

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

**STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES OF SELECTED
FIRMS IN GHANA.**

BY

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**THESIS SUBMITTED TO DEPARTMENT OF ACCOUNTING OF THE UNIVERSITY
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REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN
ACCOUNTING.**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this work is the result of my own research and has not been presented either wholly or partly by anyone for any academic award in this or any other university. All references to the works and ideas of others used in the thesis work have been duly acknowledged.

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CERTIFICATION

We hereby certify that this thesis was supervised in accordance with procedures laid down by the University of Ghana.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis work to my father Mr. Munkaila Imoro and my mother Mariama Munkaila.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

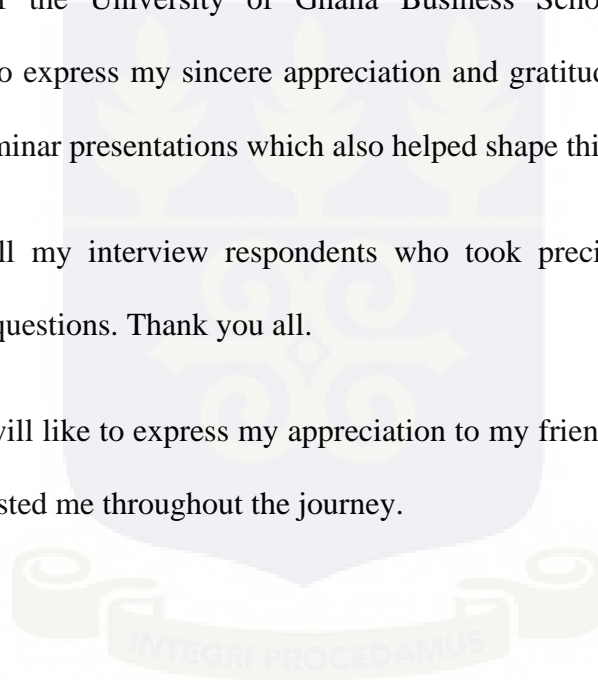
I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Almighty Allah for how far he has brought me. All praises and adorations are due him.

My profound gratitude goes to my supervisors, Dr. Samuel Nana Yaw Simpson and Dr. Cletus Agyenim Boateng for their immense contributions, directions and support. I really appreciate that.

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Last but not the least, I will like to express my appreciation to my friends and colleagues who in one way or the other assisted me throughout the journey.



ABSTRACT

The study explores stakeholder engagement practices of organisations in their sustainability practices. Specifically understanding what they do, how they do it, and more importantly why they do things in their stakeholder engagement practices. Certain theories like the stakeholder theory and the legitimacy theory were used. So far theory suggests that firms engage stakeholder in their sustainability practices to justify their (firms') operational existence and a continuation of the social contract existing between the firm and society at large.

Using a qualitative research approach, data was collected through interview. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data collected. Analysis of the data collected implied firms identify their stakeholders as primary and secondary and also consider their needs based on their ability to affect the firm's operations or existence. It also revealed that firms engage these stakeholders through series of avenues like trainings, workshops, and keeping open door policies. Affirmation of the assumptions in the legitimacy theory were also traced in the analysed data. In other words, it was confirmed that firms engage their stakeholders in their sustainability practices to ensure their continued social contract with society.

As a practical implication, the analysis of data also presents new perspectives to the stakeholder engagement process in sustainability practices and also new ways firms can engage their stakeholders in their sustainability practices.

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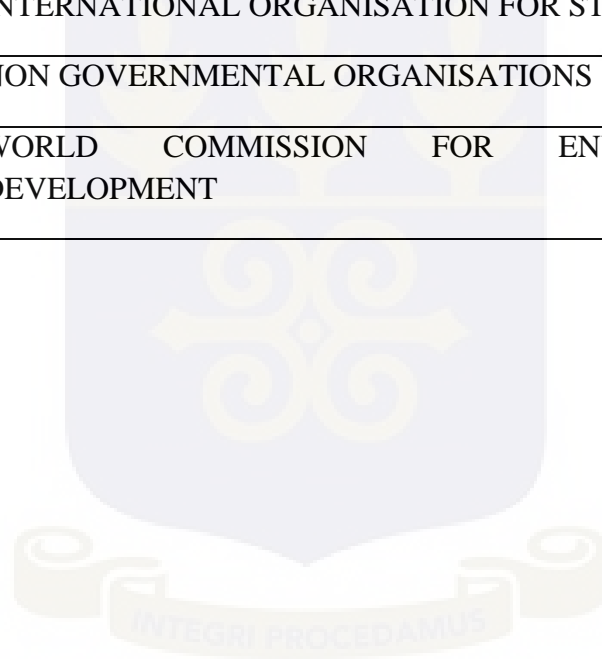
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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATION	FULL MEANING
AA1000 SES	AA1000 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STANDARDS
AA1000 APS	AA1000 ACCOUNTABILITY PRINCIPLES STANDARDS
CSR	CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
EPA	ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
GRI	GLOBAL REPORTING INITIATIVE
ISO	INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR STANDARDISATION
NGO	NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS
WCED	WORLD COMMISSION FOR ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT



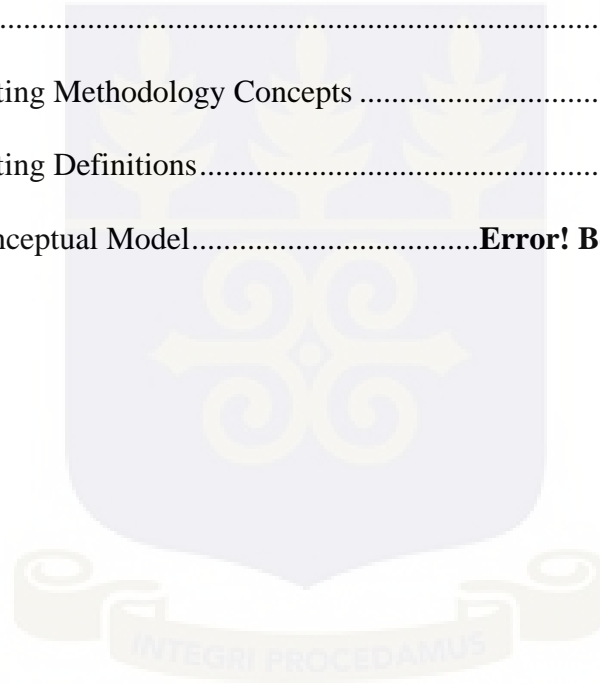
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Sustainability has generally been defined as the ability to meet current needs without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Amongst several definitions offered on the subject matter, one notable definition is the definition offered by the Brundtland Commission. The Brundtland Commission (1987, p. 247) formerly called the World Commission for Environment and Development (WCED) defined sustainability as "meeting the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" and has been of increasing importance for society over the last decades. Another impressive definition offered in the field of sustainability was that of Thwinkorg, (c2014) which explained sustainability as the ability to continue a defined behaviour indefinitely. In various definitions of sustainability, one thing is key: continuity. In an attempt to achieve this continuity, the last few decades have seen a growing debate on the role of business in society and the need for companies to take sustainability issues into account (Waddock et al, 2004; Amini, 2014 as cited in Bellantuono, Pontrandolfo & Scozzi 2016). Significant evidence though from developed countries exists to show that business activities exert pressure on the environment. The absence of strong legal regulations therefore to check firm activity and protect the ecosphere will be detrimental to society (Stern, 2006).

This continuous demand has necessitated the concept of sustainability reporting. Sustainability reporting is the process by which companies describe how they deal with their own economic, environmental and social impacts, thus making stakeholders able to recognize the value of sustainable practices (Bellantuono, Pontrandolfo & Scozzi 2016). Since its inception, sustainability reporting has undergone several development stages. The first social reports were written in the seventies. In the late 1980s, environmental reports were published by companies operating in environmentally sensitive industries. In the mid-1990s, the social and environmental dimensions were jointly discussed with the economic one in the first sustainability reports (Bellantuono, Pontrandolfo & Scozzi 2016). By the year 2009 South Africa's King III Code of Governance Principles was released and recommended that companies prepare and publish integrated reports. Later in 2010 complying with the King III and publishing an integrated report or explaining why not was made a listing requirement by Johannesburg Stock Exchange making South Africa the first country to have reporting requirements around integrated reporting. This demonstrates the increasing trend in sustainability practices and the desire to comply by firms. Whiles fulfilling this social demand, businesses need to actively involve stakeholders in doing so.

The forgoing has initiated the need to engage stakeholders in the sustainability practices of firms. Stakeholder engagement refers to the process by which firms or corporations involve their stakeholders to achieve some specific objectives. For the purpose of this research, two standards with focus on stakeholder engagement and sustainability initiatives will be employed. These standards are; AA1000 Stakeholder engagement Standard and the ISO 26000 Corporate Social Responsibility standards.

1.2 Problem Statement

Business organisations have disclosed aspects of their performance, beyond traditional financial measures for years (KPMG, 2011). Initially, this involved supplementary disclosures in the annual report (Deegan & Gordon, 1996; Ernst & Ernst, 1978; Guthrie & Parker, 1990; Hackston & Milne, 1996), but it has evolved to encompass dedicated environmental reporting, health safety and environment reporting, sustainability reporting and reporting against a 'triple bottom line' (Parker, 2005). Within the Ghanaian context, scholarly works and research in the area of sustainability practices and reporting have seen steady growth and have focused on Corporate Social Responsibility as a strategy (Hinson & Kodua, 2012; Mahmoud & Hinson, 2012; Amponash-Tawiah & Dartey-Baah, 2012); Aside the corporate level of disclosure on CSR and other social and environment, much is left to be said about sustainability reporting and sustainability practices in the Ghanaian context.

A critical review of policy reports reveals that sustainability report was not regarded in the Ghanaian context until quite recently. This is further strengthened in the claim of the GNA (2014), that it therefore stands to reason that, for corporate Ghana to be able to earn its sustainability credentials in the near future, then research and governance in the area of sustainability reporting is of the essence. Most scholarly work till date has focused on Stakeholder engagement in some other topics whiles other studies discuss sustainability practice as a stand-alone topic. There is very little knowledge on the interplay of stakeholder engagement in sustainability practices. With recent global trend of enforcing environmental governance,

most countries are pushing towards enforcing sustainability reporting and sustainability practice in general. Ghana, in an attempt to embrace this global trend has also introduced an environmental rating programme called the AKOBEN. The AKOBEN is an Adinkra symbol that implies vigilance. The programme was launched in November 2010 making it the first of its kind in the country. The AKOBEN represents the culmination of more than a decade long effort by EPA. The rating has five applicable colours each representing a different level of performance and commitment to sustainability. The applicable colours are Red, Orange, Blue, Green and Gold. Gold indicate an excellent results, followed by Green which means very good. Blue means good whiles Orange and Red means unsatisfactory and poor respectively.

The rating rules and criteria cover seven (7) topics, namely;

- Legal Requirements
- Hazardous and Toxic Waste
- Compliance with Environmental Quality Standards
- Environmental Monitoring and Reporting
- Best Practices
- Complaints Management and Community Relations
- Corporate Social Responsibility

This however hasn't been without specific Ghanaian contextual challenges regarding sustainable regulations in Ghana. For example, regulations on sustainability practices have been fragmented with different government agencies regulating different sections of this important practice.

So this focus was the extent to which stakeholders are involved and the level at which their individual and collective interest are met in the sustainability practices.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of the study is to investigate the current sustainability practices of selected firms analysing what they do, how they do it and more importantly why. This included what they do to engage their stakeholders in these practices, how they engage them and why. In doing so, the study also acquired in-depth information of current firms' sustainability practices and how stakeholder engagement is incorporated into the process. Specific objectives included:

- Examining the stakeholder engagement practices of firms in their sustainability practices.
- Understanding the motivations for Stakeholder engagements.
- Exploring how various stakeholders' engagement influences sustainability practices of firms in Ghana.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Significant of the research can be view along three strands: its contributions or additions to literature (Academia), contributions to policy (government and regulatory bodies), and contributions to practice(companies and practitioners).

- The significance of this study to research is its potential impact of expanding beyond the current knowledge on Sustainability practice in general and particularly among firms in Ghana.

- Another significant contribution of this study to practice is its addition to the body of knowledge currently existing best firms can engage their stakeholders in their sustainability practices.
- This would be useful to policy makers in considering regulations on corporations seeking to invest in Ghana.

The section on contributions of the study under chapter five (5) presents a detailed report on the significance of the study to academia, practice, and policy along with some recommendations.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This study is organized into five (5) chapters.

Chapter one (1), the introduction gives a brief history of sustainability reporting and sustainability practices in Ghana. It also gives a brief background, history and some recent developments in the field of sustainability reporting and sustainability practice among firms in Ghana. This chapter also presents the statement of the problem, the relevance of the study, the definition of concepts and the scope and limitations of the study.

Chapter two (2) is the literature review. Various theories and past research on sustainability reporting and sustainability practice are reviewed in this chapter. These include the stakeholder theory, political cost theory under the Positive accounting theory among others.

Chapter three (3) presents the methodology or the actual process through which the study was carried out. This included a definition of the key variables and a profile of the firms, respondents, and stakeholders that data was collected from.

Chapter four (4) introduces and analyses the data. The various graphical representations and interpretations of the collected data are shown in this chapter. The application of Thematic analysis as postulated by Miles and Hubberman (1994) formatted to suit the Setup, Quote and Comment (SQC) format is also found in this chapter.

Chapter five (5) discusses the findings and results of the analysis. Recommendations on the subject matter were also laid down in this section of the research. The directions for future research in the subject matter are also discussed here.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter thoroughly reviews and critically analyses previous works regarding Sustainability Practices in order to enhance our understanding of the subject matter. To further explain the concept and its related concepts and terminology, theoretical and conceptual frameworks were employed in this chapter. In this regard, AccountAbility 1000, the stakeholder theory alongside its derivative theories and the legitimacy theory are used to explain Sustainability practices and to enhance our grasp of the concept, and this chapter concludes by looking at some empirical and theoretical reviews.

2.2 Background and Components of Sustainability Practices

This section discusses previous literature on the topic of sustainability. The focus is to establish the background of the subject matter, and discuss the various elements of Sustainability practices as identified in literature and practice. The various elements of sustainability initiatives are discussed as well.

