

# **CSR in Developing Countries? Diversity Should Not Mean Dumping**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Africa, a dumping place? This has been the topic of discussion among some countries in Africa. Critically considering this assertion raises some questions: Who makes Africa a dumping place? What makes Africa a dumping place? Who accepts the responsibility?

What is the role of CSR in dealing with this menace in developing countries? Do we blame it upon MNCs' business and marketing activities, or local indigenous companies? Empirical evidence shows that MNC's business/marketing activities and their consequences have to some extent negative effects on developing countries. We will focus on MNCs, how responsible or irresponsible they are, and the role Governments in developing countries play to ensure socially responsible business operations.

To mention but just a few: rejects goods stores, second-hand clothing, different forms of dead-engines, inferior products, sunset technologies - all these contribute to a form of pollution without compensation to the consumers and the environment.

Corporate social responsibility is a concept whereby organizations take responsibility for the impact of their activities on their stakeholders, society and the environment. This extends beyond the legal obligation and sees to it that organizations are ethically responsible in improving the quality of life for the aforementioned actors

Western media does not pay attention to the role of CSR in developing countries like in developed countries. Who cares? Hardly ever do we hear companies operating in developing countries handling pollution related problems like installing waste management facilities. Even if they are, clear evidence does not exist. The living standards of workers and their working environments question the priorities of MNCs: the welfare of the people versus profitability. Are the families of workers in life-threatening jobs like mining and factories compensated and supported? These lead to the following recommendations.

It is clear MNCs' operations have much impact on the welfare of developing economies. Our proposals for consideration include: Governments must take interest in CSR activities of MNCs. Large organizations must act responsibly in developing countries by building schools, making donations, paying appropriate returns and helping in the developing of social infrastructure. MNCs' must incorporate realistic incentives in their CSR programs to employees. The government must set import regulations of certain types. The western media must increase their interest in the operations of MNCs in developing countries.

**Keywords:** CSR, MNCs, indigenous, environment, stakeholders, developing countries

### **A look into CSR in developing country:**

The statement – Africa a dumping place, calls our attention to a critical review over the conditions prevailing in specifically, Africa and all developing countries at large. It would be necessary to review the question - Who is to blame, who is responsible? The roles of MNCs, indigenous companies, the governments of developing countries, the enforcement of CSR policies and finally the activities of stakeholders in developed countries would help us address the questions. What roles do stakeholders like the green movements, human

right activist, and the media at large (both local and international) and the local indigenous people themselves play about the situation? Though this is not an accepted fact, it cannot be disputed that CSR in developing countries is a menace. It is a common saying that *'he who feels it, knows it'*. This statement appears applicable in this situation. It is an obvious case in Africa and developing countries at large that CSR policies by corporations are very poor and questionable. For this reason, we endeavour to take a critical review of the situation with supportive recommendations.

### **CSR, Diversity and the MNCs**

CSR, what is it? The best way to put CSR is a concept whereby organizations take responsibility for the impact of their activities on their stakeholders, society and the environment. This extends beyond the legal obligation and sees to it that organizations are ethically responsible in improving the quality of life for the aforementioned actors. Nevertheless, not all marketers follow the marketing concept. Some companies use questionable marketing practices thus as innocent as some their actions might be, the larger society is strongly affected. (Kotler et al., 2005:169).

Ketola (2006), listed some organisational CSR practices that of much interest with regards to developing countries. In this she outlined specific personality characteristics of psychopaths, for instance, unconcern for others' feelings which include sudden terminations of employment contracts and harsh treatment of employees. She continued that gross disregard for others' safety was psychopathic traits which include products and production methods that endanger human health and the environment as well as dangerous working conditions.

Finally, in support of our research, we consider inability to observe the laws and norms which include: breaking human rights, labour, contract and environmental laws and society agreements when it is economically more beneficial than observing them as important in our analysis of CSR practices in developing countries.

Do organisations take responsibility for the impact of their activities on their stakeholders in developing economies? Positively no, even if it does exist, it could be seen in some few areas. Ketola (2006) pointed out that corporate social responsibility could be seen in three dimensions - social, economic and ecological responsibility. Yet, identifying these areas in operations of companies in developing countries is totally an imbalance situation. For instance, most of these companies focus on sponsorship through PR practices but not the other dimensions like ecological responsibility. CSR is totally insignificant in their operations, and even if it is, then it could be due to natural inherent trait of feeling responsible (Ketola, 2006).

