

1 Society-Oriented Social Responsibility Compass to Sustainable 2 Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises in Developing 3 Countries

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6 **Abstract**

7 Although Society-oriented Social Responsibility has customarily been linked with large
8 companies, Small and Medium Enterprises businesses proved to be a considerable sector in
9 developing countries? economy. Globally, Small and Medium Enterprises constitute as
10 productive drivers of inclusive economic growth and development of many countries. In South
11 Africa, Small and Medium Enterprises make up 91 percent of formalised businesses, providing
12 employment to about 60 percent of the labour force and accounts for total economic output of
13 roughly 34

16 **Index terms**— society-oriented social responsibility, small and medium enterprises, and sustainable growth.

17 **1 Introduction**

18 cholars concur that Small and Medium Enterprises contribute massively to Gross Domestic Product of most
19 developing countries, especially in Africa. Small and Medium Enterprises position themselves as fecund drivers
20 of economic growth and sustainable development in African countries.

21 The existence of Small and Medium Enterprises in any economy is of paramount importance despite them
22 experiencing a high failure rate. Studies done reveals growing recognition of the critical role Small and Medium
23 Enterprises plays in economic development. Empirical evidence points to their efficiency and prolific job creation,
24 the seeds of big businesses and the fuel of national economic engines with much hype on their ability to eradicate
25 poverty and inequality. Nevertheless, for a multiplicity of reasons, Small and Medium Enterprises leg behind
26 practises of modern brand growth strategies such as Society-Oriented Social Responsibility.

27 Despite their vital contribution to economic growth, Small and Medium Enterprises in developing countries still
28 face numerous challenges that inhibit growth. The frustrating low growth rate has been predominantly caused by
29 Small and Medium Enterprises failing to embrace growth strategies such as Society-Oriented Social Responsibility.
30 SME lament cost linked to adoption, implementation and practise of SSR. However, apart from SME funding and
31 access to finance (which is a major reason for high failure rate), the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM)
32 Reports of 2001-2010 explained that South African SMEs suffer from poor marketing, expertise which proceed
33 from inadequate training and education. Furthermore, SME business owners' ethics play a prohibitive role in the
34 adoption of SSR as a strategy to build brand loyalty and other benefits realised through the successful practice
35 of SSR.

36 To date, very little research has been conducted in South Africa on the perceived role of the owner's ethical
37 values which directly or indirectly impact on the business' adoption, practise or implementation of SSR. Research
38 on SSR in SMEs is limited, especially in developing countries. While playing such a significant role in the economy,
39 to address this, the study will investigate SSR as a compass strategy to the sustainable growth of SMEs businesses
40 in South Africa.

41 South Africa experiences abundant socioeconomic challenges, and the challenges are, however to a large
42 extent linked to high levels of unemployment. (Hall, 2009) Pointed out that the official unemployment rate
43 is approximately 29 per cent; however, if one were to include those between the ages of 16 to 60 and discouraged
44 work seekers, then the unemployment rate is approximately 36 per cent. Olawale and (Garwe, 2010) revealed

6 C) PRACTISE OF SSR BY SME BUSINESSES IN SOUTH AFRICA

45 that growth failure rate of SMEs in South Africa is around 75 per cent, one of the highest in the world which
46 conveniently contribute to vast unemployment in the country.

47 Nevertheless, according to the Stakeholder Theory, by involving all SSR stakeholders in the business activities,
48 SMEs improve their relationship with customers, work in an accommodative business environment, engage
49 motivated workforce, willing community and increased brand loyalty which results in potential growth of the
50 business (Freeman, 2010); (Urban and Naidoo, 2012). Therefore, the motive and drive of the study were to
51 establish clearly whether SME business owner's ethical values have a role to play in SME businesses in South
52 Africa.

53 2 Objectives

54 Results were attained through assessing SMEs perception of SSR towards sustainable growth of the business;
55 assessing impact of SSR on the SME business; assessing SSR as a sustainable growth strategy for SME businesses.

56 3 II.

57 4 Literature Review a) SSR and sustainable growth of SME 58 businesses in South Africa

59 The future generation refers to a business that considers the effects of its growth on its employees, community
60 and the environment. It has been established through research that there is a direct tradeoff / or interchange
61 between rapid growth and growth in the future. There are amassable chances that rapid growth today may
62 exhaust resources and create environmental, employee and societal problems for future generations, including the
63 depletion of oil and fish stocks and global warming (Ball 2014).

