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Multinational Companies and Corporate Social Responsibility Challenges in Developing Countries: Towards a New CSR Approach

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Abstract:
Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has taken a Centre stage of many for many multinational companies operating in developing countries. The concept of corporate social responsibility mandates corporations to pay not to pay attention only to economic profits but also the social problems within their environment. It emphasizes the social dimensions of business activities in the society. The article analyses the challenges multinational companies face in implementing CSR in developing African countries in the global south. The article examines strategies to overcome these challenges and move towards a new CSR approach for developing African countries. The article argues that the current global trade liberation affords multinational companies the opportunity to contribute positively through the current CSR agenda in developing African countries. Multinational companies must reassess the pursuit of economic profits in these regions if their CSR framework seeks to contribute to development and governance goals. Finally, the article concludes that multinational companies through CSR can contribute positively to development and governance goals of developing African countries.

Keywords: *Corporate social responsibility, multinational companies, developing countries, globalization, stakeholder dialogue*

1. Introduction

There is enormous pressure on business corporations to behave responsibly and show significant interest and commitment towards the socio-economic problems within the environment in which they operate (Bakan,2005). Global initiatives like ISO 26000, OECD guidelines, Global Reporting Initiatives and UN Global Compact are playing significant roles in this direction. There is a global call for corporations to pay more attention to corporate values and take steps to ensure corporate social responsibility (Jonathan and Terence,2006). Globalization establishes linkages between countries in the world through integration of economies. It makes business transactions across borders possible.

In recent times, multinational companies have come under sharp criticisms on the need to pay attention to corporate social responsibility in countries in which they operate, especially developing countries. Global anti-corporate activism has put enormous pressure on multinational companies operating in developing countries to devote resources towards corporate social responsibility (Jonathan and Terence, 2006). Developing countries in this regard, refers to Africa regions with less per capita incomes and relatively less industrialized.

The concept of corporate social responsibility as argued by Rogene and Sandra (2003), involves business responsibility that goes beyond the production of goods and services at market value. It widens the corporation's constituency and tasks them to pay attention to their social impact. Multinational companies face critical challenges in an attempt to implement corporate social responsibility. There is an increased presence of multinational companies in developing countries and this has put pressure on individual multinational company to compete and make profit. Another key challenge is how socially responsible a multinational company must be in communities where state structures are very corrupt.

My focus in this article is to discuss key challenges multinational companies face in an attempt to implement corporate social responsibility in developing countries especially in the global south. I will then explore strategies that can help multinational companies to cope with these challenges. I will finally argue my position that multinational companies can contribute significantly to the developmental goals in developing countries.

2. Contemporary Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility

Cramer (2006) explains corporate social responsibility as a "sustainable profit", a profit achieved within a sustainable balance between well-being of people, environment and economic prosperity. This supports Bakan (2005)'s explanation of corporate social responsibility as "Capitalism with a Conscience". The corporation must take interest in how their actions and inactions affect social and environmental interest, not just their shareholders. Rogene and Sandra (2003, p304) defined corporate social responsibility as "an ethical concept which involves changing notion of human welfare and emphasizes a concern with the social dimension of business activities that have to do with improving the quality of life". This widens the corporation's constituencies and tasks them to pay attention to their social impact as a matter of necessity.

The European commission defined corporate social responsibility as "a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interactions with their stakeholders" (http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/csr/index). United Nation Conference on Trade and Development (UNTAD, 1999) also explains corporate social responsibility as a principle which rises above statutory arrangement to incorporate standard of behavior that may be expected but not required by law. The concept of corporate social responsibility therefore sees corporations as integral part of the society and the very medium through which business flourishes. The CSR concept therefore mandates corporations not to pay attention only to economic profits but also the social problems within their environment. It is an ethical imperative for corporations to consider the motives and consequences of their decisions and more especially if their actions and inactions endanger the lives of others. The concept shows that business and society are interdependent. Business uses society's resources and in turn, fulfills economic needs of the society.

