Ethical Responses and Environmental Law for Ecotourism Sustainability

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Abstract

This article is grounded on a literature-based exploratory overview research methodology and proposes that without ethical practices, and solid environmental laws in place, there is no likelihood of sustainable development of either our ecology or ecotourism which plays an important role in environmental conservation, and provides understanding of what the needs of the people are who are local to an area so that their quality of life can be improved. The researchers have examined how the extant literature has addressed a range of issues such as for example social responsibility, legislation, philosophical stances, environmental ethics and sustainable development. This article thus looks at moral responsibility and the non-commonsensical scope of environmental business relations. It argues that how organizations and people treat one another in their approach to nature, is critical to sustainable business in an environment which is increasingly threatened by malpractices such as disregard for others which is a rampant feature of business practice of wealthy nations. The article is prescriptive in nature and thus normative since it suggests practical guidelines based on accountable ethical values. By adopting ethical practices and by having ethically driven leaders, creativity and careful strategies in environmental matters, businesses will be able to generate wealth within legal and value-motivated boundaries which do not compromise the sustainability of future generations while conserving the natural endowments of the country. Philosophical stances on ethics are important in drives to mitigate environmental degradation and these are also considered since in considering the need for sustainability in ecotourism, and indeed the planet, it is critical that it be regulated effectively to help the country convert to a green economy. This will however require a very effective regulation of corporations and other businesses in their environmental dealings backed up by a range of carefully crafted legislation and by-laws in the realm of environmental law to keep them in check. Over and above the ethical duty of all of us to drive ecological sustainability, ecotourism can be an inducement for conservation measures and education promotion on ecological issues, and it also serves to support local communities in enhancing their livelihoods.

Keywords: legislation, philosophy, environmental morals, ecotourism, nature, conservation.

Introduction

There is no doubt that the world is becoming a global village in which what transpires environmentally on one side, invariably impacts others elsewhere. Globalization and the internet draw our attention to events which seem far away. Subsequent to the publication of the 'Brundtland Commission' report, *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987), the notion of sustainability has grown immensely as a critical consideration. Many corporations and governments, inter alia, have professed their pledge to adhere to the principles embodied in the WCED document, namely "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

This is based on the notion that the needs of current and future generations can only be met if there is a state of harmony between economic development, social development and ecological development (Kotzé, 2010).

On the contrary however, the progressively telling evidence of what is happening in our world, from an environmental perspective, is distressing, and the negative environmental impacts are thus the primary cause for anxiety. Many global organisations and indeed most people, state they agree with the overall notion. However, in reality there is very little conclusive confirmation that sustainable development is indeed making a difference given the visible negative impacts of development on the environment. Environmental ethics as such is thus important as it addresses the field of relationships between corporations and people in general and the natural environment. It is thus an important approach to applied ethics. It interrogates our relationship with the world as a whole. Consequently ethical questions manifest which point to our responsibilities as global citizens and the manner in which we deal with environmental issues that plague our world. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) (2015), asserts that ecotourism encompasses an environmentally responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, and sustains the security of local people. Acquah (2013) proposes three paybacks from natured-based tourism. These comprise augmented conservation consciousness, the delivery of ecosystem services, and critically the preservation of cultural identity. It is given that a local community's sentiments in both tourism planning and development must be carefully integrated (GDRC, 2013) in any plans and that any degradation of the natural environment is unacceptable.

Within this discussion, ecotourism is a significant activity in many countries, if not all. Ecotourism offers visitors the chance to appreciate the grandeur of nature while instilling within them the significance of safeguarding biodiversity and also the local culture in which it exists. Ecotourism offers opportunities for supporting livelihoods for local communities living in pristine natural surroundings such as conservation areas and national parks (Drum and Moore, 2002). Vishwanatha and Chandrashekara (2014), determined that ecotourism leads to the enhancement of the local economy through financial benefits accruing to locals, thus not only the environment benefits but also people. The tourism industry requires sustainable tourism for the good of the local economy and the natural environment on the whole, but this can only happen with the apposite support from all stakeholders especially the corporations which pollute the environment and degrade pristine areas while they should be adding positive socio-cultural impacts such as inter alia, improved local identity and community involvement (McGehee, and Andereck, 2004). In any of these ideas, effective governance is essential to sustainability and environmental protection (Feris, 2010).

Essentially, when speaking of environmental ethics, we need to consider our moral and ethical relationship with creation. It is apparent from the literature that despite the critical role of nature in our sustainability, it is being used and abused far quicker than the earth's biosphere can possibly restock (Sutcliffe et al. 2008). How do we take care of and seek to preserve not only humanity but the whole of nature. For one, it is evident in the literature that ethical practices in business are receiving far greater attention than hitherto (Carroll, 1999; Dahlrsrud, 2008; Kolk, 2010). How do we determine what is right or wrong in a given situation given that values are in part unique for individuals as well as different cultures? Stronza and Gordillo (2008), advocate that ecotourism can be a motivation for conservation and building a society, but it requires a positive economic change that does not destructively impact the social and economic fibre of the host communities, but also its natural environment. For tourism to be sustainable it must be able to maintain its feasibility in an area for an unlimited period of time (Butler, 1993: 29). Where there is pollution by corporations and others, this cannot be the case. Rural communities where unemployment is widespread, are mostly willing participants when any envisioned tourism has a

appreciably big role to play in supporting livelihoods with job availability (Hossen, 2016). However at times they do not necessarily realise the pollution and degradation that may result from working for a mining house or other pollution emitter.