2.2.1 History of Sustainability Practices

The topic of sustainability has been of increasing importance to society over the last few decades. It gained increased importance in the 1980s after the report of the Brundtland commission formally called the World Commission for Environment and Development (WCED). Since then there have been varied definitions of the topic of sustainability and sustainability practices in general. For example, the Brundtland Commission (1987, p. 247) in its report, defined sustainability to mean "meeting the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" and has been of increasing importance for society over the last decades. Another impressive definition offered in the field of sustainability was that of Thwink, (c2014) which explained sustainability as the ability to continue a defined behaviour indefinitely.

Cunningham and Cunningham (2001) also defined sustainability as the study of how natural systems function, remain diverse and produce everything it needs for the ecology to remain in balance. In defining of sustainability, Cunningham and Cunningham (2001) consider the effect of human and/or corporate activities on the environment. A related definition of the subject matter is that of USAID Global Partnerships, (2008). They defined sustainability to mean the capacity of an organisation to achieve long-term success and stability. This definition further adds that, the long term success and stability should be achieved whiles serving consumer and clients of the organisation without the threat or loss of financial support nor service quality. In various definitions of sustainability, one thing is key: continuity. In an attempt to achieve this continuity, the last few decades have seen a growing debate on the role of business in society and the need for companies to take sustainability issues into account (Waddock et al, 2004; Amini,

2014) as cited in Bellantuono, Pontrandolfo & Scozzi , (2016). Significant evidence though from developed countries exists to show that business activities exert pressure on the environment. The absence of strong legal regulations therefore to check firm activity and protect the ecosphere will be detrimental to society (Stern, 2006).

Business organisations have disclosed aspects of their performance, beyond traditional financial measures for years (KPMG, 2011). Initially, this involved supplementary disclosures in the annual report (Deegan & Gordon, 1996; Ernst & Ernst, 1978; Guthrie & Parker, 1990; Hackston & Milne, 1996), but it has evolved to encompass dedicated sustainability practices made up of the economic components, social components and environmental components. Some organisations have progressed through all of these stages, while others have jumped in for the first time with a report that reflects the latest development at the time they initiated sustainability practices. It is within the context of ongoing sustainability practices evolution that we study the development of integrated reporting as cited in Stubbs & Higgin, (2012).

In order to be able to grasp the concepts of sustainability, one must go as deep as the economic activity performed in the natural environment, which has unfolded under the concepts of integrated reporting in recent times. The concept has seen so many phases and morphs since its inception.

According to the Corporate Register (2004) sustainability was first coined about thirty (30) years ago and has since gained traction and interest in the business world. Some other sources claim

the history of sustainability practices can be traced back to as early as the 1960s and 1970s in Europe and slightly later in the United States when organization started to recognize their role in the society above and beyond profit maximization. The sustainability movement and reporting in the United States dates back to the first Earth Day held on April 22, 1970. After that, the movement gained momentum with a 1987 United Nations report, Our Common Future, better known as the Brundtland Report. This report promoted sustainability as a means of balancing economic and environmental activities.

In a report by Ernst & Young (2014), sustainability practices and sustainability reporting is noted to appear to be reaching a “tipping point,” as it moves beyond the realm of the innovators and early adopters and into the mainstream. According to some studies like (Adams, 2004; Mathews, 1997; Eugénio et al., 2010; Gray et al., 2008; Parker, 2005; Perego, 2005), sustainability practices of firms have evolved beyond its initial form into a more accepted and widely practised form of corporate initiative. The study further noted the changes in the nature of sustainability practices into several phases as explained below:

2.2.1.1 The Evolvement Phase

The evolvement phase of sustainability practice and reporting refers to the period when the Subject matter began showing its head in accounting. The increasing awareness on the subject of social accounting and for that matter sustainability practice and reporting can be traced to as far back as the 1960s. (Gray, 2002; Dillard et al., 2005). Corporate sustainability practices in the form of sustainability reporting started its evolution with focus on areas like social responsibility, corporate ethics, and ecological issues (Loew et al., 2004).

2.2.1.2 The Beginning Phase

This phase of corporate sustainability practices took off about a decade after the Evolvement phase. This was the second stage in the development of the subject matter. At this stage of the introduction of corporate sustainability practice, there was an increase in the subject matter. By 1970, sustainability reporting which is a subset of sustainability practice, had began gaining formal recognition. At this phase of development, the subject of environmental accounting had gained more interest of experts. However, there was still a certain decline mostly expressed in terms of questioning the role of accounting and the merits of publishing information about environmental activity.

2.2.1.3 The New Wave Phase

In the 1980s, there was an increase in natural disasters. A typical example is the Exxon Valdez oil spill in the Alaska state of the United States. Latson (2015) describes the Exxon Valdez oil spill as follows: "It was the worst man-made environmental catastrophe in U.S. history ". These occurrences coupled with the fact that corporate activities were now causing environmental issues lead to an increase in the growing relevance of the subject matter. Loew et al. (2004) also noted that the intensive development at this phase was prompted by the fact that this was the time when specialised accounting periodicals first appeared. Loew et al., (2004) noted further that this was the period when environmental accounting first starts to be separated from social accounting. In other words, the elements of sustainability practices had began to stand alone as topics of interest to both practitioners and researchers of accounting.

2.2.1.4 Maturation Phase

The Maturation phase also emerged barely a decade after the new wave. This was in the 1990s. The subject matter had become a key issue of accounting research. It is also worth noting that by the 1990s, the awareness of environmental accounting within social accounting increases and becomes a key topic of research, gaining recognition within accounting research.

2.2.1.5 Sustainability Practice Today

Sustainability practice as of today is in the mainstream lending credence to organisations that engage in sustainability reporting. The practice of sustainability as undertaken today includes four dimensions, namely the economic, environmental, social and time dimensions (Lozano, 2013). All four dimensions are implicitly present when reflecting upon current and future generations. Organisations should take these dimensions (people, planet, prosperity and time) into consideration while executing or anticipating their activities. Consequently, strengthened by the definition of sustainability from the Brundtlandt Commission (Nations, 1987), business practices should not compromise the current needs for the ability of future generations to meet their needs. At the same time the environment, society and economy should benefit over time. This study focuses on the translation from vision to action and more specific, stakeholder engagement in this integration process.

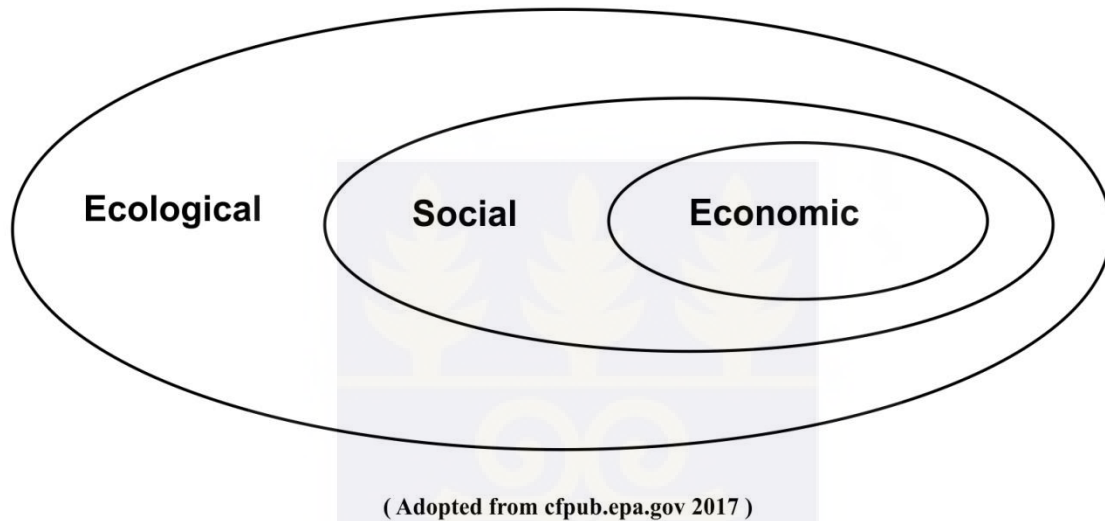
2.2.2 Components of Sustainability Practices

This section explains the various components of sustainability practices; namely sustainability initiatives and sustainability reporting. Sustainability initiatives constitute the first step toward engaging in a sustainability practice. These initiatives are executed around three (3) themes, namely; economic, ecological, and social. Sustainability reporting constitutes the final step in a sustainability practice. Under sustainability reporting, the firm publishes information about its sustainability initiatives. The subsections that follow will give detailed accounts of what constitutes sustainability initiatives and sustainability reporting.

2.2.2.1 Sustainability Initiatives

At the centre of the various definitions of sustainability are three (3) unique themes. These are also referred to as "the three elements of life". These are the economic considerations also called financial considerations, the environmental considerations and the social considerations. These form the triple bottom line.

Figure 2.1 Elements of Sustainability Initiatives



Economic elements refer to the financial variables and those variables that deal with inflows. This will typically include items or expense, cost, income, revenue, and/or taxation. Social elements measure the social dimensions of the organisation or its objectives. Demographics of society, equity, wellbeing, fairness, unemployment rate etc are some of the variables that fall within the social element of sustainability practice. The environmental elements of sustainability refers to those environmental initiatives in a sustainability practice. According to Indianaedu (2017), environmental measures include water and air quality, land management issues, solid and toxic waste, natural resources among others.

2.2.2.2 Sustainability Reporting

Sustainability reporting refers to the periodic disclosure by firms of their environmental, economic, and social performance (Fonseca et al , 2011). The definition of sustainability reporting according to Fonseca et al , (2011) lends itself to the explanations that sustainability reporting is preceded by sustainability initiatives. That is to say, sustainability practice involves first of all, having a sustainability initiative which may be economic, social, or environmental and then disclosing information about such an initiative in the firm's periodic report. The GRI (2006) in its sustainability guidelines also defines a sustainability report as a report by an organisation about the social, environmental and economic effects caused by its everyday activities. The definition of the GRI (2006) unlike Fonseca et al, (2011), focuses on the effect of the firm's everyday activities. Fonseca et al, (2011) on the other, highlights on the firm's publication of its performance economically, socially and environmentally. The GRI (2006) also explains a sustainability report to serve as a link between the commitment of the firm towards the global sustainable economy on one hand and the strategy of the firm on the other hand.

Sustainability reporting has a cycle of data collection, communication and responses (GRI,2011). In other words, for a sustainability report to be of good quality, the reporting organisation should ensure it undertakes all three steps in producing its sustainability report.

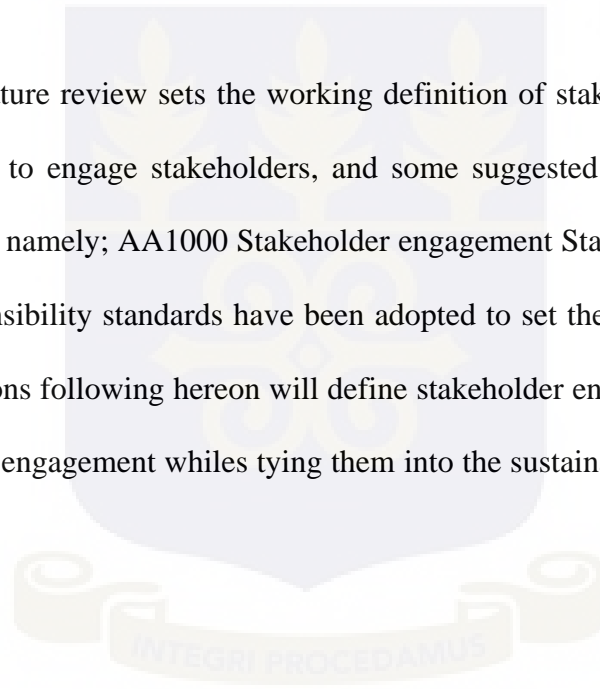
Quality sustainability report enables the reporting organisation to enjoy some benefits. Some of these benefits may be internal to the firm while others may be external to the firm. These benefits include:

- It can help compare the environmental, social and economic performance of the firm internally, externally or even cross sectors.

- Sustainability reporting also helps the firm avoid being involved in social, economic, and environmental failures.
- A firm that engages in sustainability reporting can identify the impact of its everyday activities on the environment hence a good chance to mitigate the effect of its operations on the environment.

2.3 Stakeholder Engagement, Processes and Practices

This section of the literature review sets the working definition of stakeholder engagement, the processes recommended to engage stakeholders, and some suggested stakeholder engagement practices. Two standards namely; AA1000 Stakeholder engagement Standard and the ISO 26000 Corporate Social Responsibility standards have been adopted to set the working definitions and examples. The sub sections following hereon will define stakeholder engagement, the nature and processes of stakeholder engagement whiles tying them into the sustainability initiatives of firms in Ghana.



2.3.1 Definition and Nature of Stakeholder Engagement

Whiles the International Standards Organisation (ISO) in its social responsibility standard, ISO26000, defined stakeholder engagement process to mean "*activity undertaken to create opportunities for dialogue between an organization and one or more of its stakeholders, with the aim of providing an informed basis for the organization's decisions*", the AA1000 SES defines

stakeholder engagement as the process used by an organisation to engage relevant stakeholders for a purpose to achieve accepted outcomes. Stakeholder engagement as used in sustainability practice will points to the process that firms use in engaging community members, investors, policy makers, and government at large to achieve their sustainability reporting goals.

The AccountAbility 1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard defines stakeholders as “those groups who affect and/or could be affected by an organisation’s activities, products or services and associated performance. This does not include all those who may have knowledge of or views about the organisation. Organisations will have many stakeholders, each with distinct types and levels of involvement, and often with diverse and sometimes conflicting interests and concerns” . In the context of sustainability practices, stakeholders refer to community members, investors, policy makers, and government at large.

AccountAbility1000 (2015) explains that for a stakeholder management process to be of good quality, some conditions may be met. These include:

- Should be based on a commitment to the principles of the Accountability Principles Standards.
- The stakeholder engagement process should have a clearly defined purpose.
- Should contain an agreed decision making process.
- Should also be time bound.
- The process should also be flexible and responsive to change.

Hence firms engaging stakeholders should ensure the engagement process meets these requirements or conditions. For the purpose of this study, the definition of stakeholder

engagement in the AA1000 SES as the process used by an organisation to engage relevant stakeholders for a purpose to achieve accepted outcomes has been adopted.