Who are stakeholders of organisations? An organisation's stakeholders are not only its shareholders. The stakeholders however embody all those who have interest in the operations and existence of the organisation. All those in this sense may include those who do not have a direct say but are affected by the existence of the organisation. These may include the government, media, customers, suppliers, pressure groups etc. (CIM-UK, 2004)

The case of Africa's CSR is such that, organisations do not care much what its external stakeholders had to say. Even if they do, this could only be seen within the organisation, especially – the shareholders. This is true since it could often be seen that workers are going of strike because their pleas and petitions are not considered or given attention to.

The only way however, to make their voices heard is to take to the streets with placards and to demonstrate. The organisation often responds only when the press gives attention to the pleas of the workers. An example could be when employees are working in poor environment but management takes no action until all the employee's agree to demonstrate. This is an example of even those that are directly affected in the companies.

There are other instances where organisations buy cheaply from suppliers and for that matter causing the suppliers to produce using inferior or harmful and even ecologically unfriendly processes. In such a case, the priority of the companies is the maximisation of profit – not the health of customers.

What of the government and the media? It is a common practise that organisations manoeuvre the government in their tactics called lobbying to seek the government favour in their questionable processes that they employ in their businesses.

### **Diversity, Not Dumping:**

The term diversity has different applications and meaning which include multi-cultural diversity, political diversity, business diversity etc. In this context, we are focusing on business diversity as used by MNCs. The modern trend of business diversity is a case where a company employs a diverse workforce (men and women, people of many generations, people from ethnically and racially diverse backgrounds etc.) This enables MNCs to better serve specific segments of their market since local employees can add value to the operations of the company in many different ways.

Why diversity should not mean dumping. Walking through major African cities gives clear evidence that – Africa is a dumping place. According to Auma (2008), developed countries are using Africa as dumping grounds. Multinational corporations have exploited Africa's legal loopholes to directly dump their waste products in the continent. A common sight could be: second hand engines being sold beside the streets as well as sales of used clothes and store-reject goods. Tin can, poly-ethane bags and other packages are sprawling all over. Major gutters and sewage systems are often choked with packages of used products, poly-ethane bags and other waste products emanating from dumped goods. These are personal observations that we can refer to.

Besides, major shops are made stocked with inferior products. Imported products made from especially China by multinational companies to suit the cheap market which include electrical and electronic gadgets/appliances, wax prints. On the other hand, second goods and discarded gadgets like computers, stereo sets, TVs, industrial machineries; receded tires etc. are imported from the West (Maphosa, 2008). This is the prevailing situation in Africa and in most developing countries. It is an accepted fact that a company that supports the diversity of its workforce can also improve employee satisfaction, productivity and retention. Above all, this practice of business diversity pushes the concept of racism aside, thus considering all race and background of people as potentially employable but that does not mean that their welfare must be jeopardized. Nevertheless, this does not imply that having satisfied the human resource aspect should lead to negligence of ecological harm and dumping of inferior goods on its stakeholders.

Of serious concern to us is also the term financial diversity. By which means do organisations invest in developing countries? Diversifying ones resources or investing in

poor developing countries does not justify the claim that poor investment with strings attached investment should be the case (Vidal, 2002).

## **MNCs**

It is a common marketing practice that, the best is for the rich, and the worse goes to the poor. This we term as a 'hidden-policy' since no organisation accept this fact. Organisations justify their behaviour through rationalisation to disguise underlying motives and intentions. No one accepts the blame (Brown, 1997; Miller, 1993; Swajkowski, 1992 and Morgan, 1986). It is evident that the best of technologies, the most innovative products and trends are meant for developed countries as well as the 'cream' of every society. The laggard state and the rejected innovations are also dumped on the poor or developing countries, (Vidal, 2002). So the question is; how can organisations be responsible if they don't discard the worse technology but sells the products or worse technologies to a particular market? The results of such technology on that particular market would be non than pollution, health related problems, less satisfied customers etc. Yet these are the causes of social irresponsibility. These are facts of business practices by MNCs that appears to be accepted and yet a major challenge for developing countries. (Vidal, 2002).