The Importance of Ecotourism

Ecotourism is a category of sustainable tourism whose objective is the conservation of the environment through the development of the native communities. The development of the communities is expressed in economic, environmental, social as well as cultural ways (Cusack and Dixon, 2006). Ecotourism is thus a critical factor in the desired 'green economy'. It is also the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry, and emphasizes environmental protection, and also the socioeconomic development via community participation in aspects such as environmental education and skills development.

> Ecotourism has been defined responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996).

Ecotourism promotes the protection of indigenous cultures and their customs while also safeguarding the natural environment and conserving finite resources. Essentially, the natural resources are conserved through ecotourism as an alternative the land being plundered by international and national corporations such as mining operations. Ecotourism thus seeks to preserve the environment and enhance it (Cheung and Fok, 2014). When tourists travel to ecotourism areas they expect to find uninterrupted and clean natural areas, where fauna and flora are conserved, such as national parks, wildlife reserves, wetlands, protected areas, coastal and marine areas (Sangpikul, 2011). A community-based approach to ecotourism is vital as it identifies the need to endorse both the quality of life of local inhabitants and the conservation of all natural resources (Anup et al., 2015).

Ecotourism can brings permanent economic advantages to a resident community. For one livelihoods improve as employment and finances are brought into the community by tourists, although there are also many cases in which only outside operators and government agencies benefit to the detriment of locals and the environment. Thus many people do not share in the benefits of ecotourism, and this requires moral interrogation. Ecotourism should seek to enhance a local community in all aspects as its members work as a team to offer an efficacious ecotourism undertaking as stakeholders with an equal share in a venture (Schellhorn, 2010). There must be concerted efforts to minimize and negate in totality any negative physical, social and spiritual impacts of ecotourism manipulation by companies. There should rather be a striving to for strong environmental and cultural awareness and deference in stakeholders. What is important is a positive experience for visitors and local inhabitants in pristine natural conditions. Financial benefits should be in place for environmental conservation and there should also be engendering of financial benefits for all stakeholders in a win-win situation with nature. Any development needs to benefit a destination more in terms of local involvement and it should have negligible adverse impacts (Cater, 1993).

Company responses

Moral frameworks are increasingly being introduced into workplaces and manifest in organizational visions, missions and codes of ethics. Employees are made aware of the moral

dilemmas they may encounter and the legal challenges to the manner in which they operate. However scant attention is paid to the real wielders of power including political interest groups, mega corporations and such like. The role of patriarchal societies and the extensive exploitation of nature (Warren, 2000) are downplayed as is capitalism and its commodifying of things which are non-human (Kovel, 2002).A large amount of work on global environmental affairs while not *per se* ethically orientated, tends to focus on how humans impact nature and it shows the extent to which powerful transnational forces and international institutions aggravate the manner in which humanity abuses the natural environment. As early as 1989, intellectuals discussed the moral issues which emanate from the way in which humans exploit nature and they protested about how humans systematically exploit nature with the resultant environmental degradation issues. What we require urgently is a range of effective proactive strategies to counter environmental degradation (Buysse and Verbeke, 2003).

In international business practices, the notion of business and its relationship with the social order with a special emphasis on environmental ethics, has been in vogue since the mid-1970s when questions were increasingly raised as to how the growing population was impacting the environment. It has tended to focus on the manner in which people treat nature and how especially industries, technology, and the use of pesticides were affecting the environment. Organizations which do not strive for sustainability are in essence degrading the world for all of us (Buckley et al., 2009). Morf (1999) asserted that "Ethics is the moral principle that individuals inject into their decision making process and that helps temper the last outcome to conform to the norms of their society". When business leaders thus act unethically, they have consciously opted to be immoral. In businesses that wish to survive, their leaders need to embrace the legal and moral atmosphere in which they conduct business and create an organization which exudes an ambience of environmental concern and in which doing the right thing is part of the operating DNA. Such companies are environmentally friendly and adopt Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives voluntarily, but in some countries, CSR is legally obligated (Osuji & Obibuaku, 2014). Many companies simply comply to 'tick a box' and do not bother to act in environmental sustainability initiatives beyond mere compliance. However, there is increasing pressure from societies globally for organizations to account for their social, environmental and ethical evils which manifest in many of their operations.

Nonetheless a truly sustainable organization is aware of the symbiotic relationship between the environment, and community and social aspects of its operations, and also its economic concerns and shareholder requirements. It is therefore expected to create a sustainable community via its various business actions (Buckley et al., 2009). It is true that countless moral issues arise with regard to the way people treat nature, and a great deal of environmental harm involves people being exploited and abused, through the manner in which nature is exploited and abused. People are most certainly not the only authentic moral proxies.