3. Are there Ethical Obligations for Corporations to do good?

Friedman (1970) argues that corporation's executives hold allegiance to the owners of the business. The moral duty of the corporation according to Friedman (1970), is to make more profits for its owners. Asking corporations to be socially responsible or engage in good activities for the sake of the society is morally wrong. Taking the corporation's profit to engage in socially good activities will incapacitate the corporation for its core functions. The primary responsibility of the corporation is to make more money as possible while conforming to societal laws. In Friedman's view, allocating corporate resources to reduce pollution, alleviate poverty in host communities, building schools for depraved communities, etc. reduces corporate profits and hence corporate social responsibility is the responsibility of business. Corporate social responsibility is not in the interest of shareholders and hence it amounts to corporate irresponsibility.

Diane (2003) argues that self-interest in business and our core moral values present a fundamental tension. Neoclassical economic principles of business which serve as vehicle for business operations pay little attention to the moral duty we have towards others. Ethical obligations for corporations to do good comes into conflict with the neoclassical economics principles of business corporations. When moral values appear costly to business goal, it invokes a tradeoff between business goal and what is morally right thing to do (Diane, 2003).

Any arrangement that relieves economic players from every moral attachment is inadequate (Ulrich, 2004). The freedom of the market is not to confront society but a function of the society. Stakeholders are persons with legitimate interests who have intrinsic values (Freeman, 1984). This means each has a right to be treated as an end in itself and not as means to other end. The corporation must be seen as a constellation of intrinsic values (Ulrich, 2004). It is difficult to defend corporate practices that endanger the lives of people in a community. If corporate practice of dumping cyanide chemical into rivers kill people and deprave them of livelihood, such practice cannot be defended on the grounds of economic profits. Therefore, the corporation has a moral obligation to address social problems that it has created. In this direction, there is a moral basis for the corporation to show a good sense of moral behavior.

Society and business are interdependent. Business uses society's resources and in turn, fulfills economic needs of the society (Cramer, 2006). Corporations have no place if society collapses. This provides moral basis for corporations to consider the motives and consequences of their decision and more especially if their actions and inactions endanger the lives of others. Society is the medium through which business flourishes and hence a sustainable society affects the success of business. It is never out of place for corporations to focus on social dimensions of business activities that have to do with improving the quality of life in the society (Sandra and Rogene, 2001). Society allows corporations to operate in order to promote human welfare. Ethical and moral questions concerning this human welfare must be recognized and addressed.

Again, the changing social needs of the society affect governance decisions of the corporations. It is therefore important for corporations to accommodate themselves to these social changes. Business operations which undermine social values in the society will create conflict between business and society. Corporations must therefore accommodate themselves to moral values that promote human welfare in the society. If business expects to survive, it must promote values that ensures societal cohesion and stability. The free market economy cannot justify corporate activities that threaten the very existence of people in the society (Ulrich, 2004). It is morally prudent for corporations to use their enormous resources to help build and sustain the society in which they operate. Corporations therefore have ethical obligation not to harm the society and to positively contribute towards the welfare of the society.

4. Multinational Companies and Corporate Social Responsibility Challenges

The extent to which multinational companies must devote resources towards corporate social responsibility is yet to be resolve concretely (Cramer,2006). Some of these multinational companies operate in economies which are plagued with poverty, abuse of human rights and inconsistent government policies. Multinational companies in such environment find it difficult to prioritize resources to implement corporate social responsibility.

Multiple social problems faced by many developing countries pose a challenge for multinational corporations in choosing areas to advance social support for local communities. Challenges like low level of education, youth unemployment, poor medical facilities, child infant mortality, child labor, lack of portable drinking water, etc. put multinational companies in a dilemma over which areas are of most concern to the local communities. There is a possibility of leaving out key social problems. In spite of the corporations' effort to help address social challenges, the choice of project in some cases creates dissent among members of the local communities. In Chad, the consortium producing and transporting Chad oil namely Exxon Mobil, Petronas and Chevron are in such dilemma. In spite of resources devoted by the consortium towards improving life conditions, other critical areas are yet to receive attention. Children in the project area suffer a lot from diarrhea or fever and education in the area is low. Members of the local communities do not think the consortium social projects is touching on key areas of social concerns (Walker-Said and Kelly, 2015).

Many developing countries are characterized by bad governance. There is a high level of corruption in governmental functions, poor democratic structures, abuse of human rights to mention but few. Multinational companies operating in these regions face a huge challenge of where to draw the line. They pay huge taxes which are supposed to improve living conditions in these areas (Visser, 2012). Must they pay extra royalties to the community due to a corruptible government? In Ghana, mining communities have called on central government to devote more mining royalties to develop the mining communities (WACAM, 2013).

