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Drivers of corporate social responsibility: a comparative analysis

Understanding corporate social responsibility (CSR)

- Corporate social responsibility is a fast growing concept in management with a focus on the contemporary role of business in society.
- Almost five decades of scholarly debate on the role of business in the society:
 - Howard Bowen's thesis (1953): business should contribute towards societal welfare.
 - Milton Freedman proposition (1962 & 1970): social responsibility of the business is to increase shareholder returns
 - Carroll's pyramid of CSR (1991) integrating economic, legal, ethical & philanthropic concerns.
 - The triple bottom line framework (economic, social and environmental concerns) by Elkington (1997)

Adapted from Stuart Hart (2007: 160)

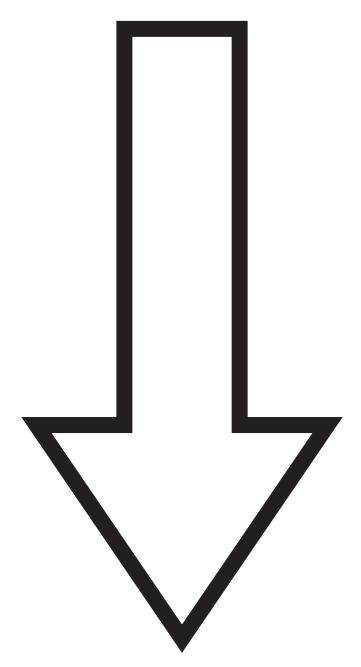
- CSR still remains a contested concept; contested because:
 - It is open to different interpretations;
 - It is appraisive, and
 - It is complex and multi-faceted in nature. (Moon et.al 2004)

Hence, no unified definition, and continues to be used interchangeably with other concepts: corporate citizenship, sustainability etc.

However, all definitions bear some striking similarities.

Objectives

- Investigate and compare the drivers of CSR agenda pursued by corporations in the United Kingdom, South Africa and Malawi;
- Examine the role of multi-stakeholder partnerships on CSR agenda by different corporations;
- Draw appropriate lessons and implications for public policy and practice in Malawi and South Africa.



Research Methodology

- Qualitative research utilising case study strategy.
- Semi structured interviews and primary and secondary data review.
- Analytical technique: pattern matching (Yin 2003).

Contribution to the world of knowledge

The study will provide:

- An increased understanding of the factors that account for different CSR agenda exhibited by corporations in different socio-political environments from their host countries.
- An increased understanding of the nature of CSR in one of the poorest countries in the World where no empirical studies have been conducted.
- An increased understanding of how colonial legacy influences the CSR model adopted by corporations operating in the former British colonies.
- A better understanding of the public policy and practical implications of CSR theories within the context of a developing country.

Literature Review

- Most of academic literature focuses on the conceptualisation of CSR;
- CSR discourse constructed on moral, and altruistic ends in form of corporate philanthropy (Carroll 1991; Lantos 2001; Porter & Kramer 2002).
- Primary concern in CSR discourse is whether firms pursue it for self interest or doing so is ethically good.

Limitations:

- Few empirical studies conducted to support ethical motive.
- Studies conducted however remain inconclusive, making CSR being viewed as public relation tool.
- Academic literature is very narrow, and focuses on CSR in developed countries, with few studies on developing countries.

Theoretical framework for understanding CSR

- Many theories available for understanding CSR.

Two dominant theories:

- Stakeholder theory (Freeman 1984 & 1999)
- Theory of enlightened self-interest (Wallich and Mc Gowan 1970; Keim 1978).

References: For detailed information E-mail: andmzembe@yahoo.co.uk