In 1978 McNulty and Cheeks stated that "...the topic itself is hardly new...Much of the discussion concerning corporate social responsibility has focused on business in the United States, but it is increasingly clear that managers around the world are being faced with new problems resulting from societal changes"(1978:4–5). In addition, the huge damage imposed on corporate America by a series of unethically guided actions such as the EnRon, WorldCom, and Arthur Anderson scandals, have highlighted the need to reconsider business and how it operates as a matter of urgency.

Legislation in place

In 2011, at the 17th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 17), South Africa confirmed its pledge to build a green economy by signing the Green Economy Accord. Then, in 2012, South Africa participated in the Rio Earth Summit (Rio+20) which dealt with two major topics, one of which addressed the issue of a "…Green Economy in the Context of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication". Kidd (2011) elucidates that environmental conservation is not possible and he does this by means of an analogy of three-legged cooking pots: "...unless all the legs [economic development, social development and ecological development] are equal in length and strength, the pot will be unstable". In a striving to regulate human activities that may adversely impact on the environment, laws are enacted in terms of section 24 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. The laws deal with a range of 'green' issues, inter alia, air pollution, water pollution, soil pollution and the protection of indigenous species (plant and animal life and all micro-organisms) and general biodiversity, marine environments, and of course the conservation of water, and agricultural lands. The laws generally forbid any undertaking which threatens to place the environment at risk. There is a strict imposition of what may be conducted and how. Generally environmental impact assessments (EIAs) are mandatory, but at times some unacceptable project may 'slip through the cracks'.

Sustainable development is also endorsed in the principles of the National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998 (NEMA). The NEMA is an enlightened environmental management legislation in South Africa and globally. It offers the framework for decision-making for individuals, institutions, and governments. The National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act 10 of 2014 asserts that "Biodiversity means the variability among living organisms from all sources including, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part and also includes diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems." This makes it clear that the safety and conservation of all species in all ecosystems is critical.

The National Strategy for Sustainable Development and Action Plan, 2011-2014 (NSSDP) signposted a new way of thinking about how to promote the effective stewardship of South Africa's natural, social and economic resources. This National Strategy for Sustainable Development and Action Plan, also referred to as NSSD 1 (2011 to 2014), was approved by Cabinet on 23 November 2011 (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2019). The five strategic objectives of the NSSD include:

a. Enhancing systems for integrated planning and implementation
b. Sustaining our ecosystems and using natural resources efficiently
c. Towards a green economy
d. Building sustainable communities
e. Responding effectively to climate change

This is a clearly proactive strategy that respects the notion of sustainable development as a long-term obligation, which considers environmental protection, social equity and economic efficiency with the vision and values of the country. "The NSSD 1 marks the continuation of a national partnership for sustainable development. It is a milestone in an ongoing process of developing support, and initiating and up scaling actions to achieve sustainable development in South Africa" (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2019).

Ecological sustainability is thus enshrined in South African Constitution and it gives all and sundry the right to environmental protection via legislation and other processes that protect the idea of ecologically sustainable development and suitable use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development. Having said that, it is recognized that the application and implementation of environmental treaties and laws must be radically improved so as to better protect the environment. Unfortunately however…

> "… the structure of our legal systems and the human-centred nature of the philosophies (jurisprudence) on which our legal systems are based, are now impeding the attainment of ecologically sustainable ways of living. The overall effect of our current legal system is to legitimise and encourage unsustainable human practices, rather than to prevent them. The crucial challenge facing the current generation is to begin to regulate human behaviour so that it contributes to, rather than undermines, the Earth's systems. This means not merely adjusting our legislation to restrict the most environmentally harmful activities, but completely re-thinking our legal and political systems. Our governance systems are defective because they are based on a false understanding of how the universe functions, and of our role within it.

> The core falsehood is that we humans are separate from our environment and that we can flourish even as the health of Earth deteriorates. In fact, we have convinced ourselves that our health and wellbeing depends on exploiting the Earth as fast as possible. The exact opposite is true: we have evolved within, and remain an inextricable part of, the community of life on Earth. Desolation, dysfunction and disease are the consequences of believing that human fulfilment is attainable outside of this 'Earth Community' or that it can be achieved at the expense of the health of the community as a whole. This illusion of independence is exacerbated by the myth that we are the 'master species' whose destiny it is to run this planet for our own benefit. The dominant cultures in our world are as convinced of the superiority of our species over others and of our right to rule and exploit the planet as most white South Africans once were about their right to oppress other South Africans." (Cormac Cullinan, 2007).