Multinational companies are required by law to pay their corporate taxes to host government. These taxes are expected to develop host communities in which these companies operate. It is a corporate irresponsibility for the corporations to evade taxes. Paying extra royalties to host communities after paying taxes, put undue pressure on the financial investment of these corporations. This tempts many multinational corporations in developing countries to undercut taxes. The dilemma facing multinational corporations is whether to evade taxes and convert those monies to community enhancement programs or pay these huge taxes to host government and also go the extra mile to raise living conditions in the host communities.

Shell is faced with this dilemma situation in the Niger-Delta in Nigeria. Shell is a multinational oil and gas company operating in Nigeria. Shell operates exploration and production company (SNEPCO), Shell Nigeria Gas Limited (SNG), and Shell Liquefied Natural Gas (SLNG). Shell and its subsidiaries control an average of 30% shares in Nigeria's oil sector (Donwa et al, 2015). Shell is paying huge taxes to the Nigeria government but the government has not shown enough commitment in the socio-economic problems faced by citizens in the Niger-Delta. Most communities in the Niger-Delta are in poverty with critical environmental problems. The indigenous people resorted to violent attack on Shell's infrastructure and kidnapping of Shell's staffs. Kidnapping became a lucrative business due the price money charged by the kidnappers in the Niger-Delta. Should Shell assume huge social responsibility which impacts on their competitiveness or pack and leave the Niger-Delta where the government has failed woefully in using the oil money to improve living conditions? Corrupt governments in countries where multinational companies are operating pose a threat to the concept of corporate social responsibility.

Another challenge for multinational companies is where they identified with the government in power to protect their self-interest. This means they would support and fund government policies in an attempt to insulate their interest. This is a clear case of negative interference in the affairs of the country. In Ghana, the multinational companies employ about 20% of the labor force which is significant for the economy. They have the sympathy of the government because of their per capita investment in the country. They have been insulated against public outcry for them to be socially responsible. There have been many instances of human rights abuses but the government did not act (ISODEG, 2015).

A negative interference would be described as multinational companies collaborating with government to influence policies to protect their self-interest. On the other hand, a positive interference can be described as multinational oil companies collaborating with citizens to put an end to oppressive and bad regimes. During the apartheid regime in South Africa, multinational oil companies like Exxon Mobil and Caltex contributed significantly in undermining the South African government in continuing with the apartheid regime.

One crucial challenge is how multinational corporations identify all their stakeholders and what their real interests mean to their business operations. Apart from primary stakeholders, there is a real challenge of identifying all secondary stakeholders due the complexities in arbitrating their interests and hence some of them become marginalized (Rogene and Sandra 2003). This marginalization has become a source of conflict for some multinational companies operating in developing countries. The conflict that ensued between shell and communities in the Niger-Delta was largely attributed to the failure of shell and its subsidiaries to identify certain secondary stakeholder in the local communities (Ebegbulem et al, 2013). Indigenes in mining communities in Ghana are in conflict with multinational mining companies due to the lack effective stakeholder dialogue between multinational mining companies and indigenous miners. The indigenes claimed that multinational mining companies have disregarded them in mining jobs and have failed to improve living conditions in mining communities (Crawford and Botchwey, 2016).

The final challenge I would like to consider is cultural gap between multinational companies and host countries. According to De George (2003: p235), lack of universal norms for business everywhere to follow have put many multinational companies in ethical dilemma. Differences exist in moral principles between multinational companies and their host countries. In many developing countries, giving bribes have become an acceptable norm and is highly tolerated in the economy. Different value system poses practical problems for multinational companies. Though countries like UK and the US have enacted anti-bribery and corruption acts for their corporations operating in foreign territories, the complex business operations in many developing countries pose a challenge to these anti-bribery and corruption acts (see UK Bribery Act 2010, US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act).

De George (2003), indicates that some multinational companies conduct their business on the principle of "when in Rome, do as the Romans" The principle is morally flawed. If child labor is not accepted in Norway, then why must Statoil in Ghana use child labor in its operations? Child labor, bribery and other corruptible activities are only tolerated norms. Such approaches make it convenient for multinational corporations to use the logic of relativism to behave in any way they please using the excuse of differences in culture. The challenge is how multinational companies can establish principles to facilitate ethical behavior across cultures.

