

CORPORATE SOCIAL DISCLOSURE BY PUBLIC ENTERPRISES: EVIDENCE FROM A LESS DEVELOPING AFRICAN COUNTRY

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Abstract

The study investigates Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) information disclosure practices of a sample of public enterprises operating in a less developing African country (i.e. Swaziland) over the years 2008 and 2010. Corporate annual reports and other relevant documents were used to extract CSR disclosure information. The study used content analysis of CSR information appearing in the corporate reports. Content analysis was measured in accordance with number of words. The paper examines five major categories of CSR disclosure such as environmental performance and policies, human resources, community activities, fair business practices, and human rights. Findings show that the trend of increasing amounts of corporate social information disclosure amongst the enterprises from 2008 to 2010 has not increased significantly. Results show that human resources disclosure issues were greatest followed by community involvement and then by environmental related issues. There was no attempt to disclose human rights issues by the enterprises. This study contributes to the literature on CSR reporting practices by public enterprises in the context of less developing African countries.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Corporate Social Disclosure, Public Enterprise, Swaziland

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1. Introduction

Organizations have been criticized for not paying attention to the social and environmental factors in which they operate. With this respect, organizations are expected to engage in social responsibility practices in the societies and communities (Hidayati, 2011) in order to retain their legitimacy (Gray, 2002; Wilmshurst and Frost, 2000). Besides, organizations are also urged to disclose their CSR activities along with their financial results (Khan, Halabi and Samy, 2009). Further, CSR disclosure may lead companies to “demonstrate their legitimacy to stakeholders” (Dawkins and Ngunjiri, 2008, p.288). However, while there is substantial academic research on CSR reporting in the developed countries (Dawkins and Ngunjiri, 2008), little reference has been made to explore CSR reporting practices in developing countries, particularly in less developing African countries. As such, the aim of this paper is to examine the type and extent of CSR information disclosure in corporate reports of public enterprises in a less developing African country (i.e. Swaziland) over the years 2008 and 2010. Further, this study will fill the gap in the CSR reporting literature in the context of

less developing countries, African countries in particular.

Evidence (see Table 1) suggests that Swaziland is one of the economies with the lowest growth in Southern African region. Although Swaziland falls under the Lower Middle Income Country categories (World Bank Development Indicators, 2013a), country’s 60% revenue depends on Southern African Customs Union (SACU) revenue. Nearly 40% people of the country are living without job [Central Bank of Swaziland (CBS) (2010/2011)], country’s poverty level is very high (69%) (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011) and country’s development is threatened by its “high prevalence of HIV/AIDS” (World Bank Development Indicators 2013a). Swaziland’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate is fallen to minus 1.5% in 2012 from 3.5% in 2007 (Table 1). In 2011, Swaziland’s GDP per capita growth is minus 1.3%, which is far lower compared to its counterpart countries in the region such as South Africa (2.2%), Botswana (7.1%), Lesotho (2.7%), Namibia (3.1%), Zimbabwe (7.1%), and Mozambique (4.6%) (World Bank Development Indicators, 2013b).

Table 1. GDP growth rate (percentage) of countries in Southern African region

Year	Botswana	Lesotho	Mozambique	Namibia	South Africa	Swaziland	Zimbabwe
2005	1.6	2.7	8.7	2.5	5.3	2.5	-5.7
2006	5.1	4.3	6.3	7.1	5.6	3.3	-3.5
2007	8.9	4.7	7.3	5.4	5.5	3.5	-3.7
2008	3.7	5.7	6.8	3.4	3.6	2.4	-17.7
2009	-8.2	3.6	6.3	-1.1	-1.5	1.3	6.0
2010	8.6	7.9	7.1	6.3	3.1	1.9	9.6
2011	6.1	3.7	7.3	5.7	3.5	0.3	9.4
2012	3.7	4.0	7.4	5.0	2.5	-1.5	5.0

(Source: World Bank Development Indicators, 2013b)

However, for social and economic development, Swaziland government established a number of Public Enterprises (PEs) after its independence in 1968 (Dlamini, 2005). PEs in Swaziland, employ thousands of Swazis (Thompson, 2009) and play a significant role in the socio-economic development (Ministry of Finance Swaziland, 2004). The era of globalization demands that companies should implement innovative ideas to solve the societal problems that derive from their business operations (Knez-Riedl, Mulej and Dyck, 2006). Therefore, the significance of PEs in the country's social development and their contributions to society cannot be overlooked. On the other hand, due to recent corporate failures in many parts of the world, it has been noticed that companies are addressing accountability, transparency and disclosure issues significantly (Gill, 2008). Owen (2008, p.248) stated that "all too often we are simply offered plausible interpretations of managerial motivations for disclosure with no attention paid as to how such disclosure may, or may not, promote transparency and accountability towards non-capital provider stakeholder groups". Further, companies are increasingly paying attention to their commitment to CSR issues by disclosing CSR information (see Brammer and Pavelin, 2004). Thus, this study aims to achieve the following two objectives:

- First, the study attempts to address CSR issues that are disclosed in the corporate reports of PEs in Swaziland.