64 Todd, Javalgi and Grossman (2014) contended that regarding a business, sustainable growth is the realistically
65 attainable growth that a company could maintain without running into problems. Therefore, a business that
66 grows too quickly may find it challenging to fund growth. On the other hand, a business that grows too slowly
67 or not at all may stagnate. Finding the optimum growth rate is the goal. Todd et al. ??2014) posit that
68 a sustainable growth rate (SGR) is the maximum growth rate that a company can sustain without having to
69 increase financial leverage. In essence, to find a company's sustainable growth rate is to answer the question:
70 how much can this company grow before it must borrow money? (Snyman et al. 2014). Ndubisi and Agarwal
71 (2014), in support of Todd, Javalgi and Grossman (2014), suggest that businesses must consider sustainability
72 a priority, adding that it is one of the only ways of ensuring South Africa's economic growth. The business of
73 business is not just business.

74 The SMEs' relatively small size can work to the advantage of sustainable growth. The advantage is that SMEs
75 tend to be closer to their communities and these strong ties help them stay in tune with local needs and demands.
76 Their autonomy permits flexible decisionmaking to implement SSR as they see fit. To substantiate the idea of
77 SMEs' sustainable growth as a springboard to consistent employment levels in an economy, poverty alleviation,
78 crime reduction, increased brand loyalty through SSR (Bolanle 2012).

79 5 b) SSR factors that influence the sustainable growth of SMEs

80 In its nature, SSR can be equated with the notions of giving back to the community and offering quality
81 products and services. Common SSR activities include sponsorship programs, waste recycling and participation
82 in community activities (Adebiyi and Adeola 2014; Shitta-Bey 2014). Okafor and Oshodin (2012) agreed that
83 similar to their larger counterparts, SMEs cannot operate their businesses without community support. Okafor
84 and Oshodin (2012) argue that SMEs act responsibly because their legitimacy with immediate stakeholders is at
85 stake.

86 Conclusively, agreeing with the work of Adebiyi and Adeola (2014) and Shitta-Bey (2014), SMEs could
87 implement SSR policies successfully, which would positively affect their sustainable growth and long-term goals.
88 One important aspect to note is that SMEs have stakeholder relationships that are similar to and stronger than
89 those of large companies because of their proximity to communities. Most SME businesses are founded as home-
90 based (Spaza shops in Soweto) with strong community ties and loyal customers. Also noting Ibidunni's (2013)
91 contribution, the above statements imply that SMEs have stakeholders in the normal range with large companies
92 and the purpose of stakeholder management is similar with their primary concern being to reduce their risk
93 by managing stakeholders. Akeem (2014) posits that SSR is all about making socially sensitive investments;
94 developing relationships with the community.

95 6 c) Practise of SSR by SME businesses in South Africa

96 According to Homburg, Stierl and Bornemann (2013), SSR activities refer to those activities aimed at community,
97 sports, health and well-being, education, support to low-income groups and community participation. These
98 activities are viewed as support for social and cultural community activities, as well as community development
99 and other related issues. The main popular SSR activity is support for sporting activities and is the preferred

100 activity amongst SMEs in nearly all the countries, both in Europe and Africa. Similarly, SMEs appear to be to
101 most active in supporting sporting, health and cultural activities in Latin America.

102 Calabrese (2013) argued that SSR activities as necessary to SMEs, namely financial and in-kind (material)
103 donations; volunteerism; education of the public; support of various kinds for the local quality of life (e.g. sports,
104 culture, etc.); and collaboration with local schools, authorities and various organisations.

105 However, to sum up, the above, Manasakis, Mitrokostas and Petrakis (2013) held the view that SMEs depend
106 on the health, stability and prosperity of the communities in which they operate. The reputation of a business at
107 its location, its image as an employer and producer, but also as an actor on the local scene, certainly influences
108 its competitiveness.

109 In the researchers' view, SMEs are not in isolation from the community they operate in. Therefore Lizarzaburu
110 (2014) strongly suggested a paradigm shift on the way SMEs view the society. His suggestion was mainly targeted
111 at a two-way relationship where the community and the business view each other as partners. Cruz (2013) agreed
112 and explained that SSR activities have a significant favourable influence on the increased competitiveness of
113 SME businesses. According to Cruz (2013), this means that a business which voluntarily participates in local
114 community activities, such as providing the community with donations, assisting them with projects and sharing
115 some of its profit with the community, is more likely to become competitive in the long run. Therefore, SMEs
116 should take an interest in the overall well-being of the community by engaging in local community activities such
117 as giving the community donations of necessary funds and goods, awarding grants to children for outstanding
118 scholastic performance, and assisting the community with general development projects (e.g., health care and
119 sports) in order to build good community relations and thereby enhance their competitiveness (Rahim and
120 Wisuttisak 2013).

