presented. Finally, we present our findings, discussion and conclusions of the paper.

Literature review

Extant works on the attitudes of individual shareholders towards issues of CSR highlight that there is a propensity for management researchers or investigators to obtain a list of corporate responsibilities from these works and eventually integrate them into a questionnaire (Ryan, 1994; Ryan and Gist, 1995; Epstein, 1992; Tippet, 2000; Muller, 2001). However, we argue that issues pertaining to CSR included in those questionnaires are not far-reaching or complete if any stakeholder category is totally neglected. To get a hold of painstaking parameters of how individual shareholders concern themselves with the behaviour of firms, this section will first examine what CSR really means and recommend that it is vitally important to consider corporate responsibility from the perspective of firms' relationship with corporate stakeholders. Subsequently, it will divulge the categories of corporate stakeholders that must be part of this study. Finally, it will explore CSR issues that have been concentrated on in studies on shareholders' attitudes towards the behaviour of firms and corporate responsibility. We conclude that to ascertain the issues of CSR from the concerns of shareholders, it is more ideal to obtain a list from individual shareholders directly by questioning them about how they think each stakeholder category (for instance, workers, suppliers, customers, shareholders, community and the environment) should be handled by its firm.

The meaning of corporate social responsibility

As this study's focus is on the perception of shareholders on CSR and not the concept of CSR itself, this section will not carry out an extensive review on the concept of CSR. However, it will aim to offer a representative sample of material that can be used to set up the groundwork upon which the investigation into shareholders' concerns about the behaviours of corporate organisations can be examined. Therefore, this section will focus on the definition of social responsibility, acknowledging that it is much more useful to establish the perception of shareholders on corporate responsibility on the viewpoint of how shareholders believe other corporate stakeholders must be handled or treated by corporations.

The definitions and meanings of the concept of CSR in the extant literature are associated with imprecision in the sense that it implies different things to different persons (Hopkins, 2003), prone to conflicting interpretations, and have the disadvantage of sounding like jargon (Clarkson, 1995). It has been fundamentally contested (Moon *et al.*, 2005). Clarkson (1995, p. 102) contends that "[this] confusion and misunderstanding about the definition and meaning of corporate social responsibility [. . .]. *s a direct result of the inclusive and vague meaning of the word social". He postulated that "It has become [much more] difficult, if not impossible, to define what is, or what is not a social [matter]".* Carroll (1979) suggests that there is a hierarchy of responsibilities, each one of which has to be met in terms of decision-making. This model began with economic performance at the bottom of the pyramid of CSR. Simultaneously, a corporation is expected to abide by the legal structures. Ensuing is a corporation's responsibility to behave ethically. Finally, a corporation is expected to be a good corporate citizen, and this is often met through philanthropic responsibility. Thus, according to Carroll, effective CSR can entirely be met by a corporation when these four responsibilities are satisfied.

However, practically, it is quite difficult to group activities of corporations within only economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities (Chiu, 2009). These responsibilities lap over, as noted by Schwartz and Carroll (2003). For instance, the grouping of a corporation's donations as a charity is not straightforward. It could also be regarded as an approach or a strategy to improve the image of the business to derive economic gains, therefore meeting the economic responsibility of a corporation. Corporate donations and corporate strategies have more or less become intertwined, and activities are used to create benefits for the benefactor and beneficiary. Further, initiatives fashioned out to tackle environmental issues by corporations are deemed to lap over legal, economic and discretionally domains. Hence, instead of situating the concept of CSR on the four corporate responsibilities by Carroll, we contend that it is necessary to situate it on the perspective of a corporation's association with its corporate stakeholders. Therefore, CSR "is concerned with treating the stakeholders of the firm ethically or [responsibly]" (Hopkins, 2003, p. 1). Ethically or responsibly clearly means that handling or treating corporate stakeholders in a way and manner that is considered socially acceptable.

There is an amalgamation between the concept of CSR and the stakeholder perspective of corporate governance: "Stakeholder management is the most substantive manifestation of social responsibility" (Jones, 1999, p. 5). It refers "to mapping the relationships of stakeholders to the corporation (and among each other), while seeking to balance and meet legitimate concerns as a prerequisite" (Hopkins, 2003, p. 165). In his deliberation on the pyramid of CSR, Carroll (1991, p. 43) considers a usual match between the concept of CSR and a business' stakeholders. Further, the author postulates that:

> The word "social" in CSR has always been vague and lacking in specific direction as to whom the corporation is responsible. The concept of stakeholder personalises social or societal responsibilities by delineating the specific groups or persons business should consider in its CSR orientation. Thus, the stakeholder nomenclature puts "names and faces" on the societal members who are most urgent to business, to whom it must be responsive.

It is thus relevant to conceptualise the concept of CSR from the perspective of corporate shareholders (Chiu, 2009; Caliyurt and Crowther, 2004; Mouly Potluri and Temesgen, 2008). Caliyurt and Crowther (2004) profess that the outside environment within which a business undertakes its activities has undergone some changes, and there is an ongoing diversion from a narrow perspective of corporate governance (i.e. the shareholder perspective) to a broader perspective of corporate governance (i.e. the stakeholder perspective). They argue that the incremental power and concern of all corporate stakeholders irrespective of their contributions have resulted in an incremental demand for corporations to be responsible. The viewpoint of OECD (2001) is that corporate responsibility is articulated by the activities carried out by corporations to cultivate and ameliorate the symbiotic relationship between corporations and societies in which they undertake their business activities. In consequence, perspectives of shareholders on corporate responsibility are founded on how they perceive other corporate stakeholders ought to be handled by corporations.

Who are corporate stakeholders?

The concept of CSR draws on the strategic management theory that states corporate managers can add value to a firm by considering the social and economic impacts of the operations of the firm in terms of decision-making (Freeman, 1984). The theory maintains that corporate managers can ultimately promote the long-run capability of a firm – such as retention of highly skilled workers, swaying public views against government intervention, attracting socially responsible capital providers, increase in creditworthiness in the financial market among others – by having a sense of balance between the financial requirements of sustaining and growing a firm, and the needs of its stakeholders (Kreitner, 2001; UN, 2008). This then leads to the question of: who should be considered a corporate stakeholder? Early research in the area of stakeholder perspective of corporate governance defines stakeholders as any group or individual who can influence or is affected by the activities of a business (Freeman, 1984).