A number of Acts have been recently enacted to address environmental concerns and ecological sustainability, which obviously also affect ecotourism. These include the following in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Acts and regulations (2017-2019)   **Source**: Department of Environmental Affairs
Available online at: https://www.environment.gov.za/legislation/actsregulations

Date	Act
09 March 2018	National Environmental Management: Integrated Coastal Management Act, 2008 (Act No. 24 of 2008) Reclamation of land from Coastal Waters Regulations
21 July 2017	National Environmental Management: Air Quality Act, 2004 (Act No.39 of 2004) National Pollution Prevention Plans Regulations
21 July 2017	National Environmental Management: Air Quality Act, 2004 (Act no. 39 of 2004) Declaration of Greenhouse Gases As Priority Air Pollutants
30 May 2017	National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (10/2004): Threatened or Protected Marine Species Regulations (GG 40876)
03 April 2017	National Environmental Management: Air Quality Act (39/2004): National Greenhouse Gas Emission Reporting Regulations (Gn 40762)
24 February 2017	National Environmental Management: Integrated Coastal Management Act (24/2008): Draft reclamation of land from coastal waters regulations (GN 40638)

The Constitution refers unambiguously to 'ecologically sustainable development', while the National Water Act 36 of 1998 recognises that people must share water with other species. Part 3 of the Act necessitates that a 'reserve' consisting of a defined quantity of water of a specific quality, must be maintained in water courses both to satisfy basic human needs, and to safeguard aquatic ecosystems in order to protect ecologically sustainable development and use of the relevant water resources (Cormac Cullinan, 2007). It is inescapable that government needs to vigorously promote sustainable development, and this must be unswervingly in line with plans and strategies to conserve water and protect the nations biological diversity. Strategic environmental assessments (SIAs) of public policies need to be used increasingly to consider the impacts of corporate decisions on the natural environment.

Various of the top companies on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange are flouting environmental laws and not telling their shareholders, according to a study by the Centre for Environmental Rights. The CER evaluated 20 listed companies on the JSE and established that between 2008 and 2014 many of them had dishonored their permits and licences or contravened the law. Examples of their violations included toxic spills, unauthorised disposal of hazardous waste, contamination of soil or of ground and surface water, and air pollution (Dasnois, 2015), despite their listing on the JSE's Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) index.

A CER study found that:

> "…in "all but a few cases" the companies had understated or failed to report breaches of the law in their reports to shareholders. Some were actively misrepresenting levels of compliance to shareholders. Examples included:
>
> • Lonmin, one of the best performers in the index in 2014, was guilty of a "significant" number of failures to comply with environmental laws and permits. These included a failure to meet air quality permit requirements, repeated violations of dust emission limits, poor water management systems and non-functional sewage systems.
> • Arcelor Mittal failed to tell shareholders about criminal investigations reported by the Department into its Vanderbijlpark plant and Vereeniging plants.
> • African Rainbow Minerals failed to respond to questions from the CER about the high number of applications made for authorisation of activities which it had already started….
> • Anglo American Platinum was commended by the CER for the disclosure of environmental issues in its annual reports, but the study found problems at several mines, including incorrect waste management, high concentrations of nitrates, chlorides and sulphates in ground water and surface water, and failure to separate clean and dirty water systems.
> • DRDGold was found to have been guilty of frequent breaches of environmental laws and permits, including: spills and water pollution…
> • Harmony Gold was found to have been guilty of "multiple" unlawful discharges and overflows, and ongoing excessive dust emissions….
> • Pretoria Portland Cement's annual reports from 2008 to 2012 failed to mention a number of incidents (55 in 2009) where inspectors found the company to have failed to comply with its permit, or with the law. …" (Dasnois, 2015),

The National Environmental Management Protected Areas Act

The National Environmental Management Protected Areas Act number 57 (2003) is an important legal frameworks enabling the development of the tourism industry in South Africa. This Act

seeks to protect and conserve all ecologically viable areas representative of South Africa's biological diversity and all the natural landscapes and seascapes.it also makes provision for a national register of all national, provincial and local protected areas and caters for their management. The Act safeguards that the environment is exploited correctly to encourage tourism development and mitigate corporate plundering of biodiversity so that the relationships of organisms within their environment is maintained without human degradation of the physical environment for commercial ventures such as mining. Thus environmental integrity and social justice issues in local communities should always triumph over vested business interests.

The National Heritage Resources Act

The National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999 offers a set of principles for managing of all natural resources and is well crafted and essential to good governance of the natural environment. The aim is to

> …introduce an integrated and interactive system for the management of the national heritage resources; to promote good government at all levels, and empower civil society to nurture and conserve their heritage resources so that they may be bequeathed to future generations; to lay down general principles for governing heritage resources management throughout the Republic; to introduce an integrated system for the identification, assessment and management of the heritage resources of South Africa; to establish the South African Heritage Resources Agency together with its Council to co-ordinate and promote the management of heritage resources at national level; to set norms and maintain essential national standards for the management of heritage resources in the Republic and to protect heritage resources of national significance; to control the export of nationally significant heritage objects and the import into the Republic of cultural property illegally exported from foreign countries; to enable the provinces to establish heritage authorities which must adopt powers to protect and manage certain categories of heritage resources; to provide for the protection and management of conservation-worthy places and areas by local authorities; and to provide for matters connected therewith. (Polity n.d.)

