

Does the Environment Matter, a Closer Look at the Environmental Approach by Small Businesses in Africa Developing Countries

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7 Abstract

8 Environmental Social Responsibility (ESR) is a notion, where business integrates
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10 compromising profit. To this day, ESR studies are limited to areas of ethics, society and
11 employees while literature is blunt on its impact on societies, consumer behaviour and
12 governments. SMEs in developing countries are not spared their approach to ESR as a
13 sustainability strategy. SMEs? approach seems to digress from leverage on loyalty which
14 emanates from their nearness to communities who in turn are potential customers. This paper
15 takes a closer look at SMEs? approach to ESR driven by SME business owners? perception
16 towards ESR. The paper will take account of SMEs? behavioural response towards ESR and
17 establish whether they regard ESR a strategic sustainability approach with long-term positive
18 bottom-line benefits.

Index terms— environmental social responsibility, social responsibility, small and medium enterprises and sustainable growth

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32 Results were attained through assessing perceptions of SMEs towards ESR; assessing impact practice of ESR
33 by SMEs; exploring factors that undermining practise of ESR by SMEs. A mixed approach was adopted where
34 data was obtained using face to face interviews. Results showed that the majority of SME business owners had a
35 negative approach towards the practice of ESR. SMEs believe ESR was mainly for large corporations since their
36 operations were hideously affecting the environment. As new knowledge, recommendations from this paper will
37 be shared with Chambers of Commerce in Africa developing countries. Some of the recommendations were that
38 the chambers of commerce, local authorities must proactively support SMEs to practise ESR through awareness
39 workshops, train and share the ESR strategy alignment with business strategy.

40 Introduction the 20 th -century businesses have witnessed an increase in environmental catastrophes that are
41 contributed by the unprincipled business interest and human careless environmental attitudes (Banyte 2010).
42 Corporates are turning to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as its payback tool to communities, employees
43 and environment. It is widely expected for companies to actively seek to integrate environmental consideration
44 into their operation and activities. Most of these environmental considerations would be targeted on promoting

1 A) KEY LITERATURE ARGUMENTS

45 the advantages of eco-friendly products, eco-tourism; naturing environment-friendly behaviour through workplace
46 climate (Nik and Naja, 2011: 240) and environmental conservation activities initiated by communities.

47 While concluding CSR as a multidimensional construct, as most of the dimensions are discussed more relevant
48 to corporate governance issues and organisational performance as the unit of analysis, studies to do with the
49 implementation of ESR with external stakeholders, especially its customers, community are hardly explored.

50 There is a general belief about SME businesses being key to the development of most economies in Africa.
51 SMEs have been labelled as productive drivers of economic growth and development in local economies such as
52 developing countries.

53 The presence of functional SME businesses in these areas has saved a significant employment gap which large
54 corporations have failed to cover. The adverse condition is that of SME failure rate is still high leading to their
55 status as critical job creators substantial diminishing. Nonetheless, for a variety of reasons, SMEs are lacking
56 practises of modern brand growth strategies such as ESR.

57 Despite their vital contribution to economic growth, SMEs in the developing countries still face numerous
58 challenges that inhibit growth. The frustrating growth rate has been predominantly contributed by SMEs failing
59 to embrace sustainable growth strategies such as ESR. SME lament cost linked to adoption, implementation
60 and practise of ESR. However, apart from SME funding and access to finance, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
61 Reports (2018: 21) still maintain that developing countries SMEs suffer from inadequate business training or
62 technical education that can equip them to run the business effectively. Furthermore, SME business owners'
63 ethics play a prohibitive role in the adoption of ESR as a strategy to build brand loyalty and other benefits
64 realised through the successful practice of ESR.

65 To date, very little research has been conducted in developing countries on the perceived role of the owner's
66 ethical values which directly or indirectly impact on the business' adoption, practise or implementation of ESR.
67 Research on ESR in SMEs is limited, especially in developing countries. While playing such a significant role in
68 the economy, to address this, the study will also investigate the perceived role of SME business owner's ethics to
69 ESR as a stimulant of growth for SMEs in developing countries.