2.3.2 Stakeholder Engagement Process

AA1000 SES defines the stakeholder engagement process as the process used by an organisation to engage relevant stakeholders for a purpose to achieve accepted outcomes. To ensure that there is a quality stakeholder engagement process in place. The AA1000SES stakeholder engagement process outlines four stages:

- Plan;
- Prepare;
- Implement;
- Review and Improve.

2.3.2.1 Planning

The planning phase of stakeholder engagement involves identifying, profiling and mapping stakeholders. The AA1000 (2015) also highlights on the planning process involved as the stage where the firm or its engagement managers try to identify their relevant stakeholders, how they will engage with the firm and why they will want to engage with the firm. It is also at this stage that the firm determines the engagement level and methods appropriate for the engagement process. The AA1000 however also grades the engagement levels as low, medium, and high levels or engagement. The standard also cites some examples of stakeholder engagement practice as remains passive, monitor, advocate, inform, transact, involve, and negotiate among others.

2.3.2.2 Preparing

The preparation phase or stage of stakeholder engagement includes mobilising resources, building capacity, identifying and preparing engagement risks. Engagement risk includes the unwillingness to engage, participation, fatigue etc. The AA1000(2015) groups this risk as one of two types; stakeholder risks and organisational risks. The possible damage to the reputation of the organisation, the risk of wastage of financial resources and time on the part of the organisation are all possible organisational risks.

2.3.2.3 Implementation

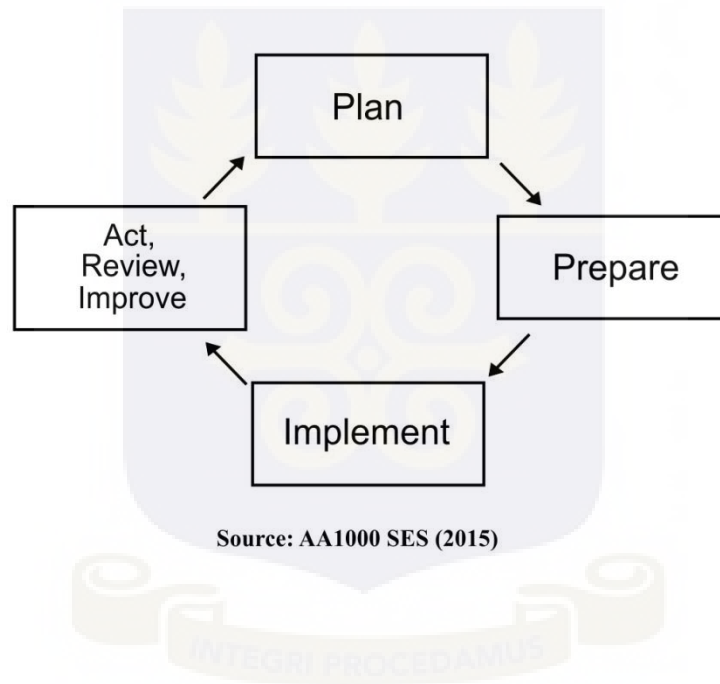
The implementation stage is the stage where the firm invites its identified or relevant stakeholders, brief these stakeholders on the possible engagement terms, engage them, document the output of the engagement process, and then develop an action plan for the engagement process.

2.3.2.4 Review and Improvement

The rationale for this stage of the stakeholder engagement process is to serve as a corrective tool. The first step in the review and improvement stage is to monitor the stakeholder engagement process, improve based on learning from the monitoring. Developing a follow-up and reporting on the overall process is the final stage in the review and improvement process.

The illustration below shows the various steps in the stakeholder engagement process.

Figure 2.2 Stakeholder Engagement Process



2.3.3 Stakeholder Engagement Practices

The International Standards Organisation (ISO) in its social responsibility standard, ISO 26000, defined stakeholder engagement process to mean "*activity undertaken to create opportunities for*

dialogue between an organization and one or more of its stakeholders, with the aim of providing an informed basis for the organization's decisions". In its definition, the ISO 26000 further explains that stakeholder engagement could take several forms ranging from the organisation in question initiating it to a form where such an engagement activity is a response by the organisation to one or more stakeholder groups. This explanation is not different from that offered by the AA1000 SES standard on stakeholder engagement. The A1000 SES focuses on the objective or desired outcome of the organisation in the engagement process.

Both ISO 26000 and AA1000 SES point to the fact that stakeholder engagement practices may take different forms ranging from the formal to informal engagement practices. Some stakeholder engagement practices cited in ISO 26000 standards include:

- Public hearings

The ISO 26000 standard prescribes giving audience to members of the general public as a means of engaging a firm's stakeholders.

- Round-table discussions

A round-table discussion as used in the ISO 26000 standard is a means of engaging stakeholders by organising a stakeholder discussion on a specific issue. This is termed a round-table discussion.

- Collective bargain

Collective bargain is a negotiation mostly for wages and other forms of employment conditions done by employee union on behalf of its members.

- Use of web based forums

Web based forums are web 2.0 platforms and other electronic platforms that affords corporations the opportunity to interact with stakeholders. Web based forums have a real time and cost effective advantage as means of engaging stakeholders.

- Consultations

Consultation requires the firm to formal discuss or consult with the identified stakeholders.

- The use of advisory committees.

Last but not the least; firms can use advisory committees to gather knowledge and unique perspectives in their stakeholder engagement process.

The AA1000SES on the other hand views stakeholder engagement practice more from a strategic perspective. It cites some stakeholder engagement practices to include but not limited to:

- Remain passive,
- Monitor,
- Advocate,
- Inform,
- Transact,
- Involve,
- Negotiate

When firms remain passive, they do not interfere with stakeholders. Monitoring stakeholders as a stakeholder engagement practice involves looking out for their activities and how it affects the organisation. A clearly example of stakeholders who are to be engaged by monitoring is the media. Advocacy is an act of pushing forth an agenda or idea. Firms could engage their stakeholders as such. Some other forms of stakeholder engagement practices have been

identified outside those identified by both the ISO and AA1000. Notable among the several other list stakeholder engagement practices is that of Sequeira & Warner (2007). In a bid to explain how firms can engage their stakeholders, Sequeira & Warner (2007) created a list of engagement practices. These included consultation, negotiation and partnership, grievance management, stakeholder involvement in project monitoring, reporting to stakeholders as well as using management functions.

Despite the difference in suggested approaches to stakeholder engagements, there seems to be some degree of similarity in the underlining task among the various authorities. That is the involvement of stakeholders. Most of the suggested stakeholder engagement strategies also focus on external stakeholders.

2.3.4 Motivations for Stakeholder Engagement

Motivation for stakeholder engagements in sustainability practices refer to the drivers or purpose for which organisations engage their stakeholders in their sustainability practices. The AA1000 Stakeholder engagement standard points out to the fact that for any stakeholder engagement process to be effective and meaningful, it must have a specific purpose also known as the motivation of the stakeholder engagement process. The standard further identifies two broad categories of purpose for stakeholder engagements: strategy and operations. That is, stakeholder engagement takes place to develop or improve strategy or to help identify and address operational issues. The standard also mentions the understanding of stakeholder views as a major motivation for stakeholder engagement.

Seuring and Müller (2008), postulates that the largest driver and motivation for firms to engage their stakeholders is external pressure. Mushka (2015) in a study that explored how stakeholder engagement creates value for corporate sustainability cites satisfying customers and seeking feedback among others as some strong motivations for stakeholder engagement by corporations.

2.4 Theoretical Review

There are so many theories that could explain the underlining assumptions and concepts framing this thesis. To better enhance the understanding of these assumptions and concepts some theories were employed in doing so. Among the selected theories were the stakeholder theory and the legitimacy theory along with their extended or modified forms. For example Stakeholder Analysis, and stakeholder mapping which are extended and modified forms of the Stakeholder theory, have both been used alongside the stakeholder theory.

2.4.1 The Stakeholder Theory

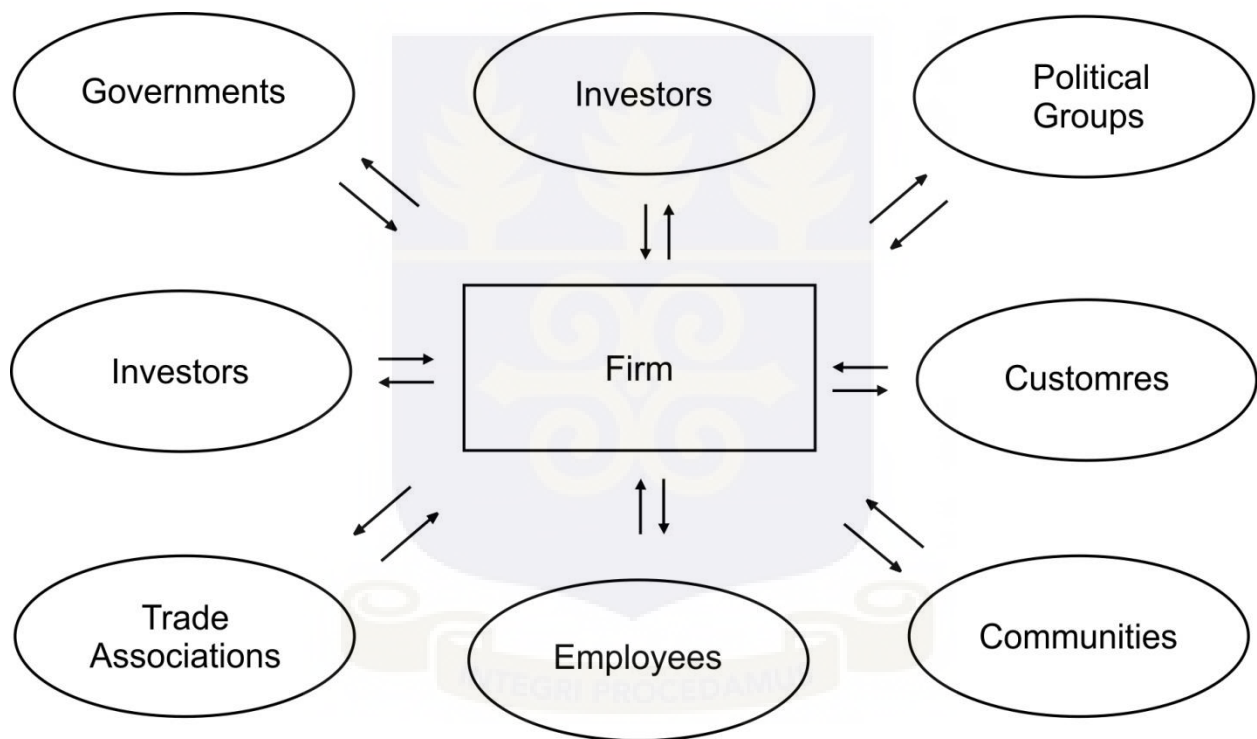
Friedman and Miles (2002, p21) explains the stakeholder theory to be:

"A theory that states that the purpose of a business is to create value for stakeholders not just shareholders. Business needs to consider customers, suppliers, employees, communities and shareholders. "

In this definition by Friedman and Miles (2002) , it points out certain key notes underlining the core of the stakeholder theory. In the stakeholder theory, the firm is to identify their stakeholders

along with monitoring stakeholder interest and commit to satisfying the various stakeholder interests. The figure below captures the essence of the stakeholder theory.

Figure 2.3 Stakeholder Theory



Source: Donaldson and Preston, (1995)

The diagram suggests that stakeholders comprise both internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders are those that are within the firm, while external stakeholders refer to those outside the firm. Some internal stakeholders include employees, management, and investors. While

external stakeholders will include governments, suppliers, communities, customers, trade associations etc. The stakeholder theory in general obliges the firm to:

- Identify and categorise its stakeholders
- Identify and monitor their needs and requirements of the firm
- Categorise these needs
- And also putting in place functions to fulfil these needs.

As far as this thesis work is concerned, the stakeholder theory will guide and shape the conceptual framework and my approach to data collection. Additionally, the stakeholder theory will be the guiding theory in the thematic analysis of my research methodology. An extension of the stakeholder theory categorises stakeholders into primary and secondary stakeholders according to Gibbson (2000). This extension will aid in the interview process.

The stakeholder theory has two main variants; the descriptive stakeholder theory and the instrumental stakeholder theory.

The descriptive stakeholder theory is a variant of the stakeholder theory that was first put forth by Donaldson and Preston (1995) suggesting that the business corporation is at the centre of co-operation and competition. This theory is explorative in nature. This variant of the Stakeholder theory also postulates that depending on the stage in corporate development that the firm or business unit has reached, different stakeholders will have varying importance or significance to the firm. (Jawahar & Mclaughin, 2001).

The Instrumental Stakeholder Theory as the other variant of the stakeholder puts the firm's stakeholder management practices in the middle of its objectives or desired outcome such as

profit, growth, survival, stability among others. It was first postulated by Jones (1995). It goes on to postulate that a firm that involves itself in stakeholder management is going to perform better on profit, growth, stability, survival etc than a firm that does not engage in stakeholder management all other things being equal. This makes the Instrumental Stakeholder Theory a contingent one.

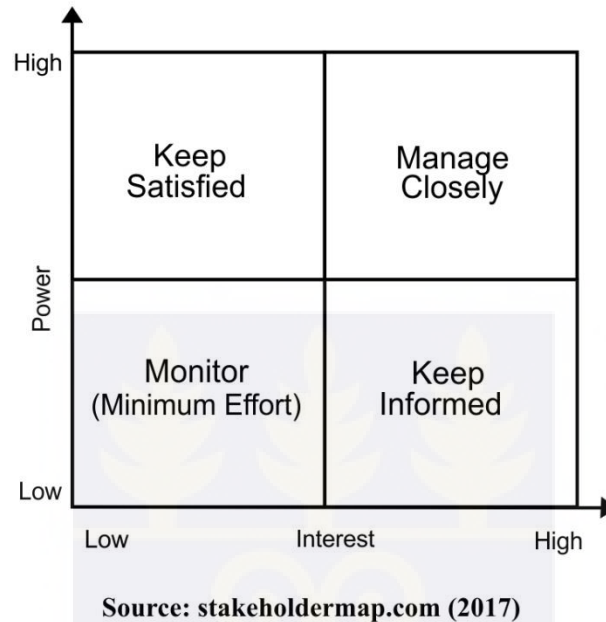
2.4.4 Stakeholder Analysis Matrix

Stakeholder analysis is an extension of the stakeholder theory. According to Schmeer (2010)

stakeholder analysis involves systematically gathering and analyzing qualitative information about identified stakeholders to determine whose interests should be taken into account in the development of policies. In the stakeholder analysis, power and interest are benchmarks of the decision making process. The power and interest of stakeholders determine how they are to be treated. The figure below shows the stakeholder analysis matrix and template.