Philosophical stances

Businesses need to constantly create value for their shareholders and other stakeholders. This is why business leaders cannot meet the expense of being involved in ethical crises such as those which led to the global pandemic of ethical deterioration and very negative publicity which triggered the economic slump of the last decade. The environment is one area that cannot be compromised on or there will simply be nothing left of lasting value for future generations to enjoy. Even with this knowledge, there are still divergent views on environmental ethics. There are different values and approaches which impact sustainable lifestyle practices as espoused by both organizations and individual consumers. To many business leaders, environmental considerations are often perceived to be obstacles to profitability. They may even be analyzed as indispensable evils, with growing costs to be minimized, or tedious regulations with which they are obliged to conform. The environment is sadly often sidelined as an aspect which is not key to business strategy except for cases in which environmentalists and other activists create a huge fuss. Thus various stances are adopted of which the eco-centric value stance, the altruistic and anthropocentric are core.

The Eco-centric Stance

Environmental ethics tends to retain is focus on the human–nature crossing points and strives to develop persuasive reasons as to why we should care about nature in its own right. In this stance, there is a firm belief that the ecosystem has an inherent value and that this an important reason for protecting it (Nordlund and Garvill, 2002). Within this context, human values are critical since these affect how we evaluate the actions that we take or events that we see unfolding before us. This leads to philosophical questions being raised. In the western paradigm, the Judaeo-Christian tradition, as well as in Islam, we are taught that the Creator gave people dominion over the earth's plants and all the creatures therein (White, 1967). When there is thus a failure to protect the earth, some would say this shows human moral failure. An ethical duty of care for the environment and for all creatures is a substantial requirement for achieving sustainability. Environmental ethicists such as Singer (2002), have disputed the notion of randomness through which humans tend to confine those worthy of ethical consideration and they called for a spreading of ethical worth and value to the whole of creation.

Eco-centricists, whether they be a business entity, or consumers, are markedly less apprehensive about material wealth and personal power. They basically embrace values that position nature in an equal position with people and are concerned with environmental overshoot in which natures limits are traverse by rampant human development. Thus nature, for them, has an intrinsic value regardless of its usefulness to people. Eco-centrism asserts that the current dilemma of the world is based entirely on the hyper exaggerated sense of human worth.

A "New Ecological Paradigm" (NEP) exists in which the beliefs about mankind's capacity to disturb the balance of nature, and it also posits the existence of real limits to growth for societies, and questions humankind's right to rule over all of nature (Dunlap et al., 2000). There is then an anti-anthropocentric stance and a higher value is placed on nature. Milbrath, (1984) states that there is also great empathy for other species as well as peoples, and future generations. But critically important is the notion of making carefully crafted strategies to circumvent risks to nature and people in general. Milbrath also points to a growing understanding of the idea that there are in fact limits to growth and a society is needed in which all role-players collaborate, are transparent in their dealings and are committed to preserving our planet (Milbrath, 1984). Where there is a pro-environmentalism stance this denotes a range of sustainable opinion that is largely determined by attitudinal variables which comprise of the values, beliefs, and norms of people (Nordlund and Garvill, 2002). Environmental stewardship is very important for any commercial growth and development, and yet only a few organizations within the global marketplace view stewardship as an important aspect for operational sustainability since anthropocentric outlooks dominate (Global Compact 2010).

There is strong understanding of the prospect of a global eco-crisis failing careful human activity (Dunlap et al, 2000). Eco-centricists prefer business strategies to be based on a total espousal of environmental principles between all facets of a business's operations. For example, they may favour the limiting of greenhouse gas emissions and more energy efficient businesses. Eco-centrists have a collective commitment to sustainable development (Dobson, 2003; Seyfang, 2006) which does not factor in financial issues when it comes to what is best for the planet. Eco-centrists tend to attribute what they do to a strong sense of environmental responsibility. There is a constant conscious decision to limit any negative environmental impacts on others, by careful personal and organizational behavioral adjustments.

The Altruistic Stance

The altruistic value oriented individual desires a universalism and munificence approach which clearly considers the welfare and interests of all stakeholders (Elliott, 2005). Treating others as you would have them treat you otherwise known as the 'Golden Rule', becomes an imperative (Stern et al., 1995). People who have altruistic values strive to provide ethical environmental value for all species as well as people and they tend to be supporters of businesses which happen to operate using sustainable practices (Schultz, 2001). There are however also those who are against altruistic CSR which is considered to be an illegitimate corporate activity. (Lantos 2002). Business organizations are not considered to be competent enough to successfully implicate themselves in public welfare issues (Shaw and Barry, 1992) and similar sentiments are echoed by Freeman (2001).

This is due mainly to the fact that businesses are generally fashioned for narrow economic purposes that drive the notion of profit maximization for their shareholders. Society and its welfare do not necessarily feature in operating strategies and shareholder desires are paramount (Trevino and Nelson, 1999). This flies in the face of the notion of creating shared value (Porter and Kramer, 2011). The altruists believe that business voluntary generosity is preferred and is better than governmental benevolence which is invariably at the taxpayers' expense and thus by force. However in such a belief, there is scant recognition for the charge imposed on shareholders who obtain less and also the consumers who tend to pay for goods and services and even employees who may receive smaller salary increases due to organizational 'philanthropy'. Organizations do not always satisfy the needs of society and this evident in environmental degradation which is the result of business activities imposing severe fines on transgressors. In any event, altruists agree that organizations must give back to society is some or other form.