70 Developing countries experience abundant socio-economic challenges, and the challenges are however to a
71 large extent linked to high levels of unemployment. ??all (2018: 126) pointed out that the unemployment rate
72 on average is approximately above 30 percent. Garwe (2016:101) revealed that growth failure rate of SMEs in
73 developing countries is around average 75 per cent, which conveniently contributes to vast unemployment in
74 the country. Nevertheless, according to the Stakeholder Theory, by involving all stakeholders in the business
75 activities, SMEs improve their relationship with customers, work in an accommodative business environment,
76 and engage motivated workforce, willing community and increased brand loyalty resulting in the potential growth
77 of the business ??Freeman, 2011: 57). Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to establish the perception of
78 SME business towards ESR.

79 1 a) Key Literature arguments

80 ESR activities refer to the instrument or measures a business can take to diminish its negative impact on the
81 natural environment, such as the ecological and economic use of natural resources; energy and water conservation,
82 recycling; using environmentally friendly packaging, and pollution control waste reduction. The most important
83 ESR activities concern the consumption of materials and energy and the handling of pollution and waste in
84 the most environmentally friendly approach. ESR activities are generally aimed at designing environmentally
85 friendly products or production processes or being actively engaged in recycling activities ??Holbrook, 2014: 33).

86 Supanti (2018: 200) observed that ESR activities had a positive impact on their business reputation, which in
87 turn influenced their competitiveness. A survey of local SME owners in the Western Cape South Africa revealed
88 a positive relationship between embracing ESR activities and increased competitiveness in terms of profitability.
89 Customers find it desirable to associate themselves with businesses and products that are ecofriendly. Hence,
90 businesses that are environmental stewards stand to gain many satisfied and loyal customers.

91 When it comes to environmental sensitivity, there is a significant positive relationship between regulated
92 ESR activities and the increased competitiveness of SMEs. This implies that if a business applies government
93 regulations about the environment outside what the law requires and uses environmentally friendly packaging
94 materials, it is more likely to be well known among its Stakeholders and become competitive in the long run.
95 Taylor, Bowen and Ryu (2019: 304) stated that SMEs should consult with the government on the ESR initiatives
96 that are most beneficial to important stakeholders and the business. SMEs should also focus on the use of
97 environmentally-friendly packing materials that are at the end of the day cost-effective to advance their image and
98 enhance their competitiveness (Shepherd, 2019: 67). However, according to Kulkarni and Rao (2017: 68), whilst
99 SR has progressed to be a trendy topic of investigation since the early 19th century, it has gained momentum
100 in recent years as academics and practitioners began recognising SMEs' environmental impact. Since large
101 organisations have always been focusing on SR and all its dimensions holistically, ESR activities in SMEs are
102 often ignored and misjudged. These judgements germinate from a range of unfounded assumptions derived from
103 large organisations. As a result, the ESR approach of SMEs has, until recently, remained largely unexplored
(Pless, Maak & Stahl, 2015:45).

105 Concerning the statements above, Zeng (2014: 90) argues that ESR, instead of being a persistent concept
106 in business management, has been predominantly investigated at the level of the large corporates. As a result,

107 several authors are sceptical about the application of traditional ESR concepts for the investigation of its activities
108 in SMEs. This justifies the need to develop a holistic understanding of the characteristics of SMEs. If a business
109 implements government regulations about the environment beyond what the law requires and makes use of
110 environmentally friendly packaging materials, there are greater chances of the SME business being well known
111 amongst its stakeholders and becoming competitive in the long run. Hence, SMEs in developing countries should
112 consult with their governments on the ESR initiatives that are most beneficial to important stakeholders and the
113 business. SMEs should also focus on the use of environmentally friendly packing materials that are costeffective
114 to improve their image and enhance their competitiveness.