Similarly, the UN (2008, p. 5) at its annual conference on trade and development defined stakeholders as "groups of persons that are affected by and/or can influence an enterprise, without necessarily holding an equity share of the enterprise". These aforesaid definitions of stakeholders do concentrate on how the operations of businesses influence or affect humans. However, the concept of CSR is whereby businesses regard the interests of society by taking responsibility for the effects their activities have on stakeholders as well as the environment (Rahim *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, stakeholder status should not be limited to "people" (Donaldson and Dunfee, 1999). It is misguided to negate the natural environment from the concept of CSR on the basis that it lacks a politico-economic voice (Starik, 1995). There is no doubt that activities of enterprises have had significant effects on the natural environment since at least the history on enterprises started to be recorded. Therefore, "recognizing the natural environment as one or more stakeholders would elevate it to the level to which managerial attention can be directed" (Starik, 1995, p. 214) and which would let corporate managers to perceive the health of the external environment as imperative.

From the ethical responsibility standpoint, it is argued that the classical model of social responsibility does not recognise the health of the environment as a responsibility of businesses (DesJardins, 1998). But many authors do recognise the environment as "non-social" (Griseri and Seppala, 2010), "involuntary" (Crowther, 2004) or "external" (Post *et al.*, 2002) stakeholder. This study therefore, includes the environment as a corporate stakeholder.

Corporate Stakeholder groups can be grouped in many ways. A distinction is usually made between internal[1] and external stakeholders, differentiating between those who form the enterprise and those who simply interrelate with it (Griseri and Seppala, 2010). Another distinction can be made between social (i.e. investors, employees, consumers and suppliers) and non-social stakeholders (Wheeler and Sillanpaa, 1997). Non-social corporate stakeholders differ from social corporate stakeholders in that they cannot be straightforwardly communicated with. They include non-human species, physical environment and future generations. Post *et al.* (2002) also categorise corporate stakeholder groups based on strategic environments. These are core stakeholders, competitive environment and external environment. Corporate core stakeholders include those persons or categories that are vitally important for the existence and success of the firm. They form the primary resource base of the firm and include shareholders and investors, employees, suppliers, customers and communities. In contrast, the next group relates to the firm's competitive position with a specific market and industry. They include business partners, unions and regulators. The third and final group consists of stakeholders in the firm's social and political terrain comprising communities, governments and private institutions.

In summary, stakeholder groups found in Griseri and Seppala (2010); Wheeler and Sillanpaa (1997) and Post *et al.* (2002) categorisation of corporate stakeholders are investors and shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers and communities. Although much have not been discussed on the natural environment in the aforesaid works, DesJardins (1998) postulates that the non-human natural environment should be included in the concept of stakeholders. Everything in the natural environment (i.e. air, water, land and so on) within which the firm carries out its operations needs to be regarded by corporate managers in their decision-making processes (Starik, 1995). The study will therefore limit itself to six major stakeholder groups, namely, shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, communities and the environment.

Perspectives of shareholders with regard to corporate social responsibility

Literature suggests that the concept of CSR is progressively becoming an extension of corporate governance (Ingley, 2008; Jamali *et al.*, 2008) and that shareholders (who consider themselves as *Homo Sociologicus*) are more often than not becoming conscious of the relevance of this concept. Thus, the challenge of such shareholders would be to assist their firms to fashion out the best possible way to balance their claims and other stakeholders, which will ultimately ensure the sustainability of their firms (Ingley, 2008).

CSR researchers have sought to establish the perspectives of shareholders on corporate activities. However, the majority of the works has focused on three main corporate activities: the relevance of firm financial statement and annual reports to shareholders (Anderson and Epstein, 1996; Chang and Most, 1985; Epstein and Pava, 1993; Lee and Tweedie, 1975, 1990); investment strategies and the risk of attitudes of individual small shareholders (De Bondt, 1998; Lewellen *et al.*, 1977) and individual shareholders attitudes towards political activities of firms (Baysinger *et al.*, 1985). Although studies on shareholders' perception on corporate social performance is scanty, this section of the paper will concentrate on five main studies that explicitly highlight some indications that are believe to be relevant by individual shareholders.

Ryan (1994) and Ryan and Gist (1995) carried out studies on organisational goals on the basis of the perspectives of individual shareholders and the executives of two companies in the USA. In many instances, their perspectives on organisational goals are fairly akin to CSR. Epstein (1992) in a study asked individual shareholders in the USA to rank how funds of corporations should be allotted. Tippet (2000) examined how individual shareholders in Australia rank the relevance of thirteen issues of corporate governance and eighteen issues concerning ethics. Muller (2001) investigated individual equity capital holders in Australia to ascertain the sort of corporate responsibility priorities that they believe a firm must possess. Recently, a study by Hanson and Tranter (2006) investigated six situations in which individual shareholders in Australia could possibly be induced to off-load their equity capital.

Review of the aforementioned studies points out three relevant issues. First, there are disparities among individual shareholders in regards to what they consider as a major concern in corporate responsibility. Individual shareholders in the study of Epstein (1992) highlight that safeguarding the environment is most relevant. However, other individual equity capital owners in the studies of Ryan (1994) and Muller (2001) perceive environment as least relevant. Second, these studies do not painstakingly highlight a list of corporate responsibilities – how suppliers must be handled by corporate organisations does not form part of their studies. Finally, unearthing the issues of corporate responsibility on the basis of a review of the extant literature could lead to incomprehensive presentation of shareholders perspectives on corporate responsibility. However, we argue that obtaining a list of corporate responsibilities from individual shareholders could lead to a comprehensive list of corporate responsibilities than getting them from the extant body of knowledge.

Ordinary shareholders possess differing views on the responsibilities firms have to handle. However, there is no consensus among them in regards to which corporate responsibility should be regarded as the topmost priority. As stated earlier, individual shareholders in the study of Epstein (1992) consider the environment as the top priority, putting it ahead of being given higher dividend. Also, most individual capital equity owners in the study of Hanson and Tranter (2006) mentioned that they would off-load their shares in companies that are not environmentally friendly or do not consider environmental issues as relevant. Contrariwise, individual shareholders in the studies of Ryan (1994); Tippet (2000) and Muller (2001) do not consider environmental issues as a top priority in corporate responsibility.

Further, the issues of corporate responsibility obtained from the aforementioned studies are not comprehensive in the sense that they left out the responsibility of firms to suppliers. However, suppliers are a relevant element in the stakeholder perspective of corporate governance shown in Freeman (1984); Crowther (2004) and Clarkson (1995). Clearly, the role of suppliers to a firm is imperative that they cannot be left out when addressing issues of corporate responsibility.