Moreover, critical analysis points to the fact that MNCs often embark on activities that promotes their image but not that of the environment and the society. For instance, MNCs are much interested in PR activities like sponsorship in soccer, games, celebrities, entertainments and highly expensive promotions instead of expensive CSR activities. According (Pendleton, 2004 and Macalister, 2004) CSR is just a branch of PR and that CSR is just a tool for businesses. The truthfulness of this argument is seen, in the following examples. MNCs in Africa often tend to sponsor Configuration of African Football (CAF) tournaments with billions of US dollars, but tend to do nothing about the harm that its mining activities cause to the local inhabitants. The land, water and air are polluted, local

farmers are losing their properties and health hazards are prominent, yet the company claims to be highly responsible in its business policies. In a report called *rhetoric and realities, Gold Rush, the impact of Gold mining on the poor people of Ghana*, there are several serious discrepancies between AGA's (AngloGold Ashanti) claims about its corporate social responsibility and evidence obtained by Action Aid presented in this report: these include specifically, on-going water contamination, environmental pollution, and toxic flooding; as well as the description of its response to the Kokoteasua/Abompekrom spillage; and the alleged shooting and brutalities of the local people (Action Aid, 2006). There are cracks in the houses of local inhabitants, employees are less paid and have less bonuses and incentives in addition to the fact that they are to a degree not motivated. Some of the children of its employees are school drop outs since they can't afford high tuition fees. Some of its workers are living in slums and very poor environments. Others have to queue for long time to join public transport to work.

What is the working condition of employees in developing countries? Of course, this isn't like the workers in developed countries. For instance, workers work under extreme conditions that do not meet the required safety standards. For example, offices are without air-conditions, factories are without good ventilation thus generating excess heat. The only protection available sometimes is notices and cautions – like, beware! Danger! Etc. To us, these warning signs still do not make organisations responsible. Rather, they should ensure the complete security of their workers by embarking on modern and innovative trends of working environments as well as periodic screening of workers for abusive substance or medication that could easily impair judgement thus leading to among others accidents that could have been prevented.

It is also evident that the processes used in developing countries for production are to say the least outmoded in nature. Sunset technologies and machineries are used with most of them lacking automation. For instance, manual labour is employed to dig trenches and gutters when big MNCs contractors are manufacturing roads. Labourers often have to be on the hot sun from morning till evening with as minimum as 1 hour lunch break. On the other hand, although MNCs can afford to use modern technologies and machineries they have from the word go concluded that developing economies are poor and unable to afford the cost involved in using such technologies so they resort to cheap labour. Who therefore are responsible for the poor CSR practices in developing countries? The answer to this is simple, that MNCs among others are included. Yet, most companies tend to believe that they are well-adjusted to society and the environment since they remain by and large unpunished for their irresponsible actions (Ketola, 2006).

### **Local indigenous companies/businesses**

Local indigenous companies in developing countries to us could be termed 'nichers'. This is because their businesses are not run on a large scale, but serve either a specific segment or operating merely to survive. However, the practise of CSR could be seen as unknown or less defined and for that matter, contribute tremendously to the associated problems of CSRs in developing countries.

These are evident in the following dimensions: undefined know-how in waste management, less informed or sometimes family managers with no managerial expertise, inadequate educational backgrounds, and obsolete production processes etc, which of course include using products that are not eco-friendly. Moreover, a critical look at their employment policies shows that there is inadequate motivation and incentives for its employees, hiring

of employees is usually not based on educational achievement but sometimes family ties and recommendations. As a typical example, typical Ghanaian palm nut oil producers employ no modern processes. From the gathering of the nuts till the final oil is extracted, all the processes produce waste, garbage and pollution. The kennels are gathered in huge quantities and piled in an open environment where we termed as 'no man's land'. These kennels are locally cracked using hard objects like stones, mallets or metal to extract the nuts. After the nuts are extracted, the kennels are often left as piles for so many years. These leftover kennels does not only endanger children and even adults who walk on bare foots sometimes, but also pollutes the environment due to the fact that kennels don't decompose that easily. Also, the smoke that comes out of the burning processes e.g. burning and cooking of the nuts to extract the oils often produces unpleasant odour into the atmosphere. To us, this is so because business activities are not controlled by the governments in developing economies, due to the fact that most of these businesses are not registered, thus are usually accountable only when they are caught. Whoever that has a business ideas can implement it no matter what the consequences are.