- Secondly, the study examines the extent to which CSR information disclosures are being reported in the corporate reports of PEs in Swaziland.

In the next sections, the study provides a theoretical framework which explains the different perspectives relating to CSR and its reporting. Then, a brief summary of Swaziland with regard to CSR and CSR regulation in the country is provided. This is followed by the research methodology adopted in this study. The results are then presented and the findings discussed, with appropriate recommendations made.

2. Literature review

Literature highlights the theoretical concept of CSR and CSR reporting.

2.1 Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

With regard to CSR activities, firm "engages in actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law" (McWilliams, Siegel and Wright, 2006, p.1). Business organizations should have some kind of social agreements with societies to continue their operations (O'Donovan, 2002). However, in order to engage in CSR practices, Carroll (1991) states that firms should have four types of responsibilities such as economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. According to Lantos (2002), there are three types of CSR:

Ethical CSR: It is morally mandatory and goes beyond fulfilling a firm's economic and legal obligations (p.206).

Altruistic CSR: It is a "fulfilment of an organization's philanthropic responsibilities" (contributing time and money to society in the form of voluntary service), "going beyond preventing possible harm (ethical CSR) to helping alleviate public welfare deficiencies, regardless of whether or not this will benefit the business itself" (p.206).

Strategic CSR: Strategic CSR is to "fulfil those philanthropic responsibilities which will benefit the firm through positive publicity and goodwill" (p.206). This responsibility involves undertaking "corporate community service activities that accomplish strategic business goals" (p.207).

Given the above, it implies that, like other business organizations, Swaziland PEs are also expected to be socially responsible and subsequently engage in CSR practices. Since Swaziland government established its PEs for socio-economic development (Dlamini, 2005), the PEs have some kind of social responsibilities to the community, society, and to its employees. In light of these concerns, this study examines the CSR activities of PEs in Swaziland.

2.2 CSR disclosure

CSR disclosure is a tool to communicate to stakeholders about social activities that are carried out by the business organizations and the impact of such activities in the society (Enviroreporting.com, 2009). In response to stakeholders' demands of disclosing CSR issues, different organizations use different forms of reporting. For instance, while a number of organizations disclose CSR information through triple bottom line reporting or Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) framework (Dawkins and

Ngunjiri, 2008; O'Dwyer, 2001), many organizations simply disclose CSR information in their annual reports (Hackston and Milne, 1996). However, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) (2002) indicates that there are a number of potential internal and external benefits that may derive from CSR reporting. Further, Dawkins and Ngunjiri (2008, p.288) state that CSR reporting can play a significant role in the "corporate communication strategy". Table 2 shows a number of benefits of CSR reporting and roles of CSR reporting.

Table 2. Benefits and roles of CSR reporting

Benefits of CSR reporting	Roles of CSR reporting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transparency to stakeholders - Creating financial value - Enhancing reputation - Continues improvement - Improving management systems - Risk awareness - Encouraging innovation - Raising awareness, motivating and aligning staff, and attracting talent - Attracting long term capital and favourable financing conditions - Maintaining licence to operate <p>(WBCSD, 2002, p.15)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inform stakeholders about the intentions of the company to enhance its social performance. - Attempt to influence stakeholders' perceptions about certain events. - Direct attention away from negative events by emphasizing positive actions. - Try to influence stakeholders' expectations about corporate behavior. <p>(Lindblom, 1994, cited in Dawkins and Ngunjiri, 2008, p.288)</p>

3. CSR in Swaziland

In Swaziland, CSR practice is not very popular. There is a low level of awareness on CSR in Swaziland (Kabir and Akinnusi, 2012) which is the greatest challenge to sustainable development in the country. CSR practice in Swaziland is mainly dominated by few multinational corporations and large PEs. Only HIV/AIDS related issues (such as information available on sexually transmitted infections and voluntary counseling and testing facilities in the work place) are common practice by most enterprises in Swaziland. However, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are also playing an important role in community and social development in Swaziland. They work with government and private sectors and involve in many activities such as agriculture, social welfare, disaster management, food security, health, HIV/AIDS, water and sanitation, environment,

human rights, civic education, and economic empowerment (Coordinating Assembly of Non-Governmental Organizations, 2006). Nearly half of the country's population received several services by CSOs operating in Swaziland (Masilela, 2009).