In sum, we argue that an enquiry into the perspectives of individual shareholders on CSR should be obtained from the responses of the individual shareholders themselves. Thus, we aim to make the very effort not to forcibly place any defined structure on the individual shareholders. The review of extant body of knowledge on this issue at hand also highlights the plan to which this research has to be carried out. The next section highlights the methodology of this enquiry.

Sample selection, data collection and analysis

This study is part of a major project that was conducted between 2011 and 2013. As a result of the largely unexplored nature of the issue on how individual shareholders perceive CSR in Ghana, we use a qualitative analysis to offer the painstaking understanding needed about this issue (Yin, 2011; Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2011). Individual Ghanaian shareholders who have absolute control over what companies they desire to invest in were selected as the study's participants. As it was cumbersome to get hold of shareholders in small unlisted firms, the study concentrated only on large publicly listed corporate organisations on the Ghana Stock Exchange (GSE)[2]. Further, to acquire a diverse category of shareholders with diverse interests in the kind of business they pump their resources in, companies representing different industries (i.e. energy, financial, healthcare, information technology, materials and so on) in Ghana were selected. All the companies listed on the GSE were contacted to seek out their consent on their readiness to participate in this research. Eventually, ten companies listed on the GSE expressed their willingness to participate in this study. As there was no compulsion concerning the selection of the companies, we focused on these ten companies for this study. Letters were then sent to the ten companies to release the list of their shareholders. Subsequently, two largest individual shareholders (who are residents of Ghana) from each of the companies were purposively selected to participate in the study; which eventually amounted to 20 individual shareholders.

This enquiry used semi-structured interview guide to collect data. Interview was preferred to other data collection techniques because it permits instant examination of issues that arise from the interviews – which a questionnaire is deficient in. Also, the potency of semi-structured interviews is the “open detection” technique where all but the principal issues examined differ from one interview to the other as differing facets of the subject matter are illuminated (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). The interview guide questions were initially tested on four individual Ghanaian equity capital holders to ensure their unambiguousness. The result was that the questions were, as a matter of fact, logically coherent, extensive and unambiguous. Interviews lasted between 60 and 130 min. Almost a third of respondents brought their notebooks and statements itemising how firms must treat other corporate stakeholder groups. This, of course, served as a reminder to the respondents as to how they perceive CSR. One respondent brought his electronic tablet, and at a particular point, he used it to find materials to support his claims on views on how companies have to treat or handle their corporate stakeholders.

Interview notes taken during the interviews in tandem with the tape-recordings were transcribed. Content analysis, a research approach that allows for replication and credible deductions from data in regards to their context (Krippendorff, 1980), was applied to the interview transcripts. The interview analysis was twofold. First, we applied inductive analysis to the interview transcripts with the goal of ascertaining the items, which were closely related to the theme of this enquiry. Second, we coded the responses of the participants under their relevant categorisation and followed by integrating them into a matrix. Below, we tease out the responses of the individual Ghanaian shareholders about their perception on CSR. To ensure reliability, clarity and accuracy of our findings, follow-up interviews and delivery of transcripts to the study’s respondents were undertaken.

Analysis

We present the responses of the individual Ghanaian shareholders who voluntarily partook in the study. We first provide a short description of the participants. The 20 individual stockholders who were interviewed represent a differing gamut of professions: teacher, manager, lecturer, nurse, financial analyst, accountant, journalist, architect, civil servant, banker and private businessperson. To relate the responses of the participants in this study, each respondent is identified with his/her profession. The demographic characteristics of the respondents of the study are quite indifferent from the profiles usually found in shareholders in several countries: they fall within the older age categories (at least 45 years old), and a significant number of them has tertiary and/or professional certificates.

Interviewing the 20 corporate shareholders on how they deem each of the 6 major corporate stakeholders ought to be handled recorded a total of 285 responses that were then grouped into 30 set of responsibilities to corporate stakeholders: workers, customers, suppliers, the community, shareholders and the environment. Below, we present the responses of the individual Ghanaian shareholders on how corporate organisations have to handle or treat other corporate stakeholder groups.

Workers

In relation to how firms or businesses ought to handle their workers, six main issues cropped up from the responses of the 20 individual shareholders. Table I below presents these six main issues.

Offer fair remuneration and incentive packages

Of the 14 respondents who mentioned that they expect their firms to meet the needs of workers, seven made it a point that firms should give fair wages to workers. Others made

Table I Attending to the needs of workers	
Worker-related issues	*Acknowledgement**
Offering fair remuneration and incentive packages	14
Ensuring a hale and hearty and secured workplace	8
Offering training and development	6
Craft out a family-favourable workplace	6
Respecting the needs of workers	5
Share in firm's plans	5

Note: *Acknowledgement indicates the number of respondents who referred to that specific issue

mention that: "give remuneration that are aligned with responsibility", "incentive packages tied to performance" and "pay at least the minimum wage or the rate on the market".

The lecturer noted that fair remunerations must be given to workers in every country irrespective of the country's economic status or condition. He went on to say that any company that is operational in any country should pay equitable wages to its workers:

> First and foremost, workers should be given fair remunerations and that not only in Ghana, but in my view it is in real sense an essential thing every firm operating in and outside this country must embrace, particularly firms in other developing countries.

The accountant indicated that firms ought to look at incentivising their workers. Also, two other participants recommended that other incentive packages such as provision of pension schemes and bonus packages for workers:

> Workers ought to be rewarded to induce them to put up their maximum effort and they ought to be recompensed when there is any improvement in firm performance. They should be given their fair share of every success of the firm. (The teacher)

> Offering them a respectable pension packages or schemes will definitely serve as a morale booster. This has been one of the mechanisms that have sustained business across the globe. (The architect)

From the aforementioned responses, it is lucid that those shareholders admit that firms have an essential responsibility for *offering fair remuneration and incentive packages* to their workers.

Ensuring a hale and hearty and secured workplace

Eight individual shareholders noted that focusing on the hale and hearty and secured workplace for workers is fundamental. Most hold the civil servant's view that workers must be provided with a secured workplace: "nobody must be under any risk of injury".

Not astonishingly, the nurse holds the notion that firms must have in place implementable occupational safety and health policies or measures. Others noted that: "possess the appropriate accoutrements to do their respective works and ensure their safety" and "you must make available to them, good working conditions, and maintain the equipments being used by them frequently, and that healthy and secured environment should be an essential issue".

Offering training and professional development

Six respondents expect firms to offer workers apposite training and professional developmental policies. The manager regards worker training and development as so essential that he had embraced it: "In my office, I am often cautious to give surety to myself that my workers always have opportunities to seek professional training and development".