Figure 2.4 Stakeholder Analysis



In the stakeholder analysis template as shown above, stakeholders are measured along two parameters, thus power and interest. Power refers to the identified stakeholders' ability to influence the organisation. Interest on the other hand refers to the identified stakeholders demands on the firm. The stakeholder analysis matrix has four quadrants each representing a group of stakeholders. The first quadrant represents stakeholders with low interest and lower power. Their demands on the firm are low and likewise their power to influence the firm. These groups of stakeholders according to the stakeholder analysis matrix are to be monitored. Minimum effort is required for them. An example of stakeholder groups that falls within this

quadrant is the community at large. Members of the community and general public relatively have a low power to influence the firm as well as a low interest in the firm. With a minimum effort, this group of stakeholders can be monitored. The second quadrant holds those stakeholders with a low interest and high power. They are to be satisfied according to the stakeholder analysis matrix. This group of stakeholders have the ability to influence the firm to a large extent, their interest is however limited. A typical example of stakeholders who may fall within this quadrant is shareholders. Shareholders have the power to influence significantly both operational and financial decision of the firm. Their interest however is very limited, mostly to the finances of the firm. Satisfying their needs is an effective approach to remain in the good books of such stakeholders. The third quadrant holds those stakeholders who have high interest in the firm yet very low power to influence things or how things are done. The media to a large extent falls within this category of stakeholders hence the third quadrant. Keeping these stakeholders informed is an effective way of managing them according to the stakeholder analysis matrix. The fourth quadrant holds perhaps the most important stakeholders. They have high interest coupled with high power to influence the firm. Some examples include shareholders.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed scholarly works that have been conducted so far on the subject matter citing the working definition of the subject matter from the definition coined out of the Brundtland Commission's report. The theoretical underpinning of the study made up of the

stakeholder theory, its descriptive and instrumental forms and the stakeholder analysis matrix were all explained. The definitions, nature and process involved in stakeholder engagement were also explained in this chapter. Additionally the working definitions for the terms and concepts used throughout the work have been specified in this chapter.



CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

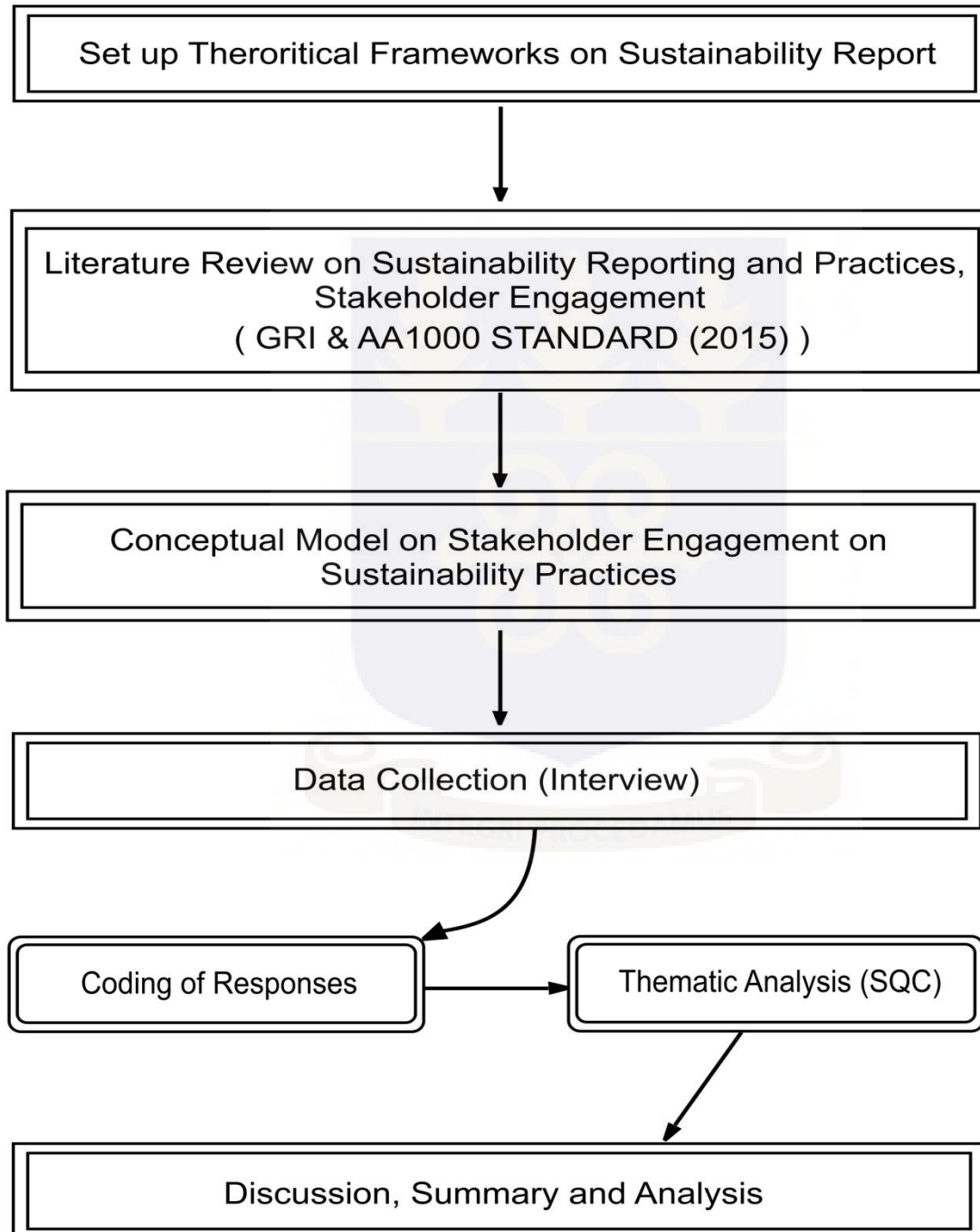
Chapter two defined the various terminologies, concepts, and frameworks to be employed in this research. This chapter will present a discussion of the methodology to be employed in achieving the objectives of the study. Specifics of this chapter will include a look into the research approach, research design, data sources, data collection methods and interview guide.

3.2 Research Design and Strategy

The research design can be conceived as the overall strategy or blueprint for conducting the research (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005; Malholtra, 2007). In my quest to study the current stakeholder engagement and expectations in sustainability reporting in Ghana, I employed a descriptive multiple case study with the aim of exploring the current levels to which firms involve stakeholders in their sustainability practices. Data collected on companies was transcribed and fed into the analysis software. Thematic analysis was then performed based on the transcribed data. Multiple case studies from the manufacturing sector were selected. To lay a smooth roadmap for my research objectives, a theoretical framework was then be setup to ensure a well guided research. Objectives and research questions were tailored towards proving

conformity or deviance with recognised and established theories on the subject matter of sustainability practices.

Figure 3.1 Research Design



3.3 Population , Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A research population refers to the total sum of all the matters or of all units of the issue or phenomenon used in investigating all the possible explanations of the same kind made Kumekpor (2002). The target population for this study was manufacturing firms in Ghana who have subscribed to the AKOBEN programme. Also some interviews were conducted amongst selected stakeholder groups. Stakeholders that were interviewed included government agency ; heads of departments of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to be specific as well as some members of the various departments in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The reason for focusing on the manufacturing firms is that mining firms on the AKOBEN are also regulated by the Ghana Chamber of Mines hence a duality of regulation. This may affect the nature of their sustainability practices.

Fifteen (15) interviews were conducted in all. Respondents were selected from case companies. The purposive sampling technique was employed to select the research sample. Purposive sampling according to Sunder et al., (2009) is a non-probabilistic sample technique which bases its selection of samples on some predefined characteristics or objectives of the study. Sunder et al.(2009) further explained that sample sizes, may or may not be fixed prior to data collection, depend on the resources and time available, as well as the study's objectives. Purposive sample sizes are often determined on the basis of theoretical saturation. Purposive sampling is therefore most successful when data review and analysis are done in conjunction with data collection according to Sunder et al (2009).

Despite the use of the purposive sampling technique to select sample firms, a snowball technique was applied within firms in determining the fifteen interviewees. The snowball technique of choosing research participants allows for selection of new participants based on the recommendations of previous participants. In some firms, a first officer may admit to having limited knowledge of their sustainability practices and/or stakeholder engagement practices hence recommend another colleague for the interview.

3.4 Data Sources and data Collection Method

This section explains the sources of data for the study, the data collection methods used and the variations in data collections and data sources.

3.4.1 Data Sources

The study employed mainly primary data and a bit of secondary data to achieve the objective of this study. According to Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005) the two data sources available for a study include primary and secondary data sources. Primary data collected from primary data sources consists of data originated by the researcher for the specific purpose of addressing the research problem while secondary data on the other hand refers to data collected for some purpose other than the problem at hand (Malholtra, 2007). Primary data sources include observations, experiments, surveys and interviews while secondary data sources include books, journal articles, online data and catalogues. The primary data collection involves the use of semi-structured personal interviews, and these were designed for selected companies from a targeted

population. Secondary data was used alongside to support and increase credibility of the primary data sources. The secondary data collection involves the use of audited financial reports of the selected companies, periodic reports on Ministry of Environment, Mines and Energy, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Forestry Commission and other relevant information that are needed for the study.

3.4.2 Data Collection Method

According to Sulaiman (2014), good data collection must allow for collection of complex but rich data. Semi-structured interview guides were developed and used to achieve the research objectives. Using interviews in data collection phase of research has so many advantages hence making it one of the most reliable forms of data collection. This is further supported by the claim of Malholtra (2007) face-to-face interviews help with more accurate screening. A further explanation by Malholtra (2007) was that the individual being interviewed is unable to provide false information during screening questions such as gender, age, or race. With regard to stakeholder expectations, an unstructured interview was used to gather information on stakeholders' expectation in the whole sustainability practice of the firm. The unstructured interview method of obtaining information is based on asking respondents a variety of questions based on their response to previous questions and is an effective tool to get opinions, attitudes and descriptions as well as for getting cause and effect relationships (Malholtra 2007; Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005). Malholtra (2007) also recognises amongst the advantages of this method to include; ease of administrating the interview.

3.4.3 Interview Guide Development

The research relied on a semi-structured interview as data collection tool for achieving the stated research objectives. The semi-structured interview guide was developed in sections. Each section of the interview guide was trying to measure a specific research objective or answer a specific research question.

The interview guide had four (4) sections. The first section contained introductory questions about the interviewee; inquiring about his position, role, and years of experience in the firm. The second section of the interview focused on the environmental and social initiatives of the selected firm. This section places emphasis on what they do by way of social and environmental initiatives, how they do them and why they do them. The third section was about firms' stakeholder engagement practices. What they do to engage their stakeholders, how they do them and the motivation or rationale behind their various stakeholder engagement practices. Last but not the least section was to solicit for feedback of various sustainability managers in the firms with regard to their sustainability practices. In this regard, the questions under this section were tailored to understand the various challenges these sustainability managers face in implementing the current sustainability practices, those challenges associated with how stakeholders are engaged in the sustainability practices, and also suggestions to improve sustainability practices and stakeholder engagement in general.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability of the data to be collected is very important in research. Hair et al., (2006) explained validity to be the extent to which a scale or set of measures accurately represent the

concept of interest. In the same light, Berthon et al., (2005) observed and asserted that for a scale to be used with confidence it must possess validity; thus, it must measure what it purports to measure. There are different types of validity. These include, content validity, convergent validity and divergent validity (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005; Malholtra, 2007). In the context of this study, validity will be enhanced by asking related questions that points to or should point to a similar responses across the data collection process.

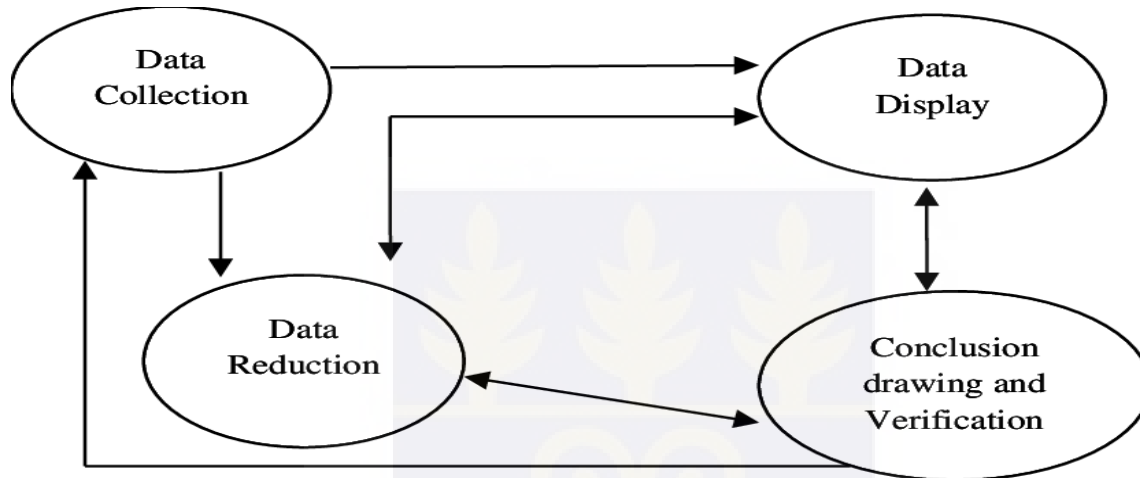
Reliability on the other hand is explained by Hair et al., (2006) as an assessment of the degree of consistency between multiple measurements of a construct. Measures such as test-retest, alternative-forms and internal consistency reliability have been identified by Malholtra (2007) as means of ensuring reliability in any data gathering process. However the commonly used method of assessing reliability is internal consistency (Hair et al., 2006). For the purpose of this thesis, I relied on internal consistency between data collected from different interviews and different sections of the same interview. Another strategy that was used to achieve reliability of data in this study is the use of triangulation, namely using several data sources.