3.1 CSR regulations in Swaziland

In Swaziland, there is no mandatory CSR regulation. However, public and private sectors in the country are encouraged to be socially responsible by a range of voluntary CSR related regulations that are opted by the government. Besides the local regulations, Swaziland is also influenced by a number of international CSR related regulatory frameworks. Table 3 shows examples of CSR related local and international standards and guidelines in Swaziland (but are not limited to).

Table 3. Local and International CSR related Regulatory Frameworks in Swaziland

Local Regulation	International Regulation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Industrial Relations Act 2005 (Amended) - The Employment Act 1997 (Amended) - The Codes of Good Practice Act 2005 - The Occupational Safety and Health Act 2001 - The Worksmens Compensation Act 1983 - The Environment Management Act 2002 - The Wages Act 1964 - The Water Act 2003 - The Flora Protection Act 2001 - The Forest Preservation Act 1910 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International Labor Organization (ILO) standards - International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9001 (Quality) - ISO 14001 (Environment) - ISO 22000 (Food Safety) - OHSAS 18001 (Health and Safety) - AMS 16001 (HIV/AIDS)

(Source: Author's own compilation)

4. Methodology

In order to obtain CSR disclosure information, the study analyzed two years corporate annual reports (2008 and 2010) and other relevant documents (e.g. newsletters, magazines) of 15 major PEs in Swaziland. For CSR disclosure analysis, annual reports have been used in a number of earlier studies (see Khan et al., 2011; Islam and Deegan, 2008; Ratanajongkol, Davey and Low, 2006). In addition, the study also collected information from companies' websites. It is worthy of note that many PEs don't produce annual reports. As such, this study could not obtain a number of annual reports of all selected enterprises. At present, there are 39 PEs in Swaziland (Weekend Observer, 2011). The study selected 15 PEs based on their size, performance, and structure. Further, the selected 15 PEs are the largest and most important PEs in Swaziland as they play a key role in the development of national infrastructure and employ a large number of employees working across the PEs. See the appendix for the list of 15 PEs.

4.1 Measurement of social responsibility disclosure

In consistence with previous CSR disclosure studies (for example, Khan et al., 2011; Raman, 2006; Hackston and Milne, 1996; Gray, Kouhy and Lavers, 1995a), this study used content analysis to measure the CSR information that appeared in the annual reports, newsletters, magazines, and websites. For measuring the contents (units of analysis), different units of measure have been employed in CSR reporting literature such as number of words (see Islam and Deegan, 2008; Ratanajongkol et al., 2006; Zeghal and Ahmed, 1990), number of sentences (see Hackston and Milne, 1996), number of pages (see Gray et al., 1995a) number of lines (see Raman, 2006) and presence or absence (see Khan et al., 2011). Since there is no particular type of measures existing in the literature, this study measured the

amount of CSR information disclosure by using the number of words.

Finally, in order to identify CSR disclosure, the study examined following five major CSR areas (themes) which are found in the literature (see GRI, 2011; Ratanajongkol et al., 2006; Hackston and Milne, 1996; Gray et al., 1995a; Zadek, Pruzan and Evans, 1997, cited in Glautier and Underdown, 2001):

- Environmental performance and policies,
- Human resources issues,
- Community activities,
- Fair business practices, and
- Human rights issues.

5. Findings and discussion

As indicated earlier that, in this study, the number of words is used to measure the extent of CSR disclosure. According to total number of words, Table 4 shows that human resources disclosure is the highest overall category of disclosure. Finding indicates that human resources issues are an important disclosure item to all enterprises. It is consistent with other studies (see Guthrie and Matthews, 1985; Zeghal and Ahmed, 1990; Gray et al., 1995b; Hackston and Milne, 1996; Tsang, 1998; Ratanajongkol et al., 2006). With regard to employee related information disclosure, Roberts (1991, in Williams and Adams, 2013, p.452) stated that this disclosure "tends to exhibit country-specific patterns, suggesting that such information may be provided in response to country-specific pressures". However, findings show that within the areas of human resources, labour/management relations issues were not disclosed by the enterprises; other issues (e.g. employee training and education, fringe benefits, and health and safety in the work place) were disclosed (Table 4).