The Anthropocentric Stance

This group of thinkers have human-centred values and believe that environmental protection is very important because nature's contributes to the welfare of humankind (Nordlund and Garvill, 2002). Such people generally prefer more sustainable lifestyles based on strong ethical grounds (Seyfang, 2006). In business oriented circles one could argue that capitalism and its excesses and also patriarchy, are to blame for driving technology to plunder and pillage nature (Capra 1997; Kunstler, 2005). A similar idea is proposed by Wilson (1988) who states that severe global environmental are predominantly due to the capitalist system of production, distribution and consumption and we need to appreciate and protect our biological resources. An anthropocentric worldview which is essentially based on a Western and especially a Eurocentric paradigm, asserts that people are superior to all other creatures and suggests that there is an unlimited supply of natural resources thus making conservation unnecessary. If there is technological progress is then there will also be material progress (Kilbourne & Polonsky, 2005).

People can use technology and innovative practices to adapt nature to suit their needs so people do not face any ecological limitations. Dunlap (1980) referred to this view of the world as the "Dominant Social Paradigm". It also proposes a strictly non-interventionist economy and to the inviolability of individual private property rights (Albrecht et al., 1982). In this paradigm, what are considered to be hard and fast scientific facts are disputable such as for example, global warming and climate change due to greenhouse gas emissions (Myers and Simon, 1994). There is also disagreement as to how to solve environmental problem in public policy procedures.

The environment and the poor

What is urgently required by organizations is a holistic and progressive approach to stakeholder engagement which emphasizes improving the integrity of businesses in the communities in which they operate. This means there should be a necessary transformation of the contemporary intellectual hypothesis regarding the manner in which business is perceived in society. Within this paradigm, it is imperative that environmental issues include and carefully consider the impact of the degradation of the globe on the poor. Given that nature is the medium for most human to human interactions and that most of the world comprises of what we term the 'poor', it is important to conserve the planet in ways that promote sustainable livelihoods and benefits with an explicit stress on poverty reduction and issues of social justice (Brechin et al., 2003). The poor lack the needed power to induce those guilty of degrading the environment that they are due some form of recompense for unethical actions, and they cannot thus transform the malpractices of guilty parties (Elliott, 2005). Relatively poor countries become the dumping grounds for waste from richer nations and the poor very often have no defense against their leaders who accept payoffs to accept waste (Clapp, 2001).

Many countries produce waste and are unwilling to pay for its local disposal. The result is often that the waste is sent to other countries. Thus many poisonous substances and even nuclear hazardous materials are sent from developed wealthy countries to developing poorer ones. Ironically, the United States of America, regarded as the bastion of liberty, is one such nation which has failed to ratify the 1989 Basel Convention which places restrictions on such unethical trade. The convention is equally flawed in its acceptance that waste traders can traffic hazardous materials through non-signatory countries and also export hazardous waste to signatories if any waste element can be reused as recycled material (Clapp, 2001). It is thus not uncommon for powerful political and commercial interests to have priority over any form of needed environmental stewardship. We should note for example, that the average American citizen uses about seventy times more energy than a person in Bangladesh, and this relates to most other resources as well (McKibben, 1998). Regulators and other stakeholders, need to make concerted efforts to support and promote the economic development of especially poor nations and the underprivileged groups within them, as well as all the individuals who fall victim to environmental degradation (Tarrow, 2005) the whims of greedy organizations and selfish individuals. The poorer nations are in a sense under a new form of neocolonialism in which nations countries in the global South are obliged to remain underdeveloped so as to mollify the global North's apprehensions about global environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity (Najam, 2005).

It becomes critical to consider impacts of business on the poor especially when it comes to issues such as mining and extracting of minerals, processing of goods, modes of transportation, the use and disposal of highly toxic materials, and other aspects. Consideration of these is important as they affect human rights, freedom, security and health and safety. Thus we see daily evidence of ecosystems being destroyed, water and air pollution, climate change and huge losses in biodiversity as our natural resources become more depleted. We view nature in instrumental terms and nature is loved for what it can provide people with, and not for itself. The concern of many is thus anthropocentric and fails to recognize the immense value of nature for itself. We are therefore faced with a myriad of very hard-hitting ethical decisions. For example, how ethical is it to burn fossil fuels which degrade our air quality and chop down the Amazon forest for furniture when it is the 'lungs' of our world? The many environmental issues we face including climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and resource depletion, and also the significant societal and ethical scope of unacceptable business actions cannot simply be ignored if we are to be sustainable as a planet. In the context of protecting the poor, it is thus critical for consumers, for

example, to be concerned about the environment, and sanction products and services that pursue conservation initiatives which seek to improve the environment (McDonald and Oates, 2006).