3.6 Data Analysis and Management

The transcription of the data collected in the semi-structured interview was coded in Microsoft Excel and then analysed using the Themematic Analysis approach presented in the Setup, Quote and Comment (SQC) approach. The first point of analysis involved coding the transcribed data. This choice of coding style is informed by Strauss & Corbin (1998) postulation that thematic analysis is best used to guide a coding process that wants to draw out key themes. Codes were furthered grouped into categories and then classified into themes as patterns emerged within the

data (Neuman, 2003; Patton, 2002). The data analysis process as adopted from the (Miles and Huberman, 1984) is illustrated in the diagram below

Figure 3.2 Data Analysis (Adopted from Miles and Huberman 1984, p.12)



3.7 Limitations of Research Methodology

One expected limitation to this research was accessibility to data. Another limitation related to interviews revolved around the role of franchisers. Because the LEAPFROCS was designed as a tool for research inside of organisations. This limitation was minimised by blending in the stakeholder engagement processes and practices as recommended by other frameworks like the GRI, the AA100 standard among others.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter examines the procedures employed to carry out this research work, bearing in mind the objectives outlined. The target population, selection method, and firm specific industries. The data collection tool that was used is also explained in this chapter. This chapter also concludes with the imitations of the study and how they have been taken care of.



CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings according to the interviews conducted. First, the interviewees are briefly presented with their departments and roles. However, due to anonymity of firms and individual interviewees, more details cannot be presented. The second section of this chapter addresses and tries to achieve the stated research objectives of this thesis. This is achieved by the extraction of themes from transcribed interviews. In the light of this, the second part of this chapter is divided into three sections along the lines of the research objectives.

4.2 Overview of Cases and Profile of Interviewees

The following tables list the firms that were selected for the interviews, the officers that were interviewed along with their positions and titles accorded them. The table that follows also shows the time spent with various officers as categorised by the interviewer.

4.2.1 Overview of Cases

In all, ten (10) organisations were selected for the interview. Fifteen interviews were conducted within these ten (10) selected organisations. For the purposes of anonymity, the names of selected companies have been concealed and they have been given code names. The code names assigned are Alpha, Beta, Celta, Delta, Echo, Felta, Gamma, Neo-Alpha, Neo-Beta and the EPA.

Alpha is a manufacturing company engaged in the production of meat and meat products. It operates in Kumasi but sells its products to consumers across the whole of Ghana. Alpha operates mainly in Kumasi, Sunyani, Obuasi and the neighbouring towns and cities.

Alpha has a strong commitment to sustainability and has subscribed to the AKOBEN of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of Ghana. The company has to its credit a Gold rating on Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR), Orange rating on Environmental Practices among others. For this study, two interviews were conducted in the company. One interviewee was the head of production department and the other was the managing director of the company.

Beta is a registered manufacturing company with an equally strong commitment to sustainability practices. Beta's main product is paint. Beta produces paint both for the domestic market and for export. Beta's commitment to sustainability is manifested in its subscription to the AKOBEN of the EPA of Ghana. This is evident in the firm's attainment of a Gold rating on CSR, Orange rating on Environmental Practices among others.

Two interviews were conducted at Beta, one with the head of the technical unit and the other with the general manager.

Celta is into production of aluminium products; mainly cooking utensils. On the AKOBEN programme, the company is listed under manufacturing companies with a Gold rating in its CSR and green in its environmental practices section.

The firm is located in the Brong Ahafo region, engaging in the production of timber and wood production. The firm showed its firm inclusion in the AKOBEN programme of the EPA in the latest report of 2012. The overall rating of the firm is a red colour putting it among the firms in the programme that are considered to be performing poorly in their environmental performance.

Echo is into the production and wholesale of cosmetic products. Its main products are powder and pomade. Echo is located in a community with high environmental management issues. Echo however is not subscribed to the AKOBEN programme of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) even though highly committed to sustainability by virtue of its location and operational nature. The inclusion of Echo provides a case on the sustainability practices of manufacturing firms that are not listed on the AKOBEN programme of the (EPA).

Felta is manufacturing company engaged in the production of wood and wood products. The company is located and operates in Sunyani but sells its products to consumers across the whole of Ghana. Felta operates mainly in Sunyani and the neighbouring towns and cities.

Just like the other firms, the firm was selected because of its strong commitment to sustainability and has subscribed to the AKOBEN of the EPA of Ghana. The company has to its credit a Gold rating on CSR, Orange rating on Environmental Practices among others.

Gamma is a manufacturing company located in the Greater Accra region. There is adequate evidence of the company's commitment to sustainability even though the company has not subscribed to the AKOBEN of the EPA yet. The inclusion of Gamma as a case company was to enable a window of opportunity in comparing how firms that subscribe to the AKOBEN of the EPA handle their stakeholder engagement and sustainability practices which are different from firms that are yet to.

Neo-Alpha

Neo-Alpha is a software company specialising in helping merchants sell their products online across channels and keep their products in sync. Neo-Alpha provides an effective and easy to use tool to manage and synchronize inventory and orders across multiple sales channels. Inclusion of Neo-Alpha is to cover firms that are not necessarily manufacturing concerns and who may be in one way or the other also polluting the environment. Other forms of pollution in the form of noise and water pollution, which could be a case for sustainability actions and programmes by such service organisations to preserve the environment.

Neo-Beta

Neo-Beta is a software company providing market and social research using short message services (sms), unstructured supplementary services data (ussd), and interactive voice response (IVR) technologies. Just like Neo-Alpha, Neo-Beta was sampled to study stakeholder

identification and engagement from the view point of service oriented firms who may not have any physical activities in the environment.

4.2.2 The Environmental Protection Agency

The Environmental Protection Agency is the leading public body for protecting and improving the environment in Ghana. The core activities of the EPA are to guide development to prevent, reduce, and as far as possible, eliminate pollution and actions that lower the quality of life. To ensure firms engage in sustainability practices, the EPA instituted the AKOBEN Programme and currently also the main regulator of sustainability practices of firms.

AKOBEN is an environmental performance rating and public disclosure initiative by the EPA. The programme was launched in November 2010 making it the first of its kind in the country. According to Darko-Mensah (2013), the AKOBEN was also the first of its kind in Sub Sahara Africa. The name AKOBEN stems from the traditional symbol representing vigilance. Hence the programme connotes the concept of vigilance. According to NDPC (2010), this rating project and the choice of name were both consistent with the efforts of the Ghanaian government to improve governance in various spheres of public and private enterprises. The programme started with 60 firms in all, made up of 11 mining and 49 manufacturing firms.

The rating has five applicable colours each representing a different level of performance and commitment to sustainability. The applicable colours are Red, Orange, Blue, Green and Gold.

4.2.2.1 AKOBEN

AKOBEN is an environmental performance rating and public disclosure initiative by the EPA.

The programme was launched in November 2010 making it the first of its kind in the country.

The AKOBEN represents the culmination of more than a decade long effort by EPA.

As far back as 1999, the EPA considered disclosures in its environmental governance approach.

This, the EPA achieved by releasing names of mining companies based on reclamation criteria.

A few years later between the years 2000 and 2006, the EPA introduced a continuous environmental improvement award. The second phase slowly faded out around 2006 when a pilot rating programme begins.

By the year 2007, a pilot rating and disclosure had started with support from the World Bank. A subsequent review concluded that the ratings programme was not ready for disclosure.

By 2010, the EPA created AKOBEN through the works of the team joined by international environmental rating and disclosure specialist. In November 2010, the AKOBEN was finally launched.

According to Darko-Mensah (2013), the AKOBEN was also the first of its kind in Sub Sahara Africa. The name AKOBEN stems from the traditional symbol representing vigilance. Hence the programme connotes the concept of vigilance. According to NDPC (2010), this rating project and the choice of name were both consistent with the efforts of the Ghanaian government to improve governance in various spheres of public and private enterprises. The programme started with 60 firms in all, made up of 11 mining and 49 manufacturing firms.

The rating has five applicable colours each representing a different level of performance and commitment to sustainability. The applicable colours are Red, Orange, Blue, Green and Gold.

The rating rules and criteria cover seven (7) topics, namely;

- Legal Requirements
- Hazardous and Toxic Waste
- Compliance with Environmental Quality Standards
- Environmental Monitoring and Reporting
- Best Practices
- Complaints Management and Community Relations
- Corporate Social Responsibility

Figure 4.1 AKOBEN Rating Methodology Concepts

AKOBEN

Rating	Performance Level
GOLD	EXCELLENT
GREEN	VERY GOOD
BLUE	GOOD
ORANGE	UNSATISFACTORY
RED	POOR

Source: Epagovgh. (2017)

Figure 4.2 AKOBEN Rating Definitions

Rating Level	Performance	General Description
RED	POOR	Has not fulfilled the requirements of LI 1652, and creates risks from toxics and hazardous wastes mismanagement and discharges.
ORANGE	UNSATISFACTORY	Exceedance of regulatory standards for conventional pollutants. nontoxics and noise pollution
BLUE	GOOD	Adequate compliance with environmental standards
GREEN	VERY GOOD	BLUE + company is responsive to public complaints
GOLD	EXCELLENT	GREEN + company follows its corporate social responsibility policies

Source: Epagovgh. (2017)

4.2.3 Profile of Interviewees

This section summarises the profiles by way of names codes of organisation, the sector in which the organisation operates, the number of interviews per organisation and the codes and titles assigned interviewees.

Table 4.1 Description and Profile of Interviewees

ORGANISATION	SECTOR	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS	INTERVIEWEE'S TITLES& CODES
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Regulator	3	Head of Mining (HMI), Head of Manufacturing (HMA), Manufacturing Officer (MOE)
Alpha	Meat and Meat Products	2	Managing Director(MDA) and Production Head (HPA)
Celta	Aluminium Products	1	Accounts Officer (CAO)
Beta	Paints	2	General Manager (BGM),and Technical Officer (BHT)
Delta	Wood Production	1	Production Manager (DHP)
Echo	Cosmetics and Rubber Products	1	Accounts Officer (EAO)
Felta	Wood Processing	1	Production Manager (FHP)
Gamma	Manufacturing of Toiletries	1	Accounts Officer (GAO)
Neo-Alpha	eCommerce	1	Chief Product Officer (NACPO)
Neo-Beta	Market Research	2	Chief Technical Officer (NBCTO) And Chief Product Officer (NBCPO)

The Table below presents the codes, years of experience and estimated duration of various interviews. Both years of experience and duration of interview have been categorised into three groups. Because of the nature of questions asked, most interviewees were senior officers in their respective firms hence having experience mostly between five (5) and ten (10) years. The average duration of an interview was also about one (1) hour. Hence interview duration was estimated to be in groups of "Less than 1 Hour" and "Over 2 Hours".

Table 4.2 Interviewee Codes and Time Estimate

CODES	YEAR OF EXPERIENCE IN FIRM	DURATION OF INTERVIEW
HMI	Over Ten Years	Over 2 Hours
HMA	Over Five Years	Less than 1 Hour
MOE	Over Five Years	Less than 1 Hour
AMD	Over Ten Years	Over 2 Hours
AHP	Less than Five Years	Less than 1 Hour
CAO	Less than Five Years	Less than 1 Hour
EAO	Over Five Years	Less than 1 Hour
GAO	Over Five Years	Less than 1 Hour
DHP	Over Five Years	Less than 1 Hour
BHT	Over Ten Years	Over 2 Hours
BGM	Over Ten Years	Over 1 Hour

FHP	Less than Five Years	Less than 1 Hour
CODE	YEAR OF EXPERIENCE IN FIRM	DURATION OF INTERVIEW
NACPO	Less than Five Years	Less than 1 Hour
NBCTO	Less than Five Years	Less than 1 Hour
NBCPO	Less than Five Years	Less than 1 Hour

4.3 Examination of Stakeholder Engagement Practices

Stakeholder Engagement is defined as the process used by an organisation to engage relevant stakeholders for a purpose to achieve accepted outcomes. The AA1000 also grades the engagement levels as low, medium and high levels of engagement. The standard also cites some examples of stakeholder engagement practice such as remaining passive, monitor, advocate, inform, transact, involve, and negotiate among others

4.3.1 Stakeholder Identification by Selected Companies

All selected companies and interviewees identified stakeholders both within and outside the organisation, hence identifying stakeholders as internal and external stakeholders. However, stakeholder engagement practices as gathered through the interviews showed some level of skewness towards external stakeholders.

For example, some selected firms recognised stakeholders mainly by their ability to affect their operations thus, primary and secondary. During the interview, interviewees highlighted some stakeholders such as:

- Customers
- Community Members
- Employees
- Investors
- Government Agencies (Regulators)

At Alpha, both interviewees AMD and AHP identified their major stakeholders to include everyone. Both interviewees further identified some stakeholders as key and primary stakeholders. The difference in views or identification of stakeholders lies in the categorisation of stakeholders. The following was recorded for interviewees in the same firm:

"To us everyone is a stakeholder. ... However I will also state that the butchers are our most important customers and stakeholders." (AHP, Alpha).

"Once you eat meat, you are a stakeholder. ... But in this sense, the stakeholders who are of primary importance are the community members. They eat our meat and they also live in the community here". (AMD, Alpha)

Both interviewees at Beta, in different wordings shared the same view as to who makes up their stakeholders and how they identified the most important or key stakeholders. Both BGM and BHT identified their stakeholders to include both internal and external stakeholders. The most notable variation was found in their view of members of the community as stakeholders. BGM considers members of the community as stakeholders while a sharp contrasting view is held by BHT. This was captured in his statement that:

"I do not consider the community members as my stakeholders. They dirty the environment than we do." (BHT, Beta).

CAO, in identifying their stakeholders recalled that their products are used throughout the country hence the consideration of households as stakeholders in addition to their immediate stakeholders. This was captured in his statement that all:

"We have stakeholders who are close and those not so close. ... For that reason we see all households as stakeholders", (CAO, Celta).

Stakeholders to Delta were first of all members of the community in which they operate, the media, their suppliers, the government and also their customers. This was highlighted in the statement of DHP that *"Our stakeholders are the general public, the media, those who supply us our wood, the government agencies as well as those who buy wood from us"*. (DHP, Delta).

Echo and Felta both mentioned similar stakeholders and stakeholder identification processes. And this was in line with the groups identified by the previous companies.