Community activities disclosure is the second highest disclosure. The possible reason is that "community activities attract public attention and can

be readily verified by outside parties” (Tsang, 1998, p.629). It asserts that companies are contributing their own money and time to their respective societies and communities for community development activities and subsequently informing such activities to stakeholders through CSR disclosure. From the socio-economic perspective, this philanthropic responsibility is highly appreciable since government

of a country alone cannot contribute to all socio-economic development of the country. Nelson Mandela (South African first democratic president) stated that “Government cannot by itself meet these socio-economic challenges. The private sector, non-governmental organizations and ordinary people have to make their contribution” (cited in Trialogue, 2008, p.33).

Table 4. CSR disclosure in details by the PEs (n = 15)

CSR Areas	2008 (in Words)	2010 (in Words)
Environmental performance and policies disclosure:	804	1049
<i>Fire extinguisher and fire exits;</i>	75(8)	92(10)
<i>Protective clothing;</i>	61(7)	73(8)
<i>Internal safety warnings/laws;</i>	125(10)	143(12)
<i>Safety training programmes;</i>	58 (4)	77(5)
<i>First-aid-kit;</i>	92(9)	108(11)
<i>Stop littering warnings/facilities;</i>	13(1)	21(2)
<i>Air pollution control;</i>	Nil	19(2)
<i>Energy saving conservation policies;</i>	51(4)	88(6)
<i>Environmental educational programmes;</i>	54(5)	73(7)
<i>Clean-up-campaign programmes;</i>	275(9)	355(12)
Human resources issues disclosure:	1190	1305
<i>Labour/Management relations (nil);</i>	Nil	Nil
<i>Employee training and education;</i>	640(15)	720(15)
<i>Employee fringe benefits;</i>	445(15)	459(15)
<i>Employee health and safety in the work place;</i>	105(4)	126(5)
Community activities disclosure:	1030	1261
<i>Donations of cash, products or employee services to support community activities, events, organizations, and education;</i>	345(10)	410(12)
<i>Part-time employment of students;</i>	105(7)	125(9)
<i>Supporting community public health projects;</i>	165(11)	189(13)
<i>Preserving Swazi cultural heritage (e.g. observing Swazi national holidays);</i>	74(4)	96(5)
<i>Supporting religious activity;</i>	Nil	33(2)
<i>Community campaign about HIV/AIDS;</i>	341(10)	408(13)
Fair business practices disclosure:	202	375
<i>Equal opportunities;</i>	78(5)	125(8)
<i>Employment of women;</i>	77(6)	135(10)
<i>Equal remuneration for women and men;</i>	Nil	Nil
<i>The use of clear English in legal terms and conditions with supplier and customers;</i>	47(2)	115(4)
<i>Customer/consumer complaints issues;</i>	Nil	Nil
Human rights issues disclosure:	Nil	Nil
<i>Non-discrimination;</i>	Nil	Nil
<i>Freedom of association and collective bargaining;</i>	Nil	Nil
<i>Child labour;</i>	Nil	Nil
<i>Prevention of forced and compulsory labour;</i>	Nil	Nil
<i>Security practices;</i>	Nil	Nil
<i>Indigenous rights;</i>	Nil	Nil

[Figures in parentheses are total number of companies disclosing CSR information]

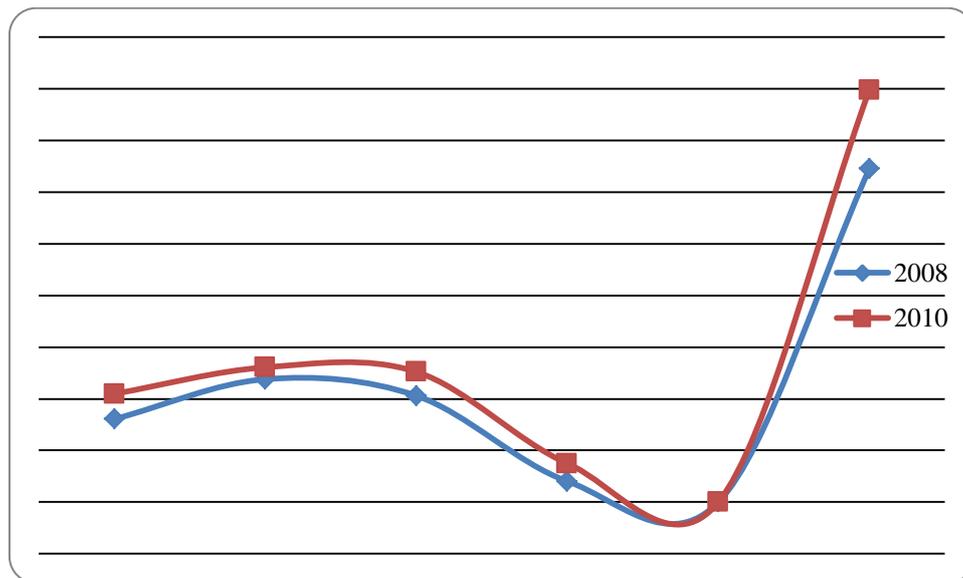
Environmental performance and policies disclosure is the third most disclosed theme among the PEs (Table 4). Findings show that companies are not disclosing adequate information about the actions that they have taken or would like to take for protection and conservation of energy and environment from their business operations. It indicates that less attention to environmental practice has been paid by the PEs that led to less environmental disclosure. It is possible due to financial crisis facing the Swaziland government. Majority of the PEs in Swaziland rely on government subvention. The enterprises might not have received sufficient grants from the government in order to perform the environmental related activities. However, with regard to the environmental issues, Swaziland government has recently established a national enforcement agency called Swaziland Environmental Authority (SEA). The main aim of SEA is to ensure that environmental regulations of the country are implemented (SEA, 2005).

