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CSR – Making the Number of Options Grow!

Reviewing the relationship between multinationals, home country governments and the distant poor.

Abstract submission:

There is a general acceptance that multinational corporations (MNCs) are uniquely situated to help solve social problems in collaboration with governments and other civil society organisations (Husted and Allen, 2006). This approach is being increasingly adopted by the government of the United Kingdom (UK) who continue to reconfigure the Department for International Development's poverty alleviation priorities around private sector development. Given this growing emphasis on the private sector as a key partner in international poverty alleviation efforts, researchers have a duty to investigate the assumptions, contradictions, and the business, management and social welfare implications of such an approach. Current corporate social responsibility (CSR) literature shows that there are broad overarching problems related to institutional/structural biases, and issues of both conflict and cooperation that shape the extent to which the role of MNCs in poverty alleviation can be maximised (Idemudia, 2008; Sharma and Lee, 2012; VanSandt and Sud, 2012). A theoretical framework is developed based upon political economy concepts of power and conflict, and extant CSR literature on the relationship between MNCs and poverty alleviation to examine the following research question: What are the institutional biases and areas of conflict and cooperation in the relationship between UK MNCs and the UK government that shape the extent to which the role of MNCs in poverty alleviation in Sub-Saharan Africa is maximised? This framework is subsequently reviewed and revised through a case study analysis of the relationship between the UK government, UK MNCs and their respective public policy and public CSR commitments to poverty alleviation in three African countries; outlining how these relationships are characterised by both conflict and cooperation. Finally the implications and limitations of the theoretical framework for reframing CSR development discourse as part of a wider agenda on expanding the number of options for maximising the role of MNCs in poverty alleviation are discussed.

Husted, B. W. and Allen, D. B. (2006) "Corporate social responsibility in the multinational enterprise: strategic and institutional approaches", *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol.37, pp. 838.

Idemudia, U. (2008) Conceptualising the CSR and Development Debate, *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, vol.29; pp.91-110.

Sharma, A. and Lee, M. P. (2012) Sustainable Global Enterprise: Perspectives of Stuart Hart, Ans Kolk, Sanjay Sharma, and Sandra Waddock, *Journal of Management Inquiry*, vol.21, no.2; pp. 161-178.

VanSandt, C. V. and Sud, M. (2012) Poverty Alleviation through Partnerships: A Road Less Travelled for Business, Governments and Entrepreneurs, *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol.110; pp.321-332.