Craft out a family-favourable workplace

Six of the respondents have the notion that in offering a family-favourable work environment for workers, firms can motivate their workers to put up their maximum effort for the betterment of the companies. Three of the six respondents (the banker, journalist and lecturer) noted that it is essential for firms to have a "favourable work environment" and "exultant workforce".

On the basis of personal experience, the architect story was about how he intermingled with his workers:

> I came across a lunch room for the topmost management and asked "what is this room for? The boss indicated that: It is to portray that you are managers." However, you do not need to let people know that you are the manager, you are the managers.' I normally at lunch time go and converse with them. I am aware of what I want, don't pull rank and they had to realise it was my style of living.

The retired civil servant recalled his time as a worker in one of the ministries and how he felt being an integral constituent of an "exultant family". "It was an exultant family. You gave out your best, your life gyrated around giving out the best [. . .] [. . .]. Now the workers are of course neither acknowledged nor valued".

Respecting the needs of workers

Five respondents linked their perspectives in diverse ways:

> Every one, irrespective of his/her age should be accorded with respect and dignity. (Architect)

> Handle these individuals with honesty and accord them with respect. (Lecturer)

> Offer opportunity to the workers, and offer them with opportunities to undertake other tasks. (Accountant)

> Honestly, everyone should be given respect and dignity regardless of his/her educational background or where he/she comes from. (Business person)

The fifth, the nurse, concentrated on the practicalities associated with the needs of workers by considering the families of workers: "There is currently a trend in Ghana, where things have become self-focused or individual-oriented that firms tend to forget that people have families- the long hours of working and the pressure associated with the work. It has always been my wish that something ought to be done about it".

Share in firm's plans

Five respondents believe that making sure that workers are abreast with the current happenings of the firm is essential. The accountant noted that: "[a]n unambiguous communication to workers about the current happenings of the firm to make them become aware of prevailing conditions within the organisation is needed".

The financial analyst extended this suggestion that:

> Let them become aware of the future plans of the firm, how the firm has fared in the past, what the firm is undertaking presently and how they may affect workers.

Sharing information on the firm's plans with workers can also be seen as a technique of "allowing workers to get involved in the decision-making processes of the firm", noted by the private businessperson. The lecturer explained it as "creating a room that will let workers to work *with you* instead of working *for you*". In furtherance, he said that: "if you preclude your workers from the operations or decision-making processes of the firm and things are not going as anticipated, they [workers] will back off without offering any assistance and let you face the problem alone. If you allow workers to work with you, when things are not going on as anticipated, they [workers] will stand by you so that with their help, you will be able to surmount that problem".

Customers

Five major issues on how customers have to be handled by firms were obtained from the responses and are summarised in Table II below.

Table II Attending to the needs of customers

Customer-related issues	*Acknowledgement**
Offering standard or quality produce and services	17
Ensuring value for money or spending	7
Respecting the rights of customers	7
Adjusting to changes in the tastes of consumers	6
Honest promotion and product disclosure	6

Note: *Acknowledgement indicates the number of respondents who referred to that specific issue

Offering standard or quality produce and services

A majority (17) of respondents noted that the firm's primary responsibility is to make sure that customers are offered products and services that are of standard or quality. The journalist extended on what he thinks makes standard products and services: "You stand by your produce or services, you do not attempt to be brainy, You are hundred per cent aware that if you produce or offer a service that is of poor standard, you must let your customers know, and not just by saying that "well, luck was not on my side".

Ensuring value for money or spending

Offering consumers good value in whatever they produce and offering a service at a realistic price were standard responses from the seven respondents who commented on this issue. The response from both the banker and architect "do not take advantage of customers through extortion" and "make sure you do not exploit your clients" captured the import of value for money or spending.

Adjusting to changes in the tastes of customers

Six respondents noted that firms need to adjust to the changing tastes and preferences of their customers in that "desires of individuals are not static", noted by the financial analyst. The teacher used a telecommunication company, MTN, to make his point clear:

> MTN is losing clients to other telecommunication firms in the country at the moment. There has been a change in tastes and preferences of customers. MTN has failed to bringing out new products and improving the already existing ones to meet the changing tastes and preferences of their customers. However, they keep on charging unrealistic prices for their old products with which others have made some improvements on [. . .]. MTN has to step up and be innovative in this contemporary and competitive environment. If not, doom awaits them.

The accountant noted that one of the main challenges confronting firms is that: "We believe we are aware of their desires and we provide them with what we believe they desire. We do not heed their advice and always become unresponsive to the feedback we get from them".

Two other respondents also share the view of firms being pragmatic in finding out what customers desire. The lecturer noted that when he identifies a firm he desires to invest in, he takes into consideration the desires of customers and asks: "Is the firm producing something that is appealing and marketable to consumers?" The nurse, who sturdily believes in conservation and the battle against customer exploitation, acknowledges the effort of Unilever: "they produce products that we desire and charge reasonable prices. They also believe in recycling".

Honest promotion and product disclosure

Six respondents think these practices constitute one of the elements of the firm's responsibility to be truthful to consumers: "be blunt" and "customers must be aware of what they are buying". Produce disclosure also means "customers have to be given assurance that the produce comes from a place that is okay", noted by the private businessperson. One other respondent (the lecturer) considered honest promotion as "ensuring that you do not sell anything to a customer contrary to his/her interests" in that "individuals often tend to rely on firms to make available to them the right products and not to compel them to be patrons of what they do not desire".

Shareholders

Seven issues that cropped up from the responses of individual shareholders on CSR are shown in Table III below.

Maintaining long-run growth in stock price

Stability in the growth of stock price and growth of equity capital in the long-run are essential expectations of 18 respondents. In addition, three of these respondents noted that long-run growth in stock value always significantly influence their decisions and choices of investing in certain corporate organisations:

> I Always go in for firms that have the possibility to grow steadily. (The businessperson)
>
> I purchase long-run [. . .] [. . .] I focused on the future potential, and not just current gains. I would instead look out for stable [and] acceptable returns over a long period. (The financial analyst)
>
> I Purchase stocks in firms that have the potential of growing in the long-run. (The journalist)

Updating shareholders on current happenings: faults and all

"Keep shareholders posted on current happenings in the organisation" said the lecturer. "Keep them posted" means, according to 16 respondents, that equity holders or shareholders must be well-informed of both the good and bad news within the firm, and how the firm plans for them.