Fair business practices disclosure is the fourth ranked category of total CSR disclosure. Equal

opportunities, employment of women, equal remuneration for women and men, the use of clear English in legal terms and conditions with supplier and customers, and customer/consumer complaints issues were covered under the disclosure of fair business practices (Table 4).

Table 4 shows that no enterprise considered to disclose human rights issues. The main possible reason is that human rights disclosure is uncommon in developing and less developing countries because of less demand from stakeholders to disclose such issues. For instance, Khan et al. (2011) found a similar result in their Bangladeshi (a developing country) study. With this respect, a future study can investigate the motives for not disclosing human rights issues in the corporate reports. It should be noted that Swaziland's human rights record is very poor. Prohibitions on political activity and harassment of political activists, child labour, discrimination and violence against women, etc. are continued in Swaziland (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2007).

Figure 1. CSR total disclosure (in Words)



Although Figure 1 indicates that the PEs have shown an increasing trend of CSR disclosure from 2008 to 2010 (increased by 24%), total number of words did not increase significantly compared to other findings (see Ratanajongkol et al., 2006). A possible reason is that enterprises might not have paid enough attention on social aspects during 2008 and 2010 due to that fact Swaziland was also affected by the global financial crisis of 2007 – 2009. As such, a future study can be conducted to examine CSR reporting performance prior and after the financial crisis.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

This study explored CSR information disclosure practices by 15 major PEs in Swaziland from 2008 to 2010 based on five areas of CSR such as environmental performance and policies, human resources, community activities, fair business practices, and human rights. Results show that while no enterprise disclosed 'human rights' issues, 'human resources' disclosure dominates the total CSR disclosures over the years 2008 and 2010 in according to total number of words.

The overall findings regarding CSR reporting practices by Swaziland PEs is not impressive. The

study found a scanty CSR disclosure performance by the enterprises. It implies that there is a lack of awareness of CSR reporting practices within the PEs in Swaziland. This finding is consistent with a prior study by Kabir and Akinnusi (2012, p.168) where they reported that CSR disclosure practice in Swaziland “is still in the embryonic stage of development” though their survey was related to manufacturing industry across the country.

Based on the findings (i.e. poor CSR reporting performance) and due to the globalization, the study recommends that it is imperative for Swaziland government to establish such a culture where the public and private enterprises could be motivated for greater CSR disclosure. The study made a significant contribution to the literature on CSR reporting practices by public enterprises in the context of less developing countries. This study will therefore encourage more study to examine the level of CSR reporting practices by PEs in other developing and less developing countries, particularly in the African context.

The main limitation of the study is that this study only examined 15 PEs out of 39. Therefore, a further research is needed to focus on a much larger sample that might be able to deliver more findings on CSR disclosure in Swaziland. The other limitation is that this study did not examine one of the major dimensions of CSR reporting, for example, economic dimension. Future study can explore economic reporting performance by Swaziland PEs, thus allowing the exploration of the role of other contextual factors operating in the socio-political life of the nation.

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Appendix: List of Swaziland PEs surveyed

Public Enterprises
1. National Maize Corporation
2. Swaziland Water Services Corporation
3. Swaziland Post & Telecommunications Corporation
4. Central Bank of Swaziland
5. Swazi Bank
6. Ned Bank (Swaziland) Limited
7. Royal Swaziland Sugar Corporation Limited
8. Standard Bank Swaziland
9. Swaziland National Provident Fund
10. Swaziland Development Finance Corporation Limited (FINCORP)
11. Swaziland Railway
12. Swaziland Royal Insurance Corporation (SRIC)
13. Royal Swazi National Airways Corporation
14. Motor Vehicle Accident Fund
15. Swaziland National Housing Board