115 Shin (2014: 108) establishes that one of the most vital contributions to the definition of CSR was made by the
116 Committee for Economic Development (CED). The CED articulated a triple concentric model of the concept.
117 The inner-circle shows the clear-cut basic responsibilities for the efficient execution of economic functions like
118 productivity, job and economic growth reflecting the notion of 'business responsibility'. The intermediate circle
119 encompasses the responsibility of the economic function about changing social values and priorities such as
120 environmental conservation, employee relations and more rigorous expectations of customers for information, fair
121 treatment and protection from injury. The outer circle outlines emerging and still amorphous responsibilities
122 that the business should assume to become more broadly involved in actively improving the social environment.
123 Carroll describes the CED model as a landmark contribution to the concept of SR' which illustrates the changing
124 relationship between business and society (Carroll 1999). Following up on SMEs, Carroll's (1999:23) model in
125 essence states that business is expected to assume wider responsibilities in the society than ever before and to
126 serve a broader range of community values. Developing countries SMEs, in effect, are also expected to contribute
127 more to the quality of societies they operate in through ESR activities than just supplying quantities of goods
128 and services. In as much as SMEs exist to serve society, its life and future will rely on the quality of the SME
129 business owner's attitude and response towards the changing ESR expectations of the communities.

130 **2 b) ESR vs Stakeholder theory**

131 Firstly, the theory seems ethically superior to maximising shareholder value because it takes into consideration
132 Stakeholder rights and their legitimate interests and not only what is strictly required by law in manager
133 Stakeholder relations (Griffith-Jones & Karwowski, 2013). Secondly, Stakeholder theory has dated the theoretical
134 imprecision of CSR by addressing concrete interests and practices and visualising specific responsibilities to
135 specific groups of people affected by business activity (Chandler & Werther Jr, 2013).

136 Considering researchers Griffith-Jones and Karwowski (2013) and Chandler and Werther Jr's (2013) contribu-
137 tions, in simpler terms, Stakeholder theory is a managerial theory that is related to organisational goals and does
138 not come within reach of business management. The theory ensures long-term rather than short-term success.
139 However, further research will be required to establish sound conclusions about the relationship, profitable
140 linkages between Stakeholder theory and CSR.

141 Stakeholder theory gives us the correct way to think about entrepreneurial risks (Driessen & Hillebrand, 2015:
142 220). According to Melé (2008), taking a Stakeholder approach enables us to develop a more robust theory of
143 entrepreneurship, one in which the role of entrepreneurial risk is better understood. Taking such an approach
144 would lead to risk avoidance behaviour by managers because according to them, constituencies except for the
145 residual cash flow claimants have incentives to dissuade managers from taking excessive entrepreneurial risks
146 (Baumgartner, Gelbmann & Rauter, 2013: 173).

147 Leaving aside the question of excessive risks and whether avoiding excessive risks is a good or bad thing, this
148 argument shows that Driessen and Hillebrand's (2015: 86) view of Stakeholder theory is one of allocating benefits
149 to other stakeholders at the expense of shareholders. Of course, it is in each Stakeholder's interest in management
150 to take risks that can lead to increasing the size of the pie for everyone. Indeed, in the real world, as opposed to
151 the world of economics journals, managers often work with Stakeholder groups, such as customers and suppliers,
152 to jointly test new products and services. Often, customers and suppliers will accept some of the risk inherent in
153 developing new ideas, products and programs (Delchet-Cochet & Vo, 2012:70).

154 It is vital to pay attention to the recent wave of corporate alliances and the emergence of issues such as
155 supply chain management as evidence that Stakeholders can see their interests as joint, not just opposed. By
156 focusing on the allocation aspect of Stakeholder theory, Driessen and Hillebrand (2015: 156) miss the idea of
157 seeing entrepreneurial risk in its richer context of joint Stakeholder relationships.

158 **3 c) Theoretical arguments**

159 The limitations of the Stakeholder theory have been discussed by a number of authors, Shafiq (2014: 121) citing
160 Wang and Bansal (2012: 45) pointed out that Stakeholder theory in all circumstances fails to address the mute
161 Stakeholders (the natural environment) and the absent Stakeholders (future generations or potential victims). In
162 agreement, Smith (2015:82) also pointed out that the natural environment should be considered a Stakeholder.