The civil servant noted that he would like corporate directors to inform shareholders about any plans or strategies being put in place by the firm. Four respondents have the following to say:

> They make some mistakes in taking decisions on the company, but I think with this, shareholders need to be informed about them. Human beings are fallible and since you are not bound to always win at all cost or take the best decisions, informing shareholders of your mistakes will pave way for them [shareholders] to put their trust in you. (The nurse)
>
> Personally, I hate the concealment of vital information about my firm and for that matter; I always want corporate directors to be honest in disclosing information related to the firm performance and current happenings within. (The architect)
>
> Under normal circumstances, the firm strives to be profitable, that is an aspect shareholders are always interested in. You can make the very effort to be profitable [. . .]. However, you cannot be certain that your firm can be a success story always. Meanwhile, I assume and think that it is very much essential for firms to be honest about their reporting. (The journalist)

Table III Attending to the needs of shareholders

Shareholder-related issues	*Acknowledgement**
Maintaining long-run growth in stock price	18
Updating shareholders on current happenings: faults and all	16
Making the very effort to achieve financial stability	15
Exact and truthful financial reporting	8
Declaring frequent dividend	8
Using performance-vested packages to incentivise corporate managers	6
Using performance-oriented packages to incentivise corporate directors	3

Note: *Acknowledgement indicates the number of respondents who referred to that specific issue

> If you are not meeting your profit target as a result of the introduction of new lines or a decision you made in the past, I think you should be honest to inform your shareholders. I believe enlightening them about this will sensibilise them and [they] will probably say, Okay, tomorrow is another day. On the other hand, if you experience a windfall profit in the current year, equally you should let your shareholders know what actually accounted for the windfall so that they will see it as an exceptional case and that it cannot serve as a guide to future performance for them.

The future strategy or plan of corporate organisations is another matter that cropped up from the responses of the respondents. Two respondents (the banker and a financial analyst) believe that future plan or strategy is an important issue that equity holders are concerned with: "awareness should be created so that shareholders will get to know the direction their firms are heading towards regardless of the time" and "I need to know their future plans or strategies for the firm to help me take decisions on whether I will remain as a shareholder or not".

Four respondents consider themselves as owners of their firms because of the shareholdings. This unambiguously and partly explains the reason for which most equity holders require their companies to keep them posted on any information concerning the firms. For example, the civil servant summarised it by saying that the reason for which he considers effective communication as a relevant issue in the management and governance of companies is that "as minority equity holders, I think we regard ourselves as owners of corporate organisations and for that matter we should always be furnished with every information associated with our firms and also we should be handled or treated by our corporate directors and managers as owners".

Making the very effort to achieve financial stability

As more than three-fourth of the respondents are conservative in their attitude towards risk, it was not amazing that 15 of them chose attainment of financial stability of their firms as being vitally important. Equity holders described what they regard as financial stability in diverse but related ways: "make substantial money so that you can remain operational", "make decisions that are considered as long-run beneficial instead of short-run damaging" and "grow but not to grow regardless of the cost":

> The long-run firm is the firm that must be recognised by shareholders [. . .]. I prefer long-run, sound firms to short-run sound firm. (The journalist)

> I am very much attracted to long-run firms when making share-buying decisions than short-run profitable firms. (The architect)

> I Prefer buying a share that I believe will still be valid in 15 years from now. (The accountant)

> I will never purchase shares in firms that always focus on making short-run profits. It is always better to go in for long-term profitable companies. (The teacher)

Exact and truthful financial reporting

Eight shareholders made mention that it is relevant for firms to make available exact and truthful financial accounts to them. The lecturer was blunt in noting that:

> How must shareholders be handled by corporate officials? Not to out-smart them, misinform them, conceal relevant information, not forging annual reports and not misinterpreting financial statements.

The rest of the respondents noted that, as equity holders, they require transparent disclosure of vital information in the companies by corporate managers to them so that they can be informed about the financial standing of their firms.

Declaring frequent dividend

Eight shareholders said that it is relevant for firms to make available frequent dividend. The rest of the respondents desire for long-run stock price appreciation, and some of them made mention that the desire for frequent dividend is dependent on the condition of each person.

Using performance-vested packages to incentivise corporate managers

“Incentive packages of corporate managers, incentive packages of corporate directors- these are the things that sometimes infuriate people when they are mentioned” noted by the lecturer. This notion of the lecturer was shared by other respondents:

> I care not about the amount they get as incentive packages provided they are doing their jobs as required of them. Other than that, I do not see the reason for which a non-performing corporate manager should be paid the same amount as a performing corporate manager. (The accountant)

> The ludicrous aspect of all is that at Enron, the Chief executive officer’s incentive package amounted to $8 million per annum, which is ludicrous amount. (The financial analyst)

> There must definitely be a certain form of incentive package for executives but they are paying themselves in excess. (The architect)

> A fair percentage of the incentive package of corporate managers should be based on corporate performance. (The nurse)

In sum, shareholders think that excessive incentive packages should not be given to corporate mangers unless they can rationalise them with performance.

Using performance-oriented packages to incentivise corporate directors

Three equity holders noted that corporate directors are rewarding themselves excessively or receiving excessive incentive packages:

> I still cannot believe corporate directors are awarding themselves excessive bonuses at the expense of the growth of the firm. Bonuses should be based on corporate performance or performance of directors and not be based on the societal status or class of corporate directors. (The civil servant)

> How must a company that is performing poorly continue to pay bonuses that are not commensurate with director performance? (The lecturer)

> They are ludicrously rewarding themselves excessively without any performance commensurate. (The financial analyst)

Unambiguously, shareholders are worried about the excessive compensation packages of corporate directors, and they believe they should be based on corporate performance, individual director performance and collective board performance.

Supplier

Four responsibilities cropped up from the responses of the individual shareholders on how firms have to handle their suppliers. Table IV below presents the four responsibilities.

Give them reasonable prices for their products

Ten respondents view paying suppliers reasonable prices for their products and services is essential to their firms’ relationship with suppliers. In addition, some also noted that

Table IV Attending to the needs of suppliers

Shareholder-related issues	*Acknowledgement**
Give them reasonable prices for their products	10
Maintaining long-run relationship with suppliers	7
Giving a clear-cut purchasing condition	5
Engage domestic suppliers	3

Note: *Acknowledgement indicates the number of respondents who referred to that specific issue

making payments on time is fundamental. For example, the private businessperson noted that: "Give them what is due them; it should be based on the recognised or accepted terms and conditions concerning the deal, which normally implies paying them without any delays". The journalist explains reasonable prices as "not exploiting suppliers by underpaying them".