Gamma cited a rather interesting identification of stakeholders and this was captured in the statement of the interviewee GAO:

"Stakeholders are viewed as those who have stake or interest in our operations.... So we consider our investors, the general public, the media, and some other remote individuals or groups as our stakeholders". (GAO, Gamma)

Interestingly, firms Neo-Alpha and Neo-Beta held investors as their first and foremost stakeholders. This is likely as a result of the nature of their activities. Both firms do not have any physical activity in the environment as opposed to the firms in the manufacturing space. For this reason, may not see the general public as an important group of stakeholders who may influence their operations. One may also attribute this lack of attribution of importance and recognition of

the general public as primary stakeholders to the role investors place in the technology space.

NACPO identified their stakeholders in his statement that:

"What come to mind when you say stakeholders are our investors, merchant and our workers"

(NACPO, Neo-Alpha)

NBCTO shared a similar opinion. This was revealed in his response that:

"The important ones like the people who invest in our start up, the people who use the platform and more importantly the researchers who sign up on the platform" (NBCTO, Neo-Beta).

Selected manufacturing firms have somehow similar approaches to stakeholder recognition with minor variations. Firms in the electronic commerce service industry had a different approach to identifying their stakeholders. Investors were central in the identification by electronic commerce service firms. Variations in stakeholder identification as observed through the interview responses were mostly seen in the ability of the group to affect the firm's operation and also the punitive power of the group. For example, Beta identifies stakeholder groups following their ability to influence its operations. This is seen in the response of BHT that:

"I do not consider the community members as my stakeholders. They dirty the environment than we do." (BHT, Beta).

Another interesting view of identifying stakeholders came from Alpha. In the first classification, Alpha's head of production (AHP) explained that everyone is a stakeholder to Alpha. This was captured in his comment that:

"To us everyone is a stakeholder. In fact, everyone who eats meat or meat products is a customer and for that matter a stakeholder. So we don't limit our definition of stakeholders to the people around here only. However I will also state that the butchers are our most important customers"

and stakeholders. They are those we interact with on regular basis. They are able to tell us what needs to change, what consumers like or dislike and stuff like that". (AHP, Alpha).

Emphasis was placed on butchers as the most important stakeholders to Alpha. AMD also placed emphasis on some unique groups of stakeholders mainly in the form of other institutions that have interest in the environment. This saw yet another perspective of the stakeholder identification process, adding environmentally focused organisations and the supply chain. These grouping of stakeholders are:

- Supply Chain
- Environmentally focused organisations like NGOs
- Customers
- Community Members
- Employees
- Investors
- Government Agencies (Regulators)

The objective of the stakeholder identification by firms was to assess how the stakeholder engagement process in sustainability practices is affected by who the firm recognises as a stakeholder. It also gives a clear indication of the firms' stakeholder analysis strategies. The approach of firms in identifying their stakeholders to a large extent followed the postulations in the stakeholder theory, where stakeholders are classified as internal or external to the firm. This however, does not follow the prescription of Gibbson (2000) for firms to categorise their stakeholder based on their importance to the firms, hence grouping stakeholders as primary and secondary stakeholders.

In line with the postulations of the stakeholder analysis, stakeholders are identified based on their influence and power or ability to affect the firm. For example, EPA being a stakeholder with higher power to influence operations of the firms, all firms identifies the EPA as a stakeholder to actively engage. This contradicts for example the postulations of Clarkson (1995) who categorised stakeholders as primary and secondary based on their contributions to the firm. In that same light, the community members who had less influence or power on the activities of selected company Beta were not regarded as stakeholders to consider and engage actively by the interviewee BHT. With regard to the EPA, selected companies did indicate from their responses that the demands of the EPA are met at all times in carrying out their sustainability practice. Additionally, most of these case companies also admitted that this identification is due to the powers the EPA wields, and the power to shut down (influence) the firm is the reason they identify and keep the EPA satisfied. This goes to show that case companies were reasoning and acting along the lines of the assumptions in the stakeholder matrix.

4.3.2 Identified Stakeholder Engagement Practices

There was variety of approaches to how case companies engaged their stakeholders. All interviews in manufacturing concerns highlighted that engaging stakeholders effectively in the sustainability process builds trust, a long lasting relationship and ensures continuity of the business. Thus to ensure the business stays in operational existence into the unforeseen future, the firm should engage its stakeholders effectively and regularly. This is further explained by one of the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis; the legitimacy theory. In the legitimacy theory, the

behaviour of the firm is explained with a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions according to Suchman (1995). The two service concern firms however engaged their stakeholders mainly through training , request for their feedback and for that matter can be seen as being proactive. Notable stakeholder engagement practices cited included:

- Community Empowerment
- User Education
- Workshops
- Understanding clients' needs
- Being proactive
- Request for feedback

In the course of the interview, some stakeholder engagement practices came up. The above listed were the most common engagement practices cited by case companies. In addition to the stakeholder engagement practices currently employed by case companies in their sustainability practices, a number of other practices were also suggested and recommended by respondents. The Table below spells out the current and recommended stakeholder engagement practices identified companies.

Table 4.3 Stakeholder Engagement Practices

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PRACTICE	ALPHA	BETA	CELTA	DELTA	ECHO	FELTA	GAMMA	NA & NB
Community Empowerment	Y		Y				Y	
User Education	Y	Y			Y			Y
Workshops		Y						
Understanding Client Needs	Y	Y	Y		Y			
Being Proactive		Y						Y
Request for Feedback	Y	Y		Y		Y		Y
Keeping an Open Door Policy	Y	Y		Y		Y	Y	
Employee Empowerment		Y	Y					

The key stakeholder engagement practices as identified and presented in the table above were user education, community empowerment, understanding clients' needs, actively seeking feedback as well as keeping an open door policy. Keeping an open door policy was the most acknowledged stakeholder engagement practice in the sustainability practice. This was expressed

in various forms and wording by the various respondents in the selected firms. For example, at Alpha, APH was noted to have indicated that:

"They normally approach us when they have complains and we listen to them because they know what the consumers want." (AHP, Alpha).

Similarly at Beta, BHT was noted to have explained that:

"The final users of our paint are the painters, hence the need to interact directly with them. At the end of the day, if they don't use the product well, it will appear as if our paint is not good. This is one reason why we interact with painters as key stakeholders." (BHT, Beta).

On the subject matter of keeping an open door policy, the response from the GAO was a rather catchy one. He explained this to revolve around employees. In response to a follow up question as to how they engage the community, he responded ;

"Almost all our workers are from this community, so we encourage them to give us feedback. Their voices also represent that of the community members." (GAO, Gamma).

The next most common approach with which selected companies engaged their stakeholders in their sustainability practices was what I themed as active request for feedback. Majority of selected companies cited their request for feedback as a routine way of engaging their stakeholders in their sustainability practices. At least responses from interviewees from Alpha, Beta, Delta and Felta hinted this as an effective way they engage their stakeholders in their sustainability practices. Interview respondent BGM was recorded to have explained that:

"We take a lot of feedback from our employees about some of these initiatives. After all, they are at the operational front." (BGM, Beta).

AMD also explained that:

"Because butchers interact directly with consumers, they know exactly what consumers want. Mainly due to the fact that they interact directly with consumers like I said before." (AMD, Alpha).

A similar view was shared by a respondent in charge of production as follows;

"However I will also state that the butchers are our most important customers and stakeholders. They are those we interact with on regular basis. They are able to tell us what needs to change, what consumers like or dislike and stuff like that." (AHP, Alpha).

Understanding clients' needs was another central engagement practice cited by a significant number of interview respondents. About the need to understand clients needs as a way of engaging their stakeholders, a respondent in charge of the technical unit of a selected company had this to say:

"The final users of our paint is the painters, hence the need to interact directly with them. At the end of the day, if they don't use the product well, it will appear as if our paint is not good. This is one reason why we interact with painters as key stakeholders through workshops and trainings." (BHT, Beta).

This goes without saying that the needs of their final users as stakeholders are very important to these firms in their sustainability practices. A critical look at the stakeholder engagement practices of selected firms shows that, firms' stakeholder engagement practices differ from the suggested stakeholder engagement practices listed in the ISO 26000 CSR Standard. The ISO 26000 CSR Standard views stakeholder engagement from a more active point of view. Thus the examples from the ISO 26000 included consultation, round-table discussions among others. However, from the perspective of the AA1000 SES, firms' stakeholder engagement practices were at the same level as the suggest stakeholder engagement practices. The AA1000 SES

suggests more of the passive stakeholder engagement approaches. Notable among the practices cited by the AA1000 included monitoring stakeholders, remaining passive, informing stakeholders etc.

4.3.3 The Stakeholder Engagement Arrangements and Structures

Among the well crafted questions of my interview guide was to assess the stakeholder engagement arrangements and structures in firms if any. By this, the objective was to find out if the selected firms have or had in place any structured way of engaging their stakeholders. The central theme of this objective was the presence and operational existence of stakeholder engagement committees within the selected firms.

There was a general lack of a standing committee to handle and implement the stakeholder engagement processes in selected firms beyond the adhoc committee sanctioned by the EPA.

The adhoc committee that handles sustainability issues is sanctioned by the EPA and made up as follows:

- Environmental Officers
- Accounts Officers
- Technical Officers
- Production Managers.
- Sustainability Managers

Beside the above listed members making up a committee as per the EPA's sanctions to handle sustainability practices in selected companies, no company so far among the selected companies

has a standing committee to handle sustainability practices. Responses in the interview that suggest the above conclusion include the responses of interview respondent BHT. In response to the question of whether or not there is a committee to ensure the system adopted is followed, he responded as follows:

"The EPA insists on a committee. It is a very loose committee though. They meet occasionally. I will say, it is more of a requirement than necessity. The committee is only made up of the environmental officers, the accountant, technical officer, production manager and other officers who may be involved with some specific things." (BHT, Beta).

Likewise, AHP also pointed out that:

"No, we don't have any committee in charge of stakeholder engagements." (AHP, Alpha)

At Felta, the interviewee FHP, explained that;

"We don't really have a committee for that, but as and when the need arises, we assemble a team to handle it." (FHP, Felta).

The above explains the current state of affairs with regard to the formation and existence of permanent committees to handle sustainability practices and stakeholder engagements for that matter in selected companies. It is clear that most selected companies do not have any permanent committees beyond the EPA's requirements for sustainability practices. A deeper look into the structures and arrangements of sustainability practices veered more towards the process by which various departments carried out their sustainability initiatives especially with the social initiatives. An interviewee at Felta, FHP, explained that;

"Both social and environmental initiatives are first proposed. Then upon vetting if they pass the evaluation criteria, then they capture in the budget under that department." (FHP, Felta).

Likewise, BHT also hinted that;

"The department concerned will initiate the proposal. It goes to management. The department is then asked to defend it, especially when it comes post budget." (BHT, Beta).

Both respondents at Alpha maintained that, though they have no standing committee to vet, implement or evaluate the sustainability practices, they however have to pass their social and environmental initiatives through a couple of vetting stages before implementation. AMD is recorded to have explained that:

"When organisations write to us requesting for some social interventions, we vet and evaluate their request especially with regard to its intended benefit. If it looks good and affordable then we can help them." (AMD, Alpha).

DAO officer, shared a similar response as follows:

"No, we currently don't have a committee for sustainability or how stakeholders are involved in such initiatives" . (DAO, Delta)

To draw the curtains on the arrangements and structures put in place by firms for stakeholder engagements in sustainability practices, it can be concluded that firms in Ghana mostly do not keep a standing committee for its sustainability practices. However, firms thrive very much to at least meet the needed personnel requirement for their sustainability practices as sanctioned by the EPA. Sustainability practices, both social and environmental initiatives, are also vetted in one way or the other by firms.

The interview data analysed also suggest that the committee is made up of mostly higher ranking officers who to a large extent may not be at the operational front where direct interactions with most stakeholders occurred.

4.3.4 Identified Levels of Stakeholder Engagement

Implying from the theoretical point of stakeholder analysis and stakeholder mapping, firms analyse to identify their stakeholders, analyse their interest in the firm and the power they wield by way of their ability to influence the firm. With the various approaches by which selected firms engage their stakeholders, I categorised the various stakeholder engagement practices as one of three levels of engagement:

- Passive Level of Engagement
- Active Level of Engagement
- Regulative Level of Engagement

The passive level of engagement refers to engagement with those stakeholders who don't have much influence. After analysing the stakeholder engagement approaches mentioned by interviewees, the approaches user education, understanding clients' needs and being proactive required less action on the part of the stakeholders being engaged, hence, can be categorised as passively involving stakeholders.

However, there were other stakeholder engagement processes that involved active participation of the stakeholders being engaged. These were those engagement processes grouped together as the active level of engagements. Community empowerment, workshops, seeking active feedback were those categorised as active engagement levels.

The last category of stakeholder engagement is what I termed as the regulatory level of stakeholder engagement. This level of stakeholder holder engagement is characterised by some level of compulsion. For example, most interview respondents believe that complying with the EPA's directives on their environmental management practices as well as follow up meetings

were done to fulfil a legal requirement. All forms of stakeholder engagements that involved directives from the regulatory bodies were classified as regulatory level stakeholder engagements. An example of a regulative level engagement with stakeholders was cited by the interviewee BGM highlighting that:

"I will say, I am forced to do it. It is a requirement. Where there is the need to engage a consultant, we do. And where there is the need to engage the EPA we do" (BGM, Beta).

In his explanation, it is clear that the EPA is engaged as a regulator and for that matter a stakeholder.

This is the most involved form of stakeholder involvement identified in the analysis of the interview data.

The Table below presents the categorisation of various stakeholder engagement practices into the three identified levels of stakeholder engagement.

Table 4.4 Stakeholder Engagement Levels

LEVEL OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT METHODS
Passive Engagement	User Education, Understanding Clients' Needs Being Proactive
Active Engagement	Community Empowerment Workshops Keeping Open Door Policies

	Request for Feedback Employee Empowerment
Regulatory Engagement	Reporting Consultation Follow ups

4.4 Motivations for Engaging Stakeholders in Sustainability Practices.

In an attempt to identify the driving force and motivation of selected firms in engaging stakeholders in their sustainability practice, the following themes were extracted.

4.4.1 Sustainability Practices - Environmental and Social Initiative

There were so many similarities among selected firms concerning their environmental initiatives. The result from the interview revealed that because of the regulatory nature of the environmental initiatives of firms, there was a standard environmental requirement by the EPA of Ghana. These were identified to generally include:

- Check for gas leakages
- General environmental pollution control
- Check for wastage of water
- Frequent monitoring of electricity and water.