There is a high possibility of multinational companies exploiting the situation to their advantage. Currently, a section of Ghanaians is questioning the transparency nature of an agreement between the government of Ghana and Lushann Eternit Energy Limited, a foreign consortium responsible for lifting between 500 and 700 barrel of crude oil per day from the Saltpond oil fields. There is a strong perception that the whole agreement has been shredded in secrecy which is a clear recipe for corruption. In recent times, Shell has been perceived to be colluding with the Nigeria government to suppress the concern of the Ogoni people in the Niger-Delta. Public pressure, increased anti-corporate activism and global concern for human rights must call the attention of multinational companies to create good image.

5. Corporate Social Responsibility Strategies in Developing Economies

I have discussed key challenges multinational companies operating in developing countries must overcome. In what follows, I will explore some strategies which can help multinational companies to deal with some of these challenges identified especially in developing countries.

Elkington (1998) concept of "triple bottom line" is a relevant strategy worth considering. It is a positive approach that takes into account the real business environment. There is a significant interrelation existing among the economic bottom line, environmental bottom line, and the social bottom line. Economic profits are derived from the natural environment. Corporations also stand to suffer from the negative effects of climate change. Therefore, environmental responsibility is a good business for corporations in the long-term. Society depends on the economy and the economy largely depend on the environment. Causing harm to the environment affect the general well-being of people in the society and also violate their human rights (Desjardin, 2003). There is a moral basis for corporations to refrain from environmental harm that impact negatively on individuals leaving in the society. The social bottom line shows that the corporation have decided to operate in a society anchored by social norms and values. The trust between the society and the corporation is that the pursuit of economic profits is carried through these social norms and values. The corporation's inability to recognize these social norms and values create mistrust between society and corporation. The social bottom line is the totality of culture regulating the natural environment where profits are made. It embodies political choices, ethical consideration and people's values as a whole.

Business operations that affect the natural biosphere make society suffer. The political will of society can impact business operations that affect their values negatively. Multinational companies must adopt the "triple bottom line "concept. This calls for transparent analysis into the inter-dependent nature of the identified bottom lines. Working out the impact each has on the other will help multinational companies to fashion out the best practices to ensure harmony in their operations. Elkington (1998) indicates that leaving out the social and the environmental bottom lines can create backlashes that can offset economic gains.

There is a strong perception in most developing countries that multinational companies are only tools of exploitations. This perception has been justified by what some multinational oil companies are doing now in developing countries. Shell current activity in the Niger-Delta is a case in point. Bribery, pollution and land degradation are at the heart of Shell's operations in the Ogoni state.

There is the need for image improvement as a key strategy to overcome this strong perception of exploitation. Image improvement can significantly be achieved through the concept of "doing well by doing good" This concept explains that corporations that pay attention to social responsibilities do well in business due to good will from society towards them. They are able to create positive image in society as a good organization. Positive image will bring multinational companies a lot of good will from the indigenous people in their project area. Leaving out social responsibility and not creating opportunities for the indigenous people can create extremism and apathy. Multinational companies can do well if they seek the good of the society in which they are operating.

Global approaches are yet to come out with workable international code of ethics for all multinational corporations, however, as a good strategy, multinational companies can form alliances especially those operating in developing countries. The purpose is to formulate ethical code to guide their actions and choices. The Caux principle which was developed by a group of US, European and Japanese corporations is a point of reference. The Caux principle was based on the Japanese concept of "kyosei" Kyosei means living and working together for the common good. (Caux Round Table, 1994).

Adopting the concept of "when in Rome, do as the Romans" is only an attempt to run away from sound ethical principles. In many cases, it is used to exploit the weak system in the developing countries by multinational companies. The payment of bribe and other corruptible activities in developing countries are not cultural norms but only tolerated. Working with common acceptable norms can make multinational oil companies overcome most of these challenges. The lack of clear cut ethical code for multinational oil companies partly explains some of the difficulties they face in developing countries.

The final strategy I would like to discuss is effective stakeholder management. Freeman (1984) indicates that the success of organization depends on how they manage the multiple stakeholder interests. The stakeholder is the one who business action and inaction affect. Multinational companies must make effort to identify the range of people who their actions affect. Effective stakeholder management is the management principle that pays critical attention to all its stakeholders. Freeman (1984) showed that there is a temptation of leaving out those stakeholders who do not impact directly on the operations of the business.

