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Corporate Foundations: Re-shaping CSR?

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The Kenya Power Company (KPLC), in conjunction with the Football Kenya Federation (FKF), Kenyan Premier League (KPL) and Kenya Red Cross recently unveiled plans for a one-day soccer extravaganza, called the Kenya Power Charity Cup. The tournament to be played by four teams on 2 February 2013 in Kenya with a national appeal will raise funds for its corporate social responsibility programmes.

This is just one of the many initiatives that have been launched in the recent past by corporate institutions in the region to bring together their constituents towards various social ends primarily targeted at improving their living standards. The key to the success of such corporate foundations has been partnerships, independence and guaranteed financial support from the mother institutions, all these being aspects that KPLC managing director and CEO, Joseph Njoroge says will be characteristic of the KPLC Foundation, due to be registered by June, 2013.

But even as corporate institutions embrace the culture of institutionalized philanthropy, which EAAG promotes, what remains key to nurturing philanthropy in the region is the involvement of their beneficiaries. In order for social development projects to have a wholesome effect on the societies and communities for which they are targeted, they (the communities and societies) need to be involved. They are increasingly being involved in the fundraising, needs assessment and execution (including in the management) of such development projects and what this symbolizes is a change, albeit a quiet one in which corporate entities are increasingly going to the ground to ensure that projects undertaken are indeed followed through to the end with efficient feedback mechanisms in place. It somehow represents a change in the minds and operations of corporate entities whose CSR projects are increasingly being shaped around the communities and their long-term needs which is in complete contrast to earlier practices where boardroom decisions would dictate the direction of CSR projects.

Given the capacity of the East African people, coupled with the increased need for corporates to embrace their constituents by 'effectively' giving back, a welcome nod is in order for corporates who choose to involve the general public in their efforts.

The economic and social potential for East Africa, when the corporate bodies through partnerships come together for worthy causes is unfathomable. But key to their coming together are structural governance regimes that are independent and supported by informed and passionate leadership. These are just few pebbles on the shore towards vibrant and sustainable social development in the region. In recognizing these, EAAG has appropriately themed its next conference "Philanthropy and Business: Is it Business Unusual" that will expound on the opportunities open for corporate entities to endear themselves to new global concepts in philanthropy such as social entrepreneurship, venture philanthropy and High impact philanthropy that point to a global recognition by philanthropists of the need to apply businesslike approaches to philanthropy. It will retrospectively seek to assess the capacity of businesses in East Africa to employ such global philanthropic concepts in their CSR projects.

The Kenya Power Charity Cup is indeed an interesting case study of how corporate bodies with institutionalized structures can come together to enhance and help grow the culture of localized philanthropy in the region while at the same time taking key stock to involve the public and their know-how(technology) all, of course for a good cause.

So then, guess the next question is: What are you doing as corporate body to promote philanthropy? Is yours a boardroom CSR system? Is it institutionalized? Challenges, if any? And most importantly, have you marked down 24th-26th June 2013?

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