Three respondents hold the notion that suppliers should not be compelled to accept the lowest price. The financial analyst noted that: "Close to perfection work and tie in procedures are more relevant to me than to compel them to accept the lowest price. If I am to pay 20 per cent or 30 per cent above the market price or rate to establish a relationship with my suppliers, that will be 100 per cent okay for me. Inasmuch as I know the work will be carried out as expected, I do not care about how much I am to pay". The manager has similar notion that: "it is unethical or immoral to force your suppliers to accept or charge the lowest price. You should be ready to know that the individual will obtain as much as necessary from the services they offer or the products they manufacture. If the price is not reasonable, they are going to sever their partnership with you without any delays".

Maintaining long-run relationship with suppliers

Seven individual shareholders regard establishing long-run relationship with corporate suppliers as fundamental. The lecturer and the manager made mention that:

> I consider suppliers as partners of firms [. . .]. Firms should be able to work together with their suppliers so that should they need something from their suppliers they [firms] would not find themselves wanting. (The lecturer)

> Firms should seek long-run relationship with their suppliers. They should always be attached to their suppliers to the point that they should not even think about prices. (The manager)

The teacher connected the establishment of relationship with suppliers and that of workers: "The relationship between the firm and suppliers should just be like the relationship between the firm and workers in that suppliers are an integral part of the operations of the firm. Without them production will halt". The banker regards this relationship between the firm and suppliers as safeguarding measure. "They will continue to supply your inputs on time".

Giving unambiguous purchasing condition

"A firm must make sure that there is a presence of clear-cut communication between it and suppliers", noted by the financial analyst. Clear-cut communication is viewed by other individual shareholders as "building conditions"; "being explicit about what you desire, what quantity and quality you require and where precisely you desire it to avoid miscommunication"; and "making it unequivocal what exactly you require them to supply, when precisely you want your supplies, how the supply must be done and the standard you require".

Engage domestic suppliers

Three individual shareholders clearly noted that they require their firms to "assist firms in Ghana", "offer Ghanaian manufacturers an opportunity" and to "make them competitive on the domestic market". Similar views would definitely be applicable to any other country across the globe.

Community

Four issues cropped up from the responses of the individual shareholders in regards to how firms must relate to the community. Table V below presents the four issues.

Table V Attending to the needs of the community

Shareholder-related issues	*Acknowledgement**
Effective assistance to local community	9
Philanthropic activities	6
Partake in worker community-work programmes	6
Support	4

Note: *Acknowledgement indicates the number of respondents who referred to that specific issue

Effective assistance to local community

Nine individual shareholders noted that firms must be in a position to assist the local community via offering employment opportunities to the locals and partaking in activities associated with the local community. The accountant noted that: "offer employment opportunities to many locals; and the nurse eulogizsd some firms that are really helping the locals to get employment opportunities".

Effective participation in the affairs of the community comprises "assisting the local community where your staff are", "being a significant part of the community where the firm resides" and "being integral part to ensuring that the local community is unified socially".

The private businessperson emphasised particularly on community participation of firms. "The firms which are successful in Ghana are those that effectively communicate, that communicate to the authorities locally, that communicate to the domestic newspaper or magazine and that give assistance to the children by organising parties during Christmas, Easter or *Eid*, that kind of thing".

Philanthropic activities

The matter of corporate responsibility raised two distinctive notions. The financial analyst and the accountant both noted that firms should not expend equity holders' money on philanthropic activities. The reasons for which the financial analysts voiced out this notion were that: "I think philanthropic activities can serve as a diversionary mechanism for senior workers that can require appalling much time which I believe must be spent doing their assigned jobs [. . .]. Philanthropic activities are not an something firms have to embark on". In a different vein, six individual equity holders noted that they do not have any issue with the firm embarking on philanthropic activities, but they should be "reasonable". The civil servant response is archetypal of this category of equity holders: "If people embark on philanthropic activities, then I see no reason for which businesses cannot embark on such activities; it mustn't be large but within the means of firms".

Partake in worker community-work programmes

Six respondents noted that firms must allow their workers to partake in community works. The nurse suggested that: "The workers must set aside a particular day to embark on philanthropic activities or do something for the community the firm resides". The lecturer and the teacher were impressed by certain community-work programmes certain companies are encouraging their workers to embark on. For instance, they made mention of the UT Bank that usually embark on health and safety programmes which also involve tidying up the environment.

Support

The banker regards corporate support to the community as a "win-win" scenario, and his assertion was reinforced by both responses of the civil servant and the lecturer. "It's normally ideal to be aware that the firm is striving to enhance its image in the eyes of the public"; "I believe it is a significant role for firms to support the community and it pays off that they receive advertising and be recognised for their support to the public".

Environment

All respondents hold the view that there exists CSR to safeguard the environment. However, their views on the way and manner their firms have to contribute to ensuring sustainability differ. On the one hand, some of the individual shareholders said that firms do not have to engage themselves in something which is more than it is needed. The financial analyst's view is archetypal of this category of individual shareholders: “I do not believe or think that firms are required to make the environment better than what we presently see”. On the other hand, a few of the individual shareholders require firms to engage in environmental sustainability – from the view of the lecturer, “firms should step up in designing programmes for environmental sustainability”. Table VI presents the four environmental responsibility issues raised by the individual shareholders.

Reducing harm to the environment

Thirteen individual shareholders hold the view that firms should make the very effort to reduce any adverse effect their activities have on the environment. For instance:

> [R]educe any adverse effects their activities have on the environment. (The civil servant)
>
> I hold the view that companies must not do something that can adversely affect the environment. And even if that happens, I expect firms to take the necessary measures to mitigate it. (The teacher)
>
> Firms have control over the amount of waste they release to the environment. (The private businessperson)
>
> It is ideal for firms to be aware that their activities normally affect the environment adversely and therefore, they should be able to design programmes to avert or mitigate such adverse effects. (The architect)

However, four individual equity holders noted that firms should not be held answerable for any adverse environmental impacts, which do not result from their activities. For instance: “I do not think it is incumbent on businesses to embark on environmental programmes in areas that are not within the area of business operation”.

Conform to environmental regulations

“Operating within the remits of the rules and regulations is the first port of call”, noted by the civil servant. The responses from three other individual shareholders are: “rules and regulations should be put in place by the government to compel firms to conform”, ”the law must embark on that” and “must observe laws associated with the environment”.

Even though it will probably be assumed that firms must go by the requirements of the rules and regulations concerning the environment, the fact that six individual shareholders raised up the matter of environmental law or rules and regulations' conformity by firms can be linked to the concerns of shareholders that: “certain firms are not operating within the remit of the laws”. This is also indicated by the response of the nurse: “My concern is whereby firms deliberately break the laws and refuse to carry out what is expected of them”.