The results show that in practice firms comply with a minimum environmental sustainability practice as listed above and report to the EPA of Ghana accordingly. However, all firms in one way or the other had specific environmental initiatives beyond the minimum scope of the EPA's requirements. For example, an interviewee on their environmental initiatives had this to say:

"Just like I said, our environmental management facilities and programmes are mainly driven by the law. However our own environmental management plans include a segmentation tank and most importantly the removal of chemicals from our disposals". (BTO, Beta)

Another yet insightful response was that of the AMD with regard to the use of a biogas plant to improve sanitation. About this initiative in the pipeline, interview respondent AMD had this to say;

"With a biogas plant, waste water and intestine contents of the animal, or dung, from the animals as well as their dung would serve as raw material to feed the Plant. We were supposed to have kicked started with the biogas plant way back in June last year" (AMD, Alpha).

One other environmental initiative that cut across most selected case companies was what interviewees termed as Waste Water Treatment Plant. For example, Beta, Celta, and Gamma had this environmental initiative in common. This summarises firm level specific environmental initiatives as follows:

- Usage of segmentation tanks
- Water Testing
- Removal of Chemicals from waste
- Usage of Waste Water Treatment Plant.

The sustainability practices as identified through the interview, had some traces of the focus areas of sustainability as cited in literature. For example, Clair (2017) indicated that sustainability practices mostly focus on the following areas: waste reduction, clean energy, environmental protection, climate protection, green building, sustainable water etc. However, findings reveal firms go beyond these areas of focus and extend their sustainability practices to the social dimensions.

With regard to social initiatives, most firms had a lot to show and talk about. This is confirmed by the gold rating of all the case companies in the AKOBEN rating disclosure. Unlike the environmental initiatives, which was heavily regulated by the EPA, social initiatives were rather diverse and unique to case companies. Some insights shared by interview respondents on social initiatives include:

"We have undertaken so many social intervention programmes in the past on our own, but we undertake them as and when the need arises. For example, a nursing training institution around recently wrote to us requesting our assistance and sponsorship. We help them out. This is one of the ways we do our corporate social responsibilities." (MDA, Alpha).

From the statement above, it can be inferred that Alpha focuses on providing sponsorship to institutions that request for help. Another social initiative cited was the support for education and sports. This is extracted from the response of the head of technical department at Beta saying that;

"One of our most outstanding social initiatives is in the area of education. We have an education fund. Our focus is on Kwahu because that is where the owner comes from and will like to give back to his community. In time past, we used to sponsor tennis as well." (BTH, Beta).

Another social initiative worth noting in the responses gathered was that of social investments and social projects. For example, on the subject matter of the firm's social initiative the respondent from Gamma, GAO indicated that:

"We take corporate social responsibilities very serious here. Among the corporate social responsibilities we have carried out here is the annual blood donation, donations in festive seasons among others" (GAO, Gamma)

Another response worth mentioning came from the interview respondent EAO. He cited as follows:

"Our focus when it comes to social initiatives lies in helping education and health care mainly." (EAO, Echo).

4.4.2 Drivers for Stakeholder Engagement

There were varied responses from selected companies as to why they engage their stakeholders in their sustainability practices. However certain drivers and motivations for engaging their stakeholders were common and almost cited across all selected firms. Key motivations and drivers for stakeholder engagement among firms in their sustainability practices include:

- Building a reputation
- Marketing benefits
- To improve the sustainability process
- To fulfil the legal requirement
- Building a relationship with stakeholders.
- Improve brand image

Beta, Echo, Celta, and Gamma cited reputation and branding as some important drivers and motivations for engaging their stakeholders in their sustainability practices. For example, EAO, hinted that;

"When we carry out these practices, and go the extra mile of engaging our stakeholders, it builds trust and as the marketer would say, improves your firm's image with the public and even the government." (EAO, Echo).

AHP highlighted that;

"By listening to the butchers and taking their feedback, we can actually improve how we do things here." (AHP, Alpha).

In the same firm, another interview respondent added that;

"By doing so we build a relationship with them". (AMD, Alpha).

The Table below summaries the drivers or motivations cited by firms as the rationale for engaging stakeholders in their sustainability practices.

Table 4.5 Motivations for Stakeholder Engagements

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PRACTICE	ALPHA	BETA	CELTA	DELTA	ECHO	FELTA	GAMMA
Building Reputation		Y	Y		Y		Y
Marketing					Y		

Benefits							
Improvements in Practices	Y						
Legal Fulfilment		Y	Y		Y		
Building Relationship	Y	Y					
Branding		Y	Y		Y	Y	
Business Continuity		Y					

Highlights from the data tabulated above also revealed legal fulfilment as a motivation or a rationale for undertaking sustainability practice as well as engaging stakeholders in the process. During the interview the interviewee BGM hinted that:

"I will say, I am forced to do it. It is a requirement. Where there is the need to engage a consultant, we do. And where there is the need to engage the EPA we do" (BGM, Beta).

A very insightful response from BHT also broke down the rationale for various identified stakeholders. He highlighted that:

"We engage our clients in all these for these main reasons; to know what they want, what the market wants, and be in tandem with what the market wants. For regulators, you engage them to ensure you are in business because they will take you to court and close you down if you don't" (BHT, Beta).

It suffices to say to say that besides the drivers for firms sustainability practices, there are certain drivers underlining the engagement of stakeholders in the sustainability practices. These were cited to include;

- To know what clients want
- To know what the market wants
- To be in tandem with market demands
- To ensure continued existence of firm's business

The key motivation for firms' stakeholder engagement practices as pointed out in the interview conforms to the postulations of the legitimacy theory. In the legitimacy theory, there is a social contract between the firm and the society. The society offers the human and natural resources as its consideration in this social contract. The firm on the other hand produces and offers goods and service as its consideration in this social contract. An exchange takes place according to the Legitimacy theory. In order to continue this social contract, the firm needs to justify its existence to society. This can be achieved by engaging the society through sustainability practices.

Insights from the interview supports the claims of Seuring and Müller (2008) that external pressure from stakeholders is an important motivation for firms to engage their stakeholders. Mushka (2015) who also found that an attempted to be proactive and seek feedback leads firms to engage their stakeholders in their sustainability practices has also been affirmed by the responses from selected firms.

4.5 Stakeholders Engagement and Sustainability Practices

Responses gathered from interviewees throughout the interview process point to the conclusion that the expectations, needs and demands of identified stakeholders have influence on the sustainability practices of firms. Various stakeholders as identified by selected firms have varying degree of influence on the firms' sustainability practices. Stakeholders that influence firms' sustainability practices the most included:

- Government Agencies (Regulators).
- Clients
- Employees
- The Supply Chain

Notable stakeholder influences are as follows:

Government Agencies

By far, the EPA appears to be the single most influential stakeholder in the sustainability practice of selected firms according to interview responses. Other government agencies and regulators that were cited to have some level of influence included

- Factories and Shop department
- Standards Board
- Customs Service

- Factories Inspectorate
- Accra Metropolitan Assembly.

Some highlights from the interviews reveal that regulators' influence go as far as dictating what should be included in sustainability practices of firms. Speaking with interviewees, almost all interviewees explained that the EPA and other regulators influence how firms carry out their sustainability practices even to the extent of determine what should be done. An interviewee at Beta captured it all in his explanation;

"As for regulators, we engage them in follow ups, trainings and workshops. Just like I explained that we organise workshops for painters to train them, regulators also organise workshops for us to train and educate us as to how to go about our sustainability practices. It is through this training that regulators can point out areas of focus and requirements to us." (BHT, Beta).

More on the influence of regulators on sustainability practices, EAO explains that, the EPA set parameters to test for in firms' discharge hence influencing the nature of sustainability practices carried out by firms. He explained that:

"The EPA requires us to test for BOD, COD, PH, Particulate Matter, Turbidity, Lead, Chrome and a lot more in our sustainability practices". (EAO, Echo).

This influence that the EPA wields on the sustainability practices of firms was further confirmed in an email follow up correspondence with BHT. In the email, he listed the parameters required by EPA in the water testing process to include:

- BOD mg/l
- COD mg/l
- Oil & grease mg/l
- Conductivity mg/l

- pH
- TDS mg/l
- TSS mg/l
- Colour TCU
- Cadmium mg/l
- Copper mg/l
- Chloride mg/l
- Lead mg/l
- Zinc mg/l
- Mercury mg/l
- Cobalt mg/l
- Iron mg/l
- Total Chromium mg/l

It will be reasonable to conclude that regulators, especially the EPA, have a significant influence on the sustainability practices of firms in Ghana. The responses and explanations of how the EPA organises workshops, trainings, and follow ups amongst others represent an important influence on the sustainability practices of firms. This is further sealed by the test parameters required by firms in their sustainability practices.

The next most influential stakeholders as identified by interviewees were their clients and customers. Majority of firms cited clients as stakeholders who influenced the sustainability process through feedback. Various responses that point to clients' role in influencing the

sustainability processes and practices of firms includes for example, at Alpha, APH who was noted to have indicated that:

"They normally approach us when they have complains and we listen to them because they know what the consumers want." (AHP, Alpha).

Similarly at Beta, BHT was noted to have explained that:

"The final users of our paint are the painters, hence the need to interact directly with them. At the end of the day, if they don't use the product well, it will appear as if our paint is not good. This is one reason why we interact with painters as key stakeholders." (BHT, Beta).

Another narrative which explained how stakeholders influence the sustainability practice was extracted from the response of interviewee GAO as follows:

"Almost all our workers are from this community, so we encourage them to give us feedback. This alone makes their feedback very important" (GAO, Gamma).

Both examples cited above reveal some levels of influence that clients and consumers (final users) have on the sustainability practices and process of firms.

The Table below summarises the various influence stakeholder groups have on the sustainability practices of firms.

Table 4.6 Stakeholder Influence

STAKEHOLDER	NATURE OF INFLUENCE
Government Agencies	Regulate and dictate how sustainability practices should be organised.
Clients (Customers)	Through purchase decisions
Employees	Through feedback

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented and discussed the findings gathered from the interview with selected companies. The themes extracted to achieve the objectives of the study were stakeholder identification by selected companies, stakeholder engagement practices of case companies, social and environmental initiatives of selected companies as well as the motivation and drivers for engaging stakeholders in the sustainability practices of firms.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I have summarised the analysed data gathered from the interviews alongside all secondary data that may have been used. In other words, this chapter is a summary of all the research finds and how they achieve the various research objectives. Where applicable, the various theoretical underpinnings of the research have been applied to the analysed data from the previous chapter. It is in this chapter that the significance of the study, thus contributions to academia, research and practice will be established.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The primary objective of the study was to investigate the current sustainability practices of selected firms analysing what they do, how they do it and more importantly why. This included what they do to engage their stakeholders in these practices, how they engage them and why they do what they do. In doing so, the study also acquired in-depth information of current firms' sustainability practices and how stakeholder engagement is incorporated into the process.

Specific objectives included:

- Examining the stakeholder engagement practices of firms in the sustainability practices.
- Understanding the motivations for sustainability practices.

- Exploring how various stakeholders influence sustainability practices of firms in Ghana.

All these research objectives of the study were achieved through the interview. Various interview questions were crafted to fulfil different objectives. In the paragraph following, the discoveries to the various objectives are explained.

5.2.1 Stakeholder Engagement Practices

Examining the stakeholder engagement practices of firms in the sustainability practices was the first objective of this thesis. To achieve this objective, questions focusing on stakeholder identification by selected companies, enumeration and explanations of their social and environmental initiatives, explanation of how they involve the identified stakeholders in their sustainability practices were asked. Major findings under this objective of the research include;

- First classified their stakeholders into primary and secondary stakeholders. In the identification process, some categories of stakeholders were considered key stakeholders.

These are the stakeholders mostly engaged in the sustainability practices of the firms. List of identified stakeholders from the empirical research were:

- (1) Supply Chain
- (2) Environmentally focused organisations like NGOs
- (3) Customers
- (4) Community Members
- (5) Employees
- (6) Government Agencies (Regulators)

This identification and classification of stakeholders conforms to the theoretical underpinnings of stakeholder analysis and stakeholder mapping. The classification of stakeholders as primary and secondary as well as the identification of key stakeholders is in line with the theoretical explanation given in the stakeholder analysis tool. In stakeholder analysis, the firm in question classifies its stakeholders according to their influence on the firm. Smaply (2017) explains Stakeholder analysis in conflict resolution, project management and business administration to be the process of identifying the individuals or groups that are likely to affect or be affected by a proposed action, and sorting them according to their impact on the action and the impact the action will have on them.

- Secondly, some selected Social and Environmental Initiatives were identified. A summary of the initiatives pointed out were as follows:
 - (1) Use of Segmentation Tanks
 - (2) Water Testing
 - (3) Chemical Testing in Waste
 - (4) Usage of Water Treatment Plants
 - (5) General Environmental Pollution Control.
 - (5) Donation
 - (6) Other Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Projects

About how firms engaged their stakeholders, the following stakeholder engagement approaches came to bear:

- (1) Community Empowerment

- (2) User Education
- (3) Workshops
- (4) Understanding Clients' Needs
- (5) Being Proactive
- (6) Request for Feedback.

These were the ways by which selected firms engaged their stakeholders in their sustainability process. Community Engagement involved equipping community members with the right set of information and action steps they needed to affect the things that affect them about the operations of the firm. Most firms that had technical products preferred user education as a way of engaging their users. This entailed educating and training the final users of the firm's product even to the extent of how to dispose of these products as well.

Stakeholder engagement occurred in three forms. These were themed as levels of stakeholder engagement. Namely, passive level of engagement, active levels of engagement and regulative levels.

5.2.2 Motivations for Stakeholder Engagements

The second objective of exploring the drivers and motivations for engaging stakeholders in the sustainability practices of firms was equally met by asking related questions in the interview. Questions assessing the rationale and importance of engaging the identified stakeholders were asked. A summary of the drivers and motivations for firms to engage their stakeholders in their sustainability practices were as follows;

- Building Reputation
- Marketing Benefits
- Improvements in Sustainability Practices
- Legal Fulfilment
- Building Relationship

Majority of the drivers and motivations of firms to engage in sustainability practices as well as engage their stakeholders centred on the firm's willingness and desire to ensure its continued operational existence. This is explained in the legitimacy theory. In legitimacy theory, there is a social contract between the firm and the society. The firm's consideration in this social contract is the product/goods or service it produces. Society's consideration on the other hand is the natural and human resources it places at the firm's disposal. To keep this contract, the firm should justify to society its existence.