163 This standpoint received huge criticism since the natural environment cannot be considered a Stakeholder. The
164 term Stakeholder usually refers to groups or individuals and therefore, cannot be considered a Stakeholder. In
165 this case, only humans can be considered as organizational Stakeholders. In the same context, another criticism
166 is that the power of Stakeholder groups is weakened by Stakeholder theory because the theory advocates that

8 A) SMES PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

167 corporations should treat all equally. Thus, labour unions could be avoided, grounded or even eliminated. In
168 addition, corporations will become weak because they will obviously attempt to serve all Stakeholders' interests.
169 Naturally, corporations will struggle to cater for all Stakeholders and protect their owners at the same time
170 (Shapiro, 2015: 149).

171 Precisely, Stakeholder theory argues that corporations are expected to treat all Stakeholders fairly and by
172 doing so can improve their performance in the marketplace, and thereby securing their future (Meier, Favero
173 & Zhu, 2015:31). However, ??reeman (1999:16) stated that if organisations want to be effective, they will pay
174 attention to all and only those relationships that can affect or be affected by the achievement of the organisation's
175 purposes.

176 This view suggests some advantages for organisations. For example, if organisations treat their Stakeholders
177 fairly, then the power of Stakeholder groups could be weakened, like, labour unions, that cannot be powerful
178 when eliminated. However, organisations could be weakened when trying to maximise stockholders' wealth ??
179 Organisations have no legal responsibility to their Stakeholders other than to their shareholders.

180 The paper achieved its aim by expressing the perception of SME business owners towards ESR and highlighting
181 as a conclusion that the owner's positivity in perception plays a very important role in response to societal needs.

182 4 II.

183 5 Methodology

184 It is against the gaps in the literature caused by different research methods that this study is anchored by
185 Stakeholder theory, which directly feeds into the Research Paradigms, i.e. Interpretivist (aligned to a qualitative
186 perspective): promotes self-reflection of stakeholders and considers that there are multiple realities since all
187 knowledge is relative to the knower. Interpretivist aims to work alongside others as they make sense of, draw
188 meaning from and create their realities to understand their viewpoint. While Positivist is aligned to a quantitative
189 perspective. Considering stakeholders, the positivist position presumes the social world exists objectively and
190 externally, and that knowledge is valid only if it is based on observations and consideration of this external
191 reality. The two paradigms build-up to a post-positivist perspective which is aligned to a Mixed approach, which
192 generates complementary results to this study ??Moriarty, 2014: 6).

193 Therefore, the philosophical paradigm that guided the research was post-positivist, which subsequently
194 recommends a mixed-method approach (qualitative and quantitative). The problem under study required the
195 participants' experiences (qualitative) and their quantitative opinions, which justifies a mixedmethod approach.
196 Qualitative research can be defined as any research that produces findings not arrived at by employing statistical
197 procedures or other means of quantification (Creswell, 2012). Quantitative research aims to test the predictive
198 and cause-effect hypotheses about social reality, and it encompasses surveys which are often used for descriptive
199 and explanatory resolutions ??Bechhofer & Paterson, 2017: 283).

200 A case study research design was used as a frame work for collecting data to answer the research questions.
201 As well, since SMEs in developing countries are made up of different stakeholders which is in line with the
202 Stakeholder theory a case study allowed the researcher to use multiple methods (interviews, questionnaires) to
203 collect data.

204 The researcher applied the case study approach to answering questions such as: what is the perception of SMEs
205 business towards ESR; to what extent do SME businesses practice of ESR. Results presented in this article were
206 driven from a sample survey of 365 SMEs in developing countries. The qualitative results were complementary
207 to the quantitative results to produce highly concerted research conclusions.

208 6 III.

209 7 Results

210 8 a) SMEs perceived importance of the environment

211 Analysis of the surveyed respondents showed that the majority of SME owners hold the view that their
212 organisations completely had no obligation concerning them protecting and preserving their surroundings, in this
213 case, the environment. Approximately 64.30 percent rated the environment as least important, important and
214 moderately important. Just a smaller chunk of about 35.