Table VI Attending to the needs of the environment

Shareholder-related issues	*Acknowledgement**
Reduce harm to the environment	13
Conform to environmental regulations	6
Introduction of useful environmental transformation	5
Minimise and recycle	3

Note: *Acknowledgement indicates the number of respondents who referred to that specific issue

Introduction of useful environmental transformation

The lecturer contrasts the two extreme actions of corporate organisations: On the one hand are those that "will physically damage the environment" and on the other hand, are those that "in actual sense to help the environment in bettering it positively". The five individual equity holders who require firms to introduce sound and useful environmental modification consider it as a relevant contribution to enhancing environmental safeguard. They link it to firms which are assisting projects in communities that are geared towards environmental conservation and tree planting as well as changing the practices to ensure environmental sustainability.

Two respondents view useful modification as planning into the future. The teacher noted that:

> I believe very strongly that firms should do more for the environment.

Another respondent, the nurse, noted that firms should apportion a significant part of their budget to research and development: "We all know that cars are associated with negative environmental implications but they have recently become a necessity. [. . .] therefore better cars should be constructed! The technology on fuel cell is in existence but not much is expended on research; that would actually result in greater benefit instead of planting trees".

Minimise and recycle

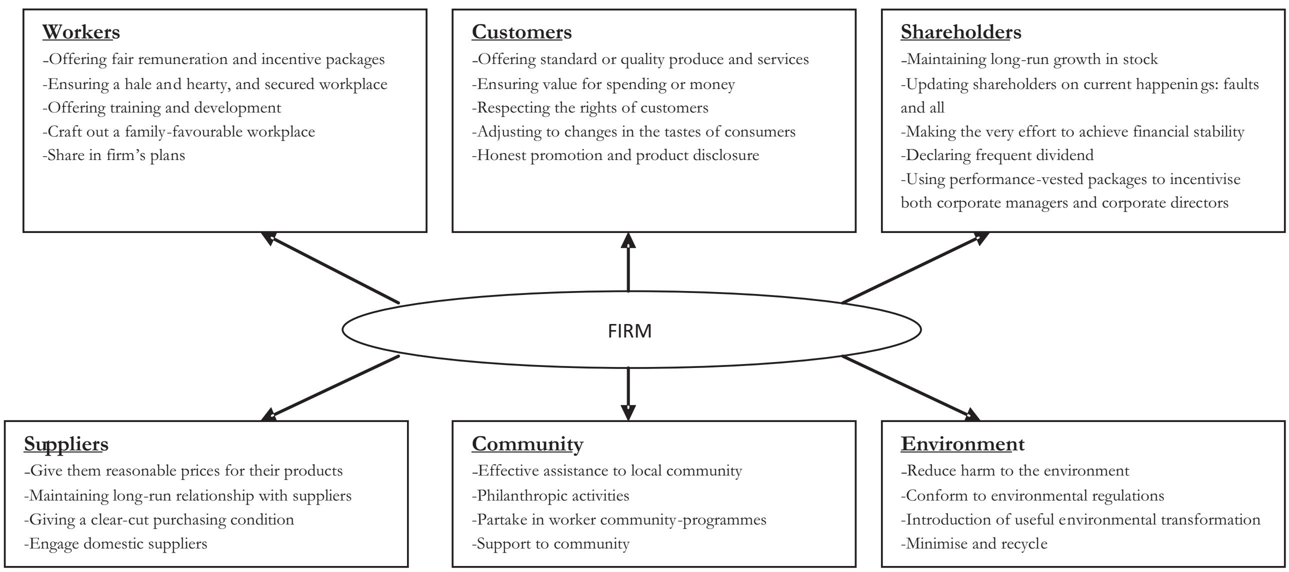
"Take a look at the plastic products all over the country in particular, the plastic bags. If there is way that can be applied to get rid of them, I think Ghana will be better off", noted by the accountant. Two individual shareholders also share the view of the accountant that something has to be done with the rampant use of plastic bags for packaging. The private businessperson was shocked at the way in which Ghanaians use plastic bags for packaging: "When you go to the market, every little thing you will end up buying will be packaged by a plastic bag. This implies that if you buy four items from four different shops, you will end up getting four plastic bags. However, you ask yourself, where will those plastic bags end up? They will definitely end up in the streets. Something urgent has to be done to mitigate or reduce this habit. I know that old habits die hard, but we need to start from somewhere". The nurse added that "we should start from small things to large things. It needs to be minimised and recycled".

Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to examine the perception of individual shareholders on CSR. We only concentrated on individual shareholders to provide insights into the subject matter. We also focused on six major corporate stakeholders (i.e. customers, suppliers, shareholders, community, workers and the environment) and how shareholders believe those corporate stakeholders should be handled by their firms. The analysis shows that individual shareholders do not seem to possess the "self-interested" attitude of regarding other corporate stakeholders as a means to attaining the end of maximising shareholder wealth. Figure 1 below presents a summary of the findings.

The relevance of looking after workers is explicit in the responses of some individual shareholders. These individual shareholders hold the view that workers should be recognised and share in profits of firms. They also want firms to create a family-favourable workplace for their workers and share in firm plans with workers. The individual shareholders believe that with the focus of worker-vested CSR, workers will be able to receive their fair share of the company's profit and that can help mitigate or get rid of workplace deviance and counterproductive behaviour, and they believe with this, companies will be more attractive to prospective and existing workers (Bauman and Skitka, 2012). This can also make workers feel that they belong truly to the firm, and for that matter, it promotes the feeling of fit (Organ *et al.*, 2006; O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986).

Figure 1 What shareholders require of their firms in handling other corporate stakeholder groups



Source: Authors construct

The study of Mercer (2003) revealed that American consumers always place much emphasis on the operations of the business that impact on their welfare directly – offering standard, durable and dependable produce and service, truth communication to customers, producing safe and fair-priced products and services. Operations of the firm that influence shareholders, workers and the society are regarded fairly relevant by the customers or consumers. However, the responses of Ghanaian individual shareholders reveal that firms should make the conscious effort to meet the needs of customers or consumers by offering standard or quality products and services, ensuring value for money or spending, respecting the rights of customers, adjusting to changes in the tastes of consumers and honest promotion and product disclosure. The self-centeredness character of customers recorded in the work of Mercer (2003) is not greatly evident in our study.