The UN Secretary General report on the post-2015 development agenda stipulates a number of goals as consequence of the Millennium Development Goals. It stresses people, planet and then profits as a triple bottom line. It also stresses justice and human dignity issues and includes environmental, social and economic dimensions at the macro (economy/society) level, while explicitly mentioning intentions to end poverty, and fight against inequality while striving to promote safe and peaceful societies with strong environmentally friendly organizations (UN, 2014). We can either advance the social reason for ethical conduct beyond mere compliance and the 'letter of the law' (Portney, 2008) or move into the realm of the 'spirit of the law' in which organizations manage themselves in such a manner that they become not only economically viable and steadfastly uphold the law, but also seek the genuine welfare and sustainability of society (Carroll, 1999).A spirit of stewardship is required by organizations in which they use the earth's resources in a responsible fashion and carefully consider all societal stakeholders interests and the heritage that is left to future generations (Worrell and Appleby, 2000). There thus needs to be a fine balance between planet, people and profits in a triple bottom-line approach. The broader societal repercussions of organizational actions and societal expectations cannot be put aside. Business stewardship if viewed as an important response to the social and environmental demands for change, can enable strategic actions to inspire the values and beliefs of stakeholders and drive sustainable practices. There are frameworks and guidelines such as ISO 26000 which can greatly assist an organization in putting eco-centric CSR into operation and in promoting environmental stewardship.

The ethical climate in an environmentally friendly organization exudes care and is directly linked to deep beliefs, values and even assumptions (Denison, 1996). The ethical climate then becomes an employee's guide and serves as his or her perception of the norms of the organization (Bartels et al.,1998). While it is true that all people use natural resources and produce waste, the ecological footprint of the globalized rich is far greater bigger than that of the poor who are localized. We have a need to further encourage organizations to adopt an ethical eco-centric approach since it is their duty to care for the environment. An anthropocentric attitude fashions a condition in which business leaders and managers are inclined to chase after only the business interests of economic growth and shareholder value at the expense of environmental ruin. If eco-centric mind-shifts are not embraced, we will not be in a position to develop in a sustainable manner and the quality of life of all people both the rich and the poor will rapidly diminish. Sustainability is principally dependent upon effective management of the environment. Organizations thus need to be visibly environmentally responsible or else this will greatly threaten our ability to meet both the impending current and future needs. The Brundtland Commission of 1987 defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) and yet, for many organizations this is meaningless and they turn a blind eye to their ethical obligations.

A holistic and balanced approach

Business organizations need to adopt a holistic and balanced, approach in which due consideration is given to the notion of the triple bottom line including 'people, planet and profits'. It is critical that governments and industries make use of effective environmental regulatory frameworks which also provide businesses with reasonable incentives as they strive to face complex environmental issues. Where there is a lack of commitment in regulation and monitoring of environmental regulations, organizations feel they can do what they like and so environmental

sustainability and eco-centric behavior become compromised and the result is a degradation of the natural resources that are available.

Organizations need to engage in meaningful stakeholder engagement an become involved in practices which include stakeholders in a constructive manner (Greenwood, 2007). It is critical to developing and maintaining solid stakeholder relations with an enduring effort to consider them at all times (Habisch and Jonker, 2005). Such an approach should invariably include considered stakeholder identification, ongoing consultation, effective communication, a spirit of dialogue and meaningful exchanges between all parties (Greenwood, 2007). ISO 26000 principles for social responsibility describe stakeholder engagement as activities which are assumed to generate opportunities for discourse between an organization and its stakeholders with the purpose of providing an educated basis for the organizational decision making (ISO, 2010:4). Greenwood (2007) asserts that stakeholder engagement is generally morally neutral in orientation. However In business, it is the quality of the parties involved which determines the reasons for any engagement with stakeholders. Thus, any engagement with stakeholders is not to automatically be associated with responsible business behavior (Greenwood and van Buren, 2010). CSR as a concept is somewhat elusive, and in the view of some intellectuals, term social responsibility is considered adequate since it means something, but not always necessarily the same thing, to all parties involved and it's not simply business related (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002). An organization could advance its corporate image by openly pinpointing itself with chosen themes and projects which relate to its particular competences. In such scenarios, word-of –mouth becomes an important aspect in stakeholder communications (Greenwood, 2007). Eco friendly and ethically responsible actions and behaviors must be the central utility of an organization and it remains its task to educate employees and all stakeholders of the business on the value of eco-centric business. An eco-centric code of ethics should drive all organizational actions and decision making.