From the example above, it could be seen that local indigenous businesses play a major role in the society. CSR seemed not to be a business philosophy to local entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, in developing economy, the number of local and indigenous enterprises supersedes well-established and modern industries. Of course most economies of developing countries are supported by these businesses. Therefore, their uncontrolled business practices serve as a major source of worry and contribute to the questionable CSR practises in these economies.

## **Literacy and education**

Developing economies on the other hand has a related problem with CSR and education/literacy. The general literacy rates are often low. This however could be a determining factor in poor CSR practices both in the companies and private enterprises. Further evidence points to the fact that more unskilled labours are used in developing countries than in developed economies. For instance, a typical large company in Germany uses robots, computers and machines which is capital intensive and for that fact the need for a few skilled labour as compared to developing economies use of intensive labour for production activities. Therefore, in a situation where the individual have less knowledge in reading and writing, it could lead to the ignoring of standards and quality patterns. Meanwhile, ensuring standards means thinking of the needs and interest of customers without discrepancies.

As a theory, CSR can best be practised as a path and pattern set from top management down to the bottom of the managerial hierarchy. In situations where this management philosophy is not inculcated to the subordinates, the sense of responsibility will be lost completely from the practises of the company. Here comes into play the education and literacy. Educated workforce can easily be taught to be more responsible. What then happens in a company or enterprise where the C.E.O and other top management have little or no education at all and can sometimes not be able to read and write? This management philosophy would be lost completely.

Less or no education on the other hand poses major challenges in forming unions within the company to help the employees defend their rights. Most unions are lead by enlightened employees and this help in ensuring that management and the company acts responsibly

towards them. Less educated people have less self-esteem, often afraid to prove their rights and feel inferior towards their highly educated superiors. However, according to Ketola (2005), the following were listed as examples of organizational behaviour, 'unconcern for others' feelings which include: harsh treatment of employees, customers and partners and also the sudden termination of employment and business contracts.

These are known as major CSR problems in developing or underdeveloped economies. For instance, Haiti's workforce experience major problems in the aforementioned areas. In addition the maximum daily income that employers pay is 1.7 dollars (per day) as at 2006. Furthermore, employees are often expelled from their appointment easily, employees are forbidden to form unions to get more power. Employees are total dictators (Poto Mitan, 2006).

On the contrary, in a more developed economy like Germany, unions are seen as the mouth-piece of employees. Employees are taken seriously and their requests are paramount in the organisations policies. Employees' contracts cannot be terminated easily, thus increasing job security.

### **Roles of MNCs in developing countries.**

Available evidences point to the fact that the few MNCs operating in developing countries put profit maximisation on top of their business priorities. It is often clear in the areas where MNCs have their interests in developing economies – supporting entertainment and social functions, where the name and fame could easily be achieved. For instance, most MNCs in developing countries use what could be termed as product association with their names. Certain entertainments are associated with particular companies. Once the name of the occasion is mentioned, then the company comes to mind. As an example in Ghana,

there are certain entertainment programmes which was organised and sponsored by large companies and organisations. Once the name of the occasion comes to mind, then the name of the company follows. This points to the fact that image and profit are of top priority in most developing countries by MNCs

What of economic and ecological benefits? Often, waste management is one of the major challenges for multi-nationals in developing countries. Most of their plants contribute to pollution and health hazards to the local communities. However, these companies would lobby to suppress the activities of the media and government officials (Ketola, 2006). This is also partly due to the fact that corruption and bribery is highly accepted in most developing countries. On the other hand, the local people have little say since their voices can't be heard especially if press freedom is curtailed or non-existent. Thus, the local media have no power in some countries and for that matter cannot expose these harmful effects to the international community.

Furthermore, to help identify the areas in which MNCs and other local companies lack CSR practices, let's us consider one example; a biscuit manufacturing company, Eurofood (Gh) Ltd, had in stock an expired flour for producing biscuits and other such products. Since disposing it would add up cost to the company, they proceeded in using it to produce the biscuits. After the information was disclosed to the press, the press was assuaged, the biscuit production continued, the allegation and the public outcry was not addressed. So the question is; who is to blame? Is it The Standard Board, The Quality Control (apparatus of the government), the company or both? (The Crusading Guide, 2006).