5.2.3 Stakeholder Engagement and Sustainability Practices

Various stakeholders as identified by selected firms have varying degree of influence on the firms' sustainability practices. Stakeholders that influence firms' sustainability practices the most included:

- Government Agencies (Regulators).
- Clients
- Employees
- The Supply Chain

Some highlights from the interview reveal that regulator's influence go as far as dictating what should be included in sustainability practices of firms. Speaking with interviewees, almost all interviewees explained that the EPA and other regulators influence how firms carry out their sustainability practices even to the extent of determine what should be done. An interviewee at Beta captured it all in his explanation.

5.2.4 Emerging Conceptual Model

The final outcome of the research produced some patterns in the stakeholder engagement of firms in their sustainability practices. To further explain the concept of stakeholder engagement in sustainability reporting, the following model has been developed based on the analysis of interview responses and theoretical review of the underlining theories discussed in this thesis.

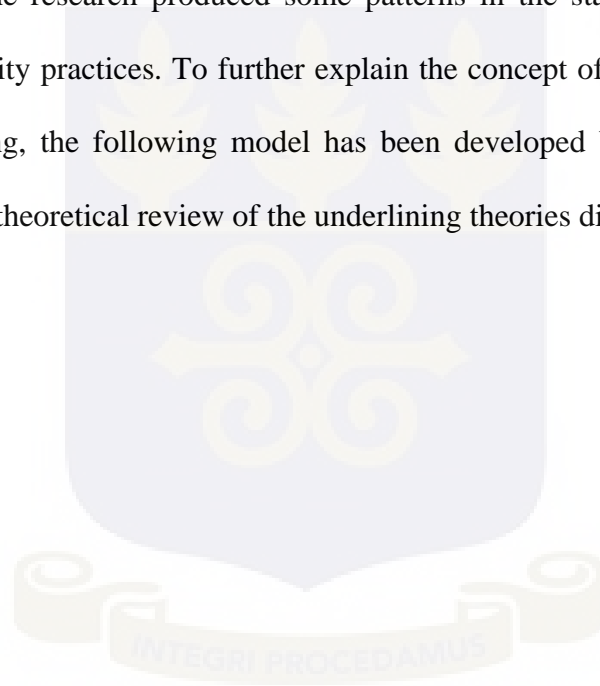
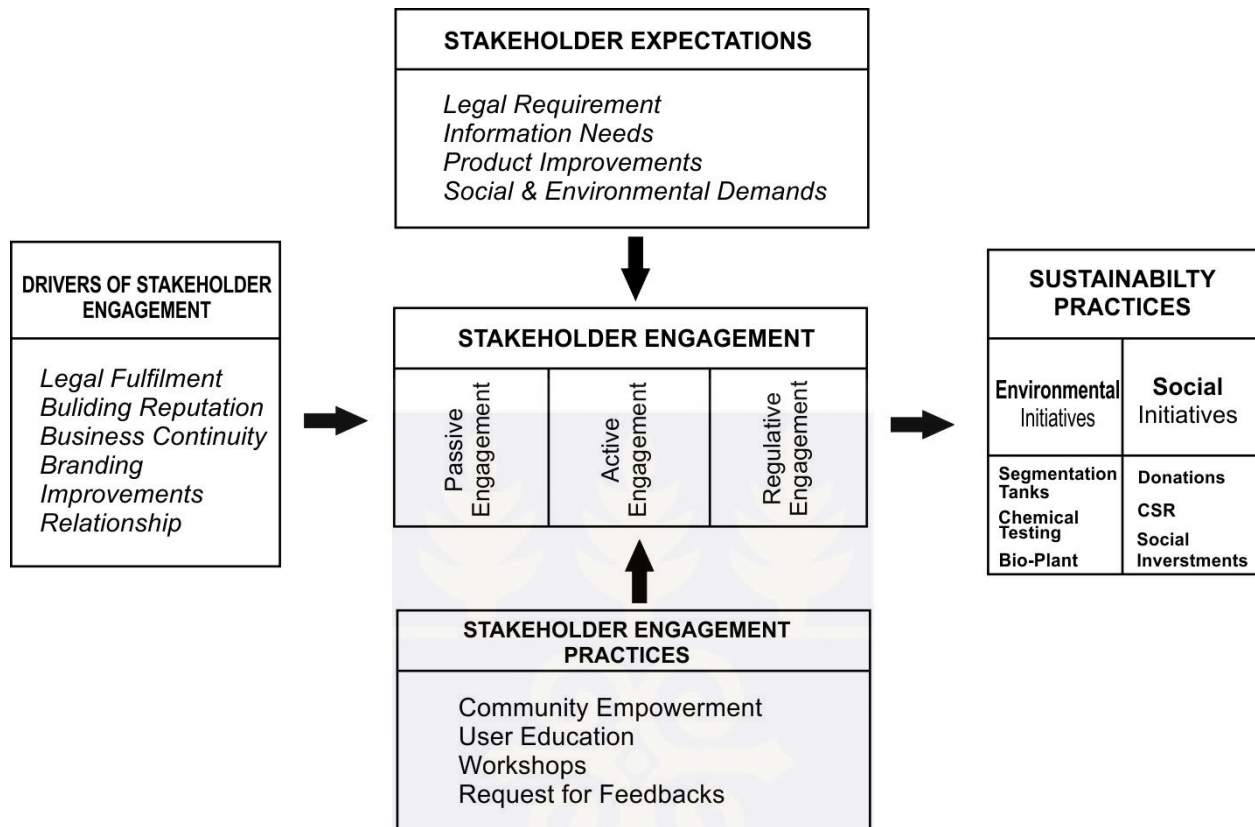


Figure 5.1 Emerging Model



The model seeks to suggest that firms' stakeholder engagement practices can be done at three levels; the passive level, the active level and the regulative level. The nature of engagement practice a firm adopts determines the level of engagement that it falls within. The model further suggests that these engagements are driven by two things; the stakeholder expectations and the motivations of the firms. This also goes to affect the nature of sustainability practice the firm will engage in.

Drivers of Stakeholder Engagement

The model suggests that firms have certain motivations and rationales for engaging their stakeholders in their sustainability practices. These motivations are the drivers of stakeholder engagement as pointed out in this model. From the analysis of statements in the research interviews conducted, these drivers of stakeholder engagement in sustainability practices may include legal requirements, to build a reputation with stakeholders, to ensure continued operational existence of the firm, to improve brand image, to improve on firm's sustainability practices, and even to build and improve relations with the community and the broader range of stakeholders.

Stakeholder Expectations

From the model, identified stakeholders have different expectations and requirements of the firm. To effectively engage stakeholders in its sustainability practices, the firm should learn about the requirements, needs and demands of identified stakeholders. These expectations could range from legal requirements/expectations, information needs, product needs to social and environmental demands. In stakeholder mapping which is a derivative tool of the stakeholder theory, the various perspectives and interests of stakeholders are identified to better understand how to prioritise stakeholders.

Stakeholder Engagement Practices

These are the activities firms carried out in the engagement process. Analysis of responses from the interviews revealed that firms undertake community empowerment, user education, trainings, workshops etc. These were the most named stakeholder engagement practices of firms in their

sustainability practices. Stakeholder engagement, according to GRI (2002), is defined to be the process used by an organisation to engage relevant stakeholders for a purpose to achieve accepted outcomes. According to the model, these are the actual activities used by firms to engage their identified stakeholders.

Sustainability Practices

Sustainability practices are the outcomes of combining sustainability drivers, stakeholder expectations, and stakeholder engagement practices. In the model, sustainability practice focuses on two main components of social and environmental accounting, thus giving rise to environmental initiatives and social initiatives.

5.3 Conclusion

In the stakeholder engagement process, identifying the stakeholders and analysing their influence or power to influence the firm is of essence. Majority of selected companies, identified their stakeholders on two (2) fronts; internal and external stakeholders. Comparing this against reviewed literature, review literature suggests that that approach to stakeholder identification and categorisation corresponds to the approach suggested by Freeman (1984), who suggested that organisation consider a broad range of internal and external groups as their stakeholders. In other words categorise stakeholders as internal and external. This however is a deviation from the postulations of Clarkson (1995) who postulates that organisations should categorise their stakeholders in terms of their importance to the firms, hence categorising stakeholders as primary and secondary stakeholders.

The sustainability initiatives of firms were mostly one of two (2) categories. Most firms engaged in some social initiatives or environmental initiatives. A critical review of literature once again reveals that sustainability practices have three (3) elements, namely; social, environmental and economic elements. Most firms in selected firms however lacked all forms of economic initiatives. The most common sustainability practices among selected firms were the usage of segmentation tanks, testing of water for chemicals, general environmental control etc. Reviewed literature shows that some of the most cited sustainability practices are; ensuring water and air quality, land management, solid and toxic waste management, and natural resource preservation among others. Hence the sustainability initiative of selected firms reveals a partial adoption of complete sustainability management.

In terms of engaging stakeholders in the sustainability practices of firms, it was gathered from the study that selected firms, after identifying and categorising their stakeholders, also assess the level of influence these stakeholders wield and base the level of engagement with these assertions. Three stakeholder engagement levels were identified in this light. These are the passive level of engagement, the active level of engagement and the regulative level of engagement.

Firms cited building of reputation, marketing benefits, branding improvement, creation of strong relationship among others as the drivers and motivations for engaging stakeholders. Even though the stakeholder theory was the underpinning theory of the study, these motivations of firms in engaging their stakeholders were along the lines of the legitimacy theory. In the legitimacy theory there is assumed to be a social contract between the firm and the society. Society's consideration under this contract is human and natural resources it provides the firm. The firm's

consideration is goods and services it produces. In order to continue this contract, the firm must justify its existence to society according to the legitimacy theory. The firm however justifies its existence by engaging its stakeholders by means of publicising its environmental activities. In the theory, building relations, marketing benefits etc among others are the motivations or this disclosure the firm does

5.4 Limitations of the Study

The study in an attempt to explore the current stakeholder engagement practices of firms in Ghana in their sustainability practices, adopted the qualitative approach to research. Qualitative research in general are known to have a "generalability" limitation (Betterthesisdk, 2017). Generalability stems from the assumption that findings cannot be extended beyond the research participants. By extension of the limitation of generalability, this study neither covers all aspects and/or approaches to stakeholder engagement nor sustainability practices.

Stakeholder engagement practices and sustainability practices as discussed in this study are based on findings from interview with selected companies. This may not cover all stakeholder engagement methods and all sustainability practices practised by firms in Ghana. Another limitation of the study was the exclusion of mining firms in the selection of firms for the research work. This was due to the fact that firms in the mining sector have two regulators when it comes to environmental governance. All mining firms fall under the jurisdiction of the Ghana Chamber of Mines and yet still subscribe to the AKOBEN of the EPA. The Minerals and Mining Act 2006 (Act 703) and the Minerals and Mining General Regulations (2012), LI 2173 spell out

different sustainability initiatives and practices for mining firms, hence their exclusion from the sample.

Based on these limitations and some other areas of interest that emerged during the study, I believe more research on the subject of sustainability practice in Ghana as well as stakeholder engagement can be carried out. For example a future research can explore how the expectations of the various stakeholders shape the sustainability practices of firms. This research should be conducted on two fronts; various stakeholders and the firms. Another study worth conducting is to have a look of how stakeholder engagement practice has evolved over time among firms in Ghana. It is also worth noting that future studies could take up the model that emerged in this study and see how applicable it is to a large number of firms in Ghana.

5.5 Contributions and Recommendations

Contributions of this research can be viewed along three strands: its contributions or additions to literature (Academia), contribution to policy (government and regulatory bodies), and contribution(s) to practice (companies and practitioners).

- The significance of this study to research is its potential impact of expanding beyond the current knowledge on sustainability practice in general and particularly among firms in Ghana. The findings can ultimately contribute to existing theories and discourse on sustainability practices. Literature on strategic perspectives of sustainability practices in the Ghanaian context is arguably non-existent. The conceptual model developed out of

this study can also guide future research on stakeholder engagement in sustainability practices.

- Another significant contribution of this study to practice is its addition to the body of knowledge currently existing on the implications and interpretations of the existing standards on the disclosure of social and environmental information and sustainability practice in general. This body of knowledge added to the existing know on the subject matter will inform firms and sustainability officers of firms on some of the best sustainability practices as well as how to engage their stakeholders in the process. The findings of the study also imply that selected firms in Ghana currently have different sustainability initiatives and approaches to engage their stakeholders in the sustainability process. Also the findings of this study reveal a disparity between firms under the EPA's AKOBEN programme and those that are not subscribed to the AKOBEN. The two firms that are not subscribed to the EPA's AKOBEN programme had no sustainability initiatives while the other firms had both social and environmental initiatives.
- The study of current stakeholder engagements as well as their expectations from sustainability practice would provide evidence of compelling reasons for the existing expectation gaps in sustainability practices in Ghana. This would be useful to policy makers in considering regulations on corporations seeking to invest in Ghana.

The findings from the study have necessitated some recommendations. These recommendations have been categorised as those recommendations made to academia, those to practice (The business world) and those to policy makers. The following are the recommendations:

To academia, sustainability reporting and sustainability practices should be incorporated into the training curriculum. Incorporating this into the training curriculum will equip students and future accountants with the adequate knowledge to make the desired progress on the subject matter.

To practice and the business community, this study makes a recommendation for the formation of standing committees to handle stakeholder engagement in their sustainability practices. Additionally, inclusion of front line personnel in the standing committees should be encouraged. Managers at the operational front have more interactions with stakeholders than strategic level managers. However the findings reveal that, the Ad hoc committees are made up of mostly high ranking officials of the selected firms. One other recommendation to business and practice will be to consider the views of more stakeholders beyond the EPA. The EPA is the major stakeholder who influences firms' sustainability practices. Going beyond the EPA can help improve the sustainability practice of firms tremendously.

To the policy maker, the AKOBEN currently monitors only two industries; manufacturing and mining. This is a serious limitation since there are so many other industries out there whose activities cause much damage to the environment and society at large and hence should be kept under the EPA's radar. Expand the scope of the environmental governance programme (EPA).

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