Effective stakeholder management treats both its internal and external stakeholders with maximum attention. Elkington (1998) indicates in his "triple bottom line" analysis that any act of omission can spark off backlashes. Leaving out any stakeholder can spark off backlashes. Multinational companies must adopt effective stakeholder management principles. This will allow them to critically examine their operations in order to make the best choices. The pursuit of economic profits thrives in an enabling environment. An environment where critical attention is paid to all stakeholders.

6. Multinational Companies and Developing Countries: What Can CSR Do?

In what follows, I will give my argued position that multinational corporations can contribute positively to the socio-economic development of developing countries. Multinational companies have resources, technology, expertise, and financial power. Investment statistics showed that in 2001, about 65000 multinational companies held total assets of $25 trillion. In terms of GDP, it constitutes about 78% of the world GDP (www.unctacl.org).

In Ghana, multinational companies employ about 20% of the total labor force. This is a significant percentage in economic term. It constitutes about 2% to the country's GDP which stands at 3.5% average growth rate in 2015 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2015). Unemployment is predominant in developing economies. Multinational companies can help reduce unemployment problems in developing countries. This will impact positively on economic growth.

Multinational NGOs have contributed significantly to the promotion of Corporate Social Responsibility in developing countries. Oxfam a UK based NGO has contributed immensely to Corporate Social Responsibility advocacy in Mining areas in Ghana. Their vigorous advocacy on environmental responsibility has sensitized many local and foreign companies to pay more attention to their environmental impact.

Amnesty International has also done a lot in other countries. Amnesty International was very instrumental in revealing corrupt sales of Liberia diamond to Europe in exchange of arms and ammunitions. Corporate Social Responsibility is picking up in developing countries due the presence and activities of these multinational companies. Developing countries have a lot to learn from these multinational companies and this value cannot be overlooked.

The concept of globalization explains linkages between countries. It underpins the integration of world economies and brings the nation-states together within the ambience of a common world. Multinational companies are vehicles through which the ideas of globalization are projected. If true and genuine cultural integration can be achieved, then multinational companies would be the true ambassadors.

The value-system of multinational companies can impact local values in a very positive way. Integrating the cultures and taking out those values which are disincentive to progress and development is what globalization stands for. Multinational companies have the resources to project the ideas of globalization in developing countries. Developing countries are plaque with poor democratic governance, weak developmental policies, and abuse of human rights, corruption, poor environmental management to mention but few. Most multinational companies are coming from an environment where these negative values are minimal.

Africa or developing economies can benefit significantly from multinational companies doing business on their soil. If multinational companies would not only be moved by their self-interest for economic profit, they can contribute to economic growth and good governance in developing countries. Exxon Mobil and Caltex contributed immensely in breaking the apartheid system in South Africa. These multinational oil companies showed enough good will. They stood for their values to help majority of South Africans get liberated under a suppressive regime. If multinationals show commitment and the desire for our common humanity beyond profits, developing countries would benefit. The concept of corporate social responsibility tasks multinational companies to show a renewed commitment towards multilateral compacts which lay ethical guidelines for multinational companies operating in developing economies. Some of these compacts are, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR), the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the Helsinki Final Act, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, the UN Global Compact, Social Accountability International, Ethical Trading Initiative and the Fair Labor Association. The moral logic of these compact is that they are based on human rights and fundamental freedoms which are inherent in all human conditions across cultures and hence they are transcultural or universal (Williams, 2000).

Multinational companies have the financial base, better technology, good management systems and good democratic values. Developing countries need these resources and this can significantly be achieved through positive international trade that seeks not only profits but the common good of all.

I have presented various challenges that multinational companies face in developing countries. I have provided enough evidence to show that these challenges are real. Key strategies have been considered as means to cope with these challenges. Whether multinational companies can contribute to positive development in developing countries, I have argued my position that multinational companies have a lot to contribute to the development efforts of developing economies.

In conclusion, I would like to state that I have not considered every aspect of challenges faced by multinational companies operating in developing countries. Also, my argued position does not constitute all that there is in what multinational can contribute in developing economies. The expositor can give what he honestly believes to be fair interpretations of the issues he discusses.

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