The findings also indicate that even though Ghanaian individual shareholders always concern themselves with the well-being of other corporate stakeholders, these shareholders require their firms to meet their interests – maintaining long-run growth in stock price, updating shareholders on current happenings of firm, making the very effort to achieve financial stability, exact and truthful financial reporting, declaration of frequent dividend, using performance-oriented packages to incentivise corporate managers and using performance-vested packages to incentivise corporate directors are the issues raised by Ghanaian individual shareholders. This evidence clearly shows that even though Ghanaian shareholders have some characteristics of *homo Sociologicus*, traits of *homo Economicus* are also embedded in their investment decisions. This result lends some support to the findings of Ryan (1994) that shareholders prefer long-run growth in stock and profits to short-term growth in stock and profits.

Further, individual Ghanaian shareholders believe that firms' approach to the needs of suppliers should be a part and parcel of their strategic plans in that almost every firm, be it service-or-product-focused, depends on suppliers. This is because they view that suppliers can offer significant benefits to the company and the generality of the supply chain (Lai and Cheng, 2009). Offering them reasonable prices for their products and services, maintaining long-run relationship with suppliers, giving a clear-cut purchasing condition and engaging domestic suppliers are the major issues that individual Ghanaian shareholders raised on how firms should treat their suppliers. This evidence clearly shows that individual Ghanaian shareholders believe just as firms must build good relationship with their customers, they require them to also handle their suppliers like gold or regard them as precious, and strive to build as well as maintain a first-class relationship with them.

The results further indicate that a company is a partnership in which the community it carries its operations has a stake. Like the other corporate stakeholders, individual Ghanaian shareholders require their firms to have wider responsibility to the communities of their business operations (Hopkins, 2003). The findings reveal that business should relate to the community in four main ways – effective assistance to local community, philanthropic activities in local community, partaking in worker community-programmes and, finally, support to community in a responsible and moral manner. This clearly implies that businesses have to always care about the communities their operations take place. Businesses are required to become conscious of the fact that establishing bridges to the local community via worker community-programmes, philanthropic activities and so on can bring significant benefits to both the firm and the community.

While firm responsibility concerning the local community dates back to a number of decades, the firm responsibility regarding the environment has in recent times become a global concern. The findings highlight that the views of Ghanaian individual shareholders on a firm's responsibility to the environment vary. On the one hand, some of the individual shareholders believe that firms do not have to engage themselves actively in something, which is more than it is needed – meaning that it is not incumbent on firms alone to make the environment better than we see today. Governments have to play their roles as well. On the other hand, other Ghanaian individual shareholders view that as the activities of businesses significantly affect the natural environment, firms are required to engage effectively in sustaining the natural environment. Reducing harm to the environment, conforming to environmental regulations, introducing useful environmental transformation and minimising and recycling are the issues that cropped up from the responses of the shareholders who believe firms must be actively involved in sustaining the natural environment.

Our study contends against the assumption or the view that individual or personal wealth maximisation is the eventual goal of people when making investment decisions (Dobson, 2003) – implying that shareholders' interests are not narrowly economic, but they require their firms to embark on socially responsible needs of other corporate stakeholders (Boatright, 2000), and the general view that shareholders' ultimate goal is growth in stock prices and dividends will probably not mirror reality (Söderbaum, 2000). Additionally, Pava and Krausz (1995, p. 147) indicate that, "*ntuition and the available evidence suggest that shareholders, even in their role as shareholders, behave much like the rest of us in terms of meeting perceived ethical as well as economic obligations*".

Finally, our study also lends some support to the *homo Sociologicus* perspective that individual shareholders are more often than not becoming conscious of the relevance of the concerns of other corporate stakeholders. Therefore, the challenge of Ghanaian individual shareholders is to assist their companies to fashion out the best possible way to balance their claims and other corporate stakeholders (Ingley, 2008). This they believe can ultimately ensure long-term survival of businesses. In addition, our findings also contribute to the nascent and fledging stream of research on CSR that indicates that investors are not only interested in financial gains but also equally concern themselves with the social needs of other corporate stakeholders. This study also reinforces the extant body of knowledge on stakeholder perspective of corporate governance (Muller, 2001; Tippet, 2000; Ryan, 1994; Epstein, 1992).

Practical implications

The study indicates some relevant insights to firms seeking to establish programmes on CSR. Our findings show that individual shareholders believe there is the need for corporate directors and management to take into consideration the interests of all corporate stakeholders – workers, customers, shareholders, suppliers, the local community and the environment – in fashioning out their CSR policies. It also shows the relevance individual shareholders attach to each of those CSRs within each corporate stakeholder group. For instance, concerning the environment, they think that it is most relevant to put implementable measures in place to reduce or minimise harm to the environment; with respect to workers, firms are the first and foremost to ensure a hale and hearty and secured work environment; with respect to customers, firms have to offer standard or quality products and services to them. Also, in regards to suppliers, corporate directors and managers have to offer them reasonable prices for their products; on the part of the local community, firms have to effectively assist them.

The practical approach to problems and affairs of individual Ghanaian shareholders is indicated by how much importance they attach to each corporate responsibility matter, and also they appreciate that a firm cannot thrive or survive for long if it refuses or totally abandons the needs of other corporate stakeholder categories. It will thus be of relevance to firms to take executable steps to deal with the needs of other corporate stakeholder groups brought up by the individual shareholders. Actually, the vivid descriptions of each of the matters concerning CSR of the individual shareholders present an important policy guideline for corporate directors and corporate managers to establish good relationship between their firms and other corporate stakeholder groups.

Limitations and directions for future research

Our study is inherently characterised by two main limitations. First, as the concept of CSR is relatively new in the context of Ghana, it could be that the individual shareholders had tentative notions about what constitutes socially responsible behaviour of firms. However, we were able to minimise this limitation by matching up our findings to other related extant studies. We establish that though the concept of CSR is relatively new in Ghana, the responses we had from our individual shareholders were in most cases in line with the extant studies. Second, given the sample size of the study, the findings cannot be generalised to reflect the views of other individual shareholders. A fertile area for future study would be to examine this concept using a larger sample size across multiple shareholder groups to assess the generalisation of our findings. Future research may examine the extent to which institutional shareholders view the concept of CSR.

Another promising area for further study would be to examine the qualities shareholders require of corporate board members. We believe that research in this area would help us appreciate the qualities shareholders expect of their corporate directors. In addition, the findings of this study can assist corporations in selecting or appointing individuals to serve on their boards. In sum, we hope that this study will serve as a curtain raiser for more works on the concept of CSR to be carried out in the context of Ghana.

Notes

1. Customers, employees, investors and suppliers.
2. The GSE was established by the Stock Exchange Act in October, 1990. Trading commenced on its floor in November 1990. Currently, 35 firms (comprising consumer discretionary, Energy, Financial, Healthcare, Industrials, Information technology and Materials sectors) are listed on it. It is worth noting that the financial sector dominates the GSE.

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