121 7 III.

122 8 Methodology

123 It is against the gaps in the literature caused by different research methods that this study is anchored by
124 Stakeholder theory, which directly feeds into the Research Paradigms, i.e. Interpretivist (aligned to a qualitative
125 perspective): promotes self-reflection of Stakeholders and considers that there are multiple realities since all
126 knowledge is relative to the knower. Interpretivist aims to work alongside others as they make sense of, draw
127 meaning from and create their realities to understand their viewpoint. While Positivist is aligned to a quantitative
128 perspective. Considering stakeholders, the positivist position presumes the social world exists objectively and
129 externally, and that knowledge is valid only if it is based on observations and consideration of this external reality.

130 However, the philosophical paradigm that guided the research was interpretivism, which subsequently
131 recommends a qualitative method. The problem under study required the participants' experiences and self-
132 reflections by SME business owners towards SSR and sustainable growth. Qualitative research is any research that
133 produces findings not arrived at by employing statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Creswell,
134 2012).

135 As mentioned above, the research reinforced the selection of a Case Study research design as a framework
136 for collecting data to answer the research questions. As well, since SMEs are made up of different Stakeholders
137 which is in line with the Stakeholder theory, a case study allowed the researcher to use interviews to collect data.

138 The researcher applied the case study approach as the primary technique for this research to answer questions
139 such as: what the perception of SMEs business towards SSR is; to what extent do SME businesses practice of
140 SSR; what the owner's values could be driving sustainable growth of the business.

141 IV.

142 9 Results and Discussion

143 The results from this study were addressed under four critical themes: Perception of SMEs towards SSR; Adoption
144 and implementation of SSR by SMEs; Barriers against the practice of SSR by SMEs and Owners' values key to
145 the success of SME business. The themes were extracted from respondents' feedback to the research questions
146 raised interviews and data collection tools.

147 10 ? Perception of SMEs towards SSR

148 SMEs are not supportive of the Stakeholder Theory, which states that all Stakeholders must be treated equally.
149 SME owners hold the idea that they pay salaries; therefore, taking care of community welfare is never part
150 of their SSR. SMEs in South Africa understand what SSR entails and more so seem to support the idea of
151 practising responsible business literally. However, SMEs in South Africa regrettably distanced themselves from
152 extra-curricular responsibilities, apart from their core business. Concerning society, SMEs are aware of the need
153 to take part in community activities as part of their SSR. However, most of their views point to large corporates
154 as the primary culprits who exploit communities through their businesses making billions in profits.

155 Once they pay tax, SMEs expect the government to take care of the community. SMEs presume that
156 government, local authorities and large corporations are solely responsible for caring and funding society beneficial
157 projects or initiatives. SMEs have a strong belief that since they obey all government laws by paying tax, annual

158 licencing fees, healthy certification and rates to the municipal, they expect those funds to be used to maintain
159 the community's living standards. A substantial societal burden is set on the shoulders of large corporations
160 whom SMEs believe benefits through huge customer numbers they serve in the community and their operations
161 harm, exploit and weigh heavily on the income of the society. Hence, should give back financial and payback
162 by participating in humanitarian, infrastructural and civil initiatives that benefit the society. Also, society has
163 little or no expectation of SMEs taking care or participating in the community; therefore, there is no pressure to
164 practise society-oriented SSR.

165 Furthermore, concerning society-oriented SSR, the SME owners indicated that they had nothing to do with
166 the community, or rather, they were not prepared to participate in any form in the community as they obey all
167 the relevant laws and pay taxes, which can, in turn, be used to support the needs of communities. Nonetheless,
168 this is against the philosophical approach of the Stakeholder Theory, which promotes total consideration of all
169 Stakeholders by the business.