What did the international community do about the plight of the local people? It is often the case that the international community has little interest in what goes on in developing countries. This is true because negative effects of MNCs in developed countries are taken more seriously than in developing countries. Contrary to this, the customers of developing countries are less educated and sometimes don't know their rights or don't care. A typical example is this appalling comment made by a reader on the news item "I've been eating these biscuits and they taste very good. I have not gotten ill yet. The main thing is in the cooking. If they are cooked long enough no maggot would survive. I will still eat the biscuits because they taste very good, maggots or no maggots. While in boarding school beetles floated on our beans stew and we still ate it and survived. Come on people forget the scare mongering. It's okay, as long as it is cooked for long" (Ajao, 2006).

Hardly have any customer from developing economies taken a company to court. Even if there exist any, there are no clear evidence of such individuals winning court cases. Therefore, the MNCs are to take responsibility in ensuring that the customer is more important than profit and their image. On the other hand, since the customers are well educated and have say, they can easily take a proper action like suing the company or boycotting entirely from patronising the products of such companies.

### **The governments of developing countries, their roles and the CSR**

What is the role of the government in developing economies in ensuring that the companies are being more responsible? MNCs and other large companies easily lobby and bribe most officials to continue their unethical business operations. More so, corruption existing in most developing economies makes it difficult for the governments to stand firm in

developing and enforcing policies that will check the operations of corporations. In view of the fact that the plights of the individuals are not addressed not to mention the fact that they are not often gathered as unions to exercise their rights, it therefore becomes the government's responsibility to protect their citizens from greedy commercial giants.

On the contrary the governments of developed countries has tougher policies to ensure that imported and manufactured goods meets standards and are completely free from questionable practices. For instance, samples of imported rice into western countries are tested and approved before the warrant is permitted to be sold. This appears to be the opposite in developing countries. 'Whatever' that is imported to developing countries successfully gets to the end customer. Even if there are such mechanisms for testing the products, such officials are easily bribed and silenced. Nevertheless, the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is gaining some prominence within policy debates in for instance Kenya and Zambia; it is not applied widely and is usually associated with philanthropy. But there are many private sector-related initiatives and business activities in both countries that might be described as expressions of CSR, and there are also emerging specialist CSR organisations (Kivuitu et al., 2005).

## **Conclusion**

We can therefore conclude that stakeholders in general primarily promote the adhering of CSR policies. Among these, the governments of developing economies have more power and resources to be able to control MNCs to be more responsible, thus, avoiding compromising the health and the plights of their citizens over irresponsible commercial giants.

In practice, it is obvious that commercial giants exist to make profit. On the other hand, the government exist to protect and provide for the needs of its citizens. To this fact, corrupt government officials and their actions are quite opposite to the reasons for the governments' existence. It can be said that, self-gain would be considered as top priority to such governments if they consider conniving with irresponsible commercial giants at the expense of their national.

A wide view of the situation in developed economies is the opposite. Governments set tougher policies to ensure that companies are responsible. These policies are never compromised to the detriment of their nationals. Other stakeholders like the media and the movement groups are also often heard faster to disrepute companies that are less responsible in their business activities.

What of defaulted companies of CSR policies? The government must serve as enforcing agents. The media must serve as the mouth-piece for the unfortunate individuals. The media must be totally responsible to serve the interest of their listeners and country instead of foreign commercial giants.

The movement groups of developed countries must also have interest in the practises of MNCs and corporations in developing countries since that is where their help is really needed. Pressure groups and unions must be set up by and for the consumers, workers/employees and families of employees, pensioners and other possible stakeholders of corporations. Furthermore, foreign media must verify the information they publish and get to the root of alleged MNC's irresponsible business practices. These include interviewing actual victims not rather than the use of secondary sources.

For the local and indigenous companies, the governments must have interest in their operations. Possibly, set standards of operation, or educate them on CSR practices, specially, on pollution, safety and quality standards. Although the tendency of being responsible is inherent (Ketola, 2005) few may try to live according to intuitively responsible standards, but clearly defined standards are needed and should be enforced.

Governments in developing countries must set examples as being less corrupt and incorporate clearly defined and enforceable standards in their polities for business activities. These should include the promotion of rule of law, probity and accountability for all. Indeed diversity shouldn't mean dumping. Corporations employing locals must not take advantage of them in trying to endanger their society, economy and ecology with waste and irresponsible business practises. Fair treatment, sustainability and employee rights must be the case.

To a degree these suggestions would finally ensure highly responsible business practises in developing countries. Both the government and the International community should have interest in the course of actions of companies in developing countries.

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