In Ghana, both the government and private sector attach much importance to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The country’s Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is a role model for the rest of Africa. Trade unions are well organised and companies are subject to regular inspection. Nevertheless, there is still much progress to be made and there is often a significant discrepancy between the legislative requirements and actual practice.

Overheid en MVO
Ghana is one of the most stable and democratic countries of West Africa. Its government actively works to attract foreign investment and devotes much attention to creating an appropriate business climate. The Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC, www.gipcghana.com/) is a government agency which encourages and supports investment in all economic sectors. Detailed information about the Netherlands’ diplomatic, trade and cultural relations with Ghana can be found at: www.government.nl/topics/international-relations/contents/ghana

Companies operating in Ghana with any form of grant or subsidy provided by the Dutch government are required to observe the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. Although Ghana itself is not a member of OECD, it is a signatory to the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights www.voluntaryprinciples.org

Working conditions
The Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations is responsible for promoting sustainable employment opportunities as well as the social integration of persons with a disability and other vulnerable groups. Although Ghana has good employment protection legislation, it is still common for workers to be engaged with no formal contract.

Recruitment often relies on advertisements in local newspapers or websites, or commercial employment agencies. Women are reasonably well represented within the employment process. Ghana has a national Ministry for Gender, Children and Social Protection. Some companies show a preference for female employees, finding them more reliable than men. Non-discrimination is regarded as important: where salaries and working conditions are equal for both men and women, the entire family will benefit.

Environment
All new companies (or an existing company undertaking new commercial activities) must register with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, www.epa.gov.gh), which will evaluate the business plans and is responsible for issuing the required permits. The Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment (www.eia.nl) has acted as partner and adviser to the EPA since 2000. Companies are also required to submit monthly environmental information, which the EPA uses for the purposes of monitoring and supervision, and must produce a full annual environmental management report which describes their environmental management strategy, actual performance during the year concerned, any incidents or shortcomings, and planned improvement measures.
Corruption

Although corruption is not unknown in Ghana and is indeed a problem, the situation is somewhat better than in most other West African nations. The Ghanaian government has made good progress in several areas. There are now far fewer reported cases of corruption involving customs officials or traffic police, for example. Ghana is in 61st place (out of 175) on the Corruption Perceptions Index compiled by Transparency International, and eighth among the countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

CSR in practice

Form International (www.forminternational.nl) has been involved in sustainable forestry in Ghana for many years. It manages teak plantations covering over 7,500 hectares, all of which are FSC certified. Form International works to prevent illegal deforestation and to create employment opportunity for local communities. It frequently works in partnership with smallholders who are given access to agricultural land in return for protecting the plantations. The Dutch supermarket chain Albert Heijn and its suppliers channel a percentage of their turnover through the AH Foundation www.ah.nl/ahfoundation (in Dutch) to support various housing, education and healthcare projects in Ghana. One of Albert Heijn’s regular suppliers is the Anglo-Ghanaian company Blue Skies (www.blueskies.com) which produces tropical fruit salads and fruit juices. With over two thousand staff, Blue Skies is the largest private employer in Ghana. The company makes significant investments in staff training and in financing the independent farmers – known as ‘outgrowers’ – who supply it with mangos, pineapples, pomegranates, etc. MDK Flowers and Greens (mdk.nl/?taal=en) is a Dutch company which cultivates tropical flowers and ornamental plants in Ghana for export to Europe. It offers its employees excellent healthcare and education facilities, as well as free transport and lunch every day. MDK also demonstrates environmental responsibility by using a recirculation system for irrigation water, sustainable substrates and integrated pest control methods. It separates and recycles waste to the greatest extent possible.

Further information

• The Dutch government endorses the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, which set out how companies doing business abroad should address matters of Corporate Social Responsibility. The guidelines provide useful input for companies wishing to compile their own Code of Conduct covering issues such as corruption, working conditions and environmental management. See www.oesorichtlijnen.nl (in Dutch) or www.oecd.org/corporate/mne/ (in English).

• MVO Nederland offers comprehensive information and advice about all aspects of Corporate Social Responsibility. See mvonederland.nl/csr-netherlands