170 11 ? Adoption and implementation of SSR by SMEs

171 SMEs are not behaving in a socially responsible manner towards society. Any other SSR activity that comes with
172 a cost to their pockets is considered less relevant. The idea with SMEs is that since they operate in a cash business
173 environment, the strategy is that the lower the use of money in non-revenue generation activities, the higher the
174 revenue for transactions. Hence, 95 per cent of their activities is profit-driven. If every SME considered society
175 as number one Stakeholders, then the country will experience consistently improving human living standards
176 with improved health care, entertainment facilities, improved infrastructure, education and productive society
177 Though it is a common belief that community loyalty to a business plays a significant role in the sustainable
178 growth of the SME business and that in most cases it is community support that props up the business, SME
179 owners focus on profit-making activities, neglecting non-revenue generating social responsibility like Stakeholder-
180 related activities. The results showed that most of the owners indicated that SSR responsibilities did not apply
181 to their respective organisations, given that their business relies not only on the community they operate in but
182 collectively on the public. Majority of wholesale SME business owners believe that 90 per cent of their business
183 transactions are with fellow businesses, and 10 per cent is towards the public. The results also (surprisingly)
184 reveal that there are SMEs who do not believe that there is an excellent reason to join hands in fighting crime.
185 The main reason could be that they have never experienced any crime-related cost or drawback. Therefore, it
186 makes no meaning to support society on a cause that seems not to affect them. SME owners that held higher
187 qualifications knew about what is ethically expected in the operations of their businesses, and they were aware
188 that business operates in a community and that the community if not supported, will affect sustainable growth of
189 the business. However, there is a concern based on SMEs viewing themselves as relatively too small to positively
190 impact the community hence no need to invest in SSR. There is a considerable challenge in the SME business
191 sector that stretches to lack of education in the country where majority of SME business owners in South Africa
192 possess matric level certificates, professional certificates in some field which may not be even close to running a
193 business, diplomas and a few possess degrees. This condition consistently brings a different level of perception
194 towards such business strategies as SSR.

195 An encouraging development was noted on SMEs' commitment to upholding Black Economic Empowerment
196 (BEE), Affirmative Action (AA), and Employment Equity (EE). Majority of SME owners confirmed their
197 commitment. However, according to the revised BEE codes which became law in 2007, businesses with a turnover
198 of less than R5 million a year are exempted from having to draw up a BEE scorecard. Given the above, there was
199 a negative difference between SME owners on the willingness to implement changes in line with BEE, AA and
200 EE. Subsequently, about that sudden development, one would find out that most SMEs undoubtedly decreased
201 since the turnover is now pegged at R5 million per year and most SMEs are way less than that value. Given that
202 majority of these SMEs fell away from the BEE criteria, their prospects of engaging in SSR naturally diminished
203 because of them failing to get BEE certified status which comes with some business leverages in South Africa.

204 12 ? Barriers against the practice of SSR by SMEs

205 In order of importance, the most common and frequent barriers hindering SMEs from further and consistently
206 engaging in SSR are huge costs incurred by the company; lack of time, lack of human resources; and a lack of
207 interest. SMEs, besides the barriers they come across in practising SSR, see no benefits in engaging in SSR
208 activities. Due to barriers, these SME businesses choose not to consider any of the Stakeholders as spelt out by
209 the Stakeholder theory and stick to the core business.

210 SMEs in South Africa are deterred from practising SSR due to the costs incurred in meeting the requirements
211 and expenses of SSR. Therefore, most of these SMEs businesses expect finance-based assistance to further engage
212 in SSR. Some of the SMEs are not interested in assistance in the form of advice or guidance on SSR as they
213 always perceive a costly outcome. That is the reason why most SMEs generally fail in effectively practising and
214 implementing SSR as a sustainable growth strategy since the 'know-how' is noncritical to them.

215 13 ? Owners' values key to the success of SME business

216 Considering Stakeholder Theory, morals play an essential role in the applicability of the philosophical principles.
217 Most SME managers see their businesses driven by morals. However, the SME managers indicate that laws that
218 set right or wrong had a strong influence on how they manage their empires. In this regard, most SME owners
219 were not clear whether their values influenced the way they run their companies. By not considering morals as a
220 significant driving force behind their businesses, SMEs showed that they did not equally consider all Stakeholders
221 in SSR. SME owners believe that there is slim or no chance of investment opportunities coming their way even if
222 their values as owners are highly maintained. The concern was based on the reason that, because of the nature
223 of their business which are naturally operating in a volatile market with unpredictable clientele tastes, profit
224 margins and competition levels, investors fear that their efforts may go down the drain. Therefore, it never
225 mattered whether to uphold personal values or not because it brought no revenue other than just principled staff.
226 In simpler terms, Stakeholder Theory does not apply to their businesses since the values enshrined in responsible
227 business do not bring any investment to their businesses.

228 14 V. Conclusion and Recommendations

229 15 ? Perception of SMEs towards CSR

230 The findings of the research showed that SMEs in South Africa have a positive attitude and are sensitive to SSR.
231 However, a positive attitude without practical results in this research will not hold water, given the fact that
232 there is severe unemployment in the economy. SMEs are sensitive to and have a positive attitude towards the
233 concept but fail to implement it fully in their organisations.