For a range of leaders and managers, CSR means a legal responsibility, philanthropy, social consciousness or liability while others view it as ethically socially responsible behavior (Kotler and Lee, 2005). Irrespective of how it is viewed, CSR is dominated by an anthropocentric worldview and it requires a fundamental transformation in perception. Greater care for the environment is non- negotiable and if there are suitable and operationally sound regulations governing organizational behavior and the environment, these will create the needed level of importance, care, and responsibility to be attached to the environment (Ferrell et al,. 2010). Given that environmental problems are rampant, effectively policed laws are critical to advance the notion of environmental stewardship and this is essential when we consider that most organizations operate in a wide range of contexts in which there are varying legal rules and standards (Brammer et al., 2012). Fines are not enough to prevent environmental degradation and are often ineffectual so what is needed is a mindset shift in which there are ethically driven practices. It would also be good to have solid ethical models and frameworks created which are especially suitable to particular industries. Understanding the different types of stakeholders, and the power they may yield and how they may influence and impact the business is vital. First and foremost is a desire to obey the law and move beyond mere compliance (Emerson, 2009). The huge value of good relationships with all stakeholders cannot be over-emphasized, so that working in good faith is critical (Weinstein, 2012; Kotchen and Reiling, 2000). Adopting a values-based system of decision-making that allows managers and leaders to consider and carefully evaluate all stakeholder needs and wants is very important (O'Riordan and Fairbrass, 2012).

An eco-centric values system needs to crafted in organizations and eventually become an integral aspect of their operating cultures. It is equally critical that board governance be applied in a way which stresses an eco-centric values-based leadership approach which promotes the idea that

all business actions should include environmentally friendly activities and promote sustainability (Laplume et al., 2008). In this regard it is also important to create an atmosphere in which both internal and external practices include CSR and stakeholder engagement policies and strategies. The role played by managers and leaders in organizations is also important in driving the notion of CSR and in stressing its value to society as such, under the umbrella of corporate citizenship (Crane and Matten, 2010). Both the vision and mission of the organization must reflect facets of CSR management and make it patently clear that it is a critical organizational task. It thus becomes important to develop a mission and robust strategic vision which revolves around ethics and the practice of corporate social responsibility.

The expectations of various stakeholder groups need to be considered by the organization (ISO, 2010). In a nutshell, it makes good sense to engage in practices that demonstrate that the organizational values include the desire to meet stakeholder needs and wants. This will aid in recruiting of values driven employees and help the organization to retain customers while it develops a desirable strong customer base (Peppers and Rogers, 2004). Innovation and creativeness are sources which support sustainability when they are undertaken with a strong ethical conviction (Weinstein, 2012; Barnes, 2013). While innovation is important, the organization should steer clear of the temptation to take short-cuts that may have the direct or indirect consequence of leading to ethical compromises which will taint the organization's reputation, credibility, standing in society and most importantly, an irreversible loss of stakeholder trust. Managers and leaders should thus demonstrate their ethical mettle by doing the right thing all the time and by dealing effectively with ethical dilemmas (Sims, 2013). This stance should be resolutely maintained even in the face of possibly diminished profits. Customers and in fact new employees are always attracted to an organization which demonstrates genuine concern for the environment and society in general and which contributes to the local community in a "win-win" scenario.

All organizational activity should be synonymous with the notion of ethical value creation and this should be communicated to stakeholders. Effective and regular transparent communication with stakeholders emphasizing eco-centricity will serves as an interface between organizational undertakings and societal interests (Crane and Matten, 2010).

Conclusions and recommendations

For ecological sustainability to be achieved there needs to be a drastic philosophical shift from a worldview that places people at the core of everything to considering the natural environment and biodiversity. Levels of human consciousness need to rise and especially in major corporate stakeholder policies and practices. Organizations should address the eco-concerns of stakeholders and the challenges posed by operating practices and resolve how to best respond to these. Effective communication will serve the purpose of clarifying how a business operates and why it does what it does. The leaders and managers as key decision-makers must be intellectually engaged in an all-inclusive approach to ascertain innovative ways to better assign organizational resources to achieve eco-centric outcomes which will positively impact on society and lead to organizational sustainability.

An eco-centric approach must be strategic in orientation and integrated into operations while being fairly prescriptive, comprehensive and systematic, in how it deals with stakeholders. There is no doubt that organizations can play a huge role in enabling a more curative economy which is eco-centric. A commitment to sustainable environmental stewardship is critical as are enabling conditions for an eco-centric economy in which the policies of the governments of the world play a vital role in encouraging innovation and guiding sustainable development. Regulations and

policies should be informed by planetary needs. Due to South Africa's abundance in biodiversity and succeeding dependence on natural resources for economic growth, ecotourism is hypothetically able to play a very important role in the country's transition to a green economy.

There is however far too much from corporations while more actions are required and the government needs to clamp down all actions which degrade the natural environment and disrupt our ecology. Ecotourism sustainability and indeed national sustainability requires positive corporate responses to the challenge of sustainability. The planet and people must come before profits in any given situation. It is time for capitalists to become more conscious concerning life on earth. Major shareholders such as asset managers and especially the institutional investors have accountability to go the facades of company visions and missions and make concerted efforts to enforce environmental protection initiatives.

An enabling infrastructure is vital if especially poor communities are to be empowered and uplifted and to this end CSR and ethical business practices are critical. Governments and society should make it impossible for organizations which degrade the environment and destroy global biodiversity to operate. Efficient energy management systems must be sought and efforts to reduce water, energy and material consumption pursued with vigor. An eco-centric approach will enhance business profitability and sustainability and also support ecological and ecotourism sustainability.

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