234 SMEs professed negativity towards SSR activities such as investing and operating in less deprived areas of the
235 community or getting involved with traditionally marginalised groups (i.e. handicapped, unemployed, homeless).
236 Regrettably, SMEs distanced themselves from extra-curricular responsibilities apart from their core business
237 which goes against the Stakeholder Theory. It is likely that such an attitude is because most SMEs' perception
238 has been built on the belief that they were too small to engage themselves in such responsibilities and point out
239 the fact that SSR activities are predominantly for Multinational companies (MNCs). Hence authorities such as
240 the Ministry of Small businesses and Chambers of Commerce should carry out an awareness campaign on the
241 benefits driven from a socially responsible business.

242 16 ? Adoption and implementation of CSR by SMEs

243 Despite their significance and contribution to economic growth, SMEs in South Africa faces numerous challenges
244 that inhibit entrepreneurial growth. Apart from SME funding and access to finance (which is a significant reason
245 for the high growth failure rate), SMEs fail to adopt, implement and practise sustainable growth strategies like
246 SSR. The failure is a result of lack of adequate training and education in business. Consequently, the high rate
247 of SME business failures results in business closures and generally high unemployment rates in the economy.
248 Therefore, government should initiate training workshops for SME business on SSR to bridge the gap between
249 the business owner's formal education and expectations in business.

250 17 ? The importance of values in practising SSR

251 Regrettably, the South African government considers the sustainable growth of SMEs as a critically vital strategy
252 to alleviate and fight the soaring levels of unemployment by progressively empowering previously disadvantaged
253 citizens of the country simultaneously forgetting to enforce mandatory policies for SMEs to commit and engage in
254 SSR fully. Likewise, since the governing authorities in South Africa at all levels are generally shallow-resourced,
255 incapable and inept when it comes to policy enforcement, SMEs are not a priority even if the impact of their
256 operations is more significant. The proof is, in developed countries such as Australia, Japan, Germany, their
257 cultures taught them to be responsible organisations no matter the size, the industry is highly socially responsible,
258 and evidently, unemployment rates are relatively low with crime levels at insignificant levels. Morals and cultural
259 beliefs in any country are easily nurtured from childhood hence the need for the South African government to
260 consider SSR to be incorporated in the education system uniquely aligned to business subjects to make SSR part
261 of SME businesses owners' values.

262 18 Owners' values key to the success of SME business

263 Researchers fail to establish whether there is a significant link between values and SSR. Literature has reflected
264 different standpoints on the same topic; however for this study, the researcher concludes as:

265 19 ? The balance between entrepreneurship and ethical practice

266 There is need for the education system to incorporate SSR as part of the subjects in the business courses. It is
267 also crucial for the system to align SSR with personal values that lead to a successful business. Research also

19 ? THE BALANCE BETWEEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ETHICAL PRACTICE

269 found that SME business owners were not aware of which personal value among all other values that can be
270 sustained and drive their business strategies such as brand loyalty through practising SSR.

271 ? Entrepreneurs placing a high value on desire and accomplishment rather than on business-driven principles.

272 South Africa has gone through some socioeconomic challenges in the past years and has seen the majority of
273 SME businesses folding up because of related financial problems. The economy led to SME businesses failing
274 to exercise their social obligations especially SSR initiatives which generally has been regarded as a cost. SME
275 business owners are aware of the need to promote their values through practising SSR; however the economy is
276 not supportive enough for the business to branch from their core business to promote SSR activities. There is
277 need for business and local authorities to come together and compliments each other synergies so that business
278 can have the room to practise SSR without much cost.

279 ? Investors are attracted only by the financial performance of the business but also the values which the
280 owner-manager exhibits for them to invest in the business' SSR initiatives.

281 As local authorities like Chamber of Commerce should run business workshops that are targeted on SME
282 business owners to appreciate critical areas that investors consider when they looking for business to invest in. It
283 is of paramount importance for the workshop content to highlight to SME business owners that investors consider
284 other non-business factors that build up to a successful business such as a history of achieved SSR initiatives
285 which reflects high on sustainable growth of the business.

286 Results showed that majority of the respondents had an adverse view of SSR towards sustainable growth
287 of SME business. SME business do not acknowledge the impact of SSR on SME business. SMEs undermine
288 the practise of SSR as a compass strategy to sustainable growth of SME businesses. The study contributed
289 to new knowledge through a model framework driven by the Stakeholder Theory entitled, "SSR, compass to
290 SME business sustainable growth". The model was proposed to motivate SME businesses to positively embrace
291 SSR. Furthermore, the study recommended chamber of commerce, local municipalities and business leaders to
292 proactively support SMEs to adopt SSR as a sustainable growth strategy through training leading to SME
293 business alignment with SSR strategy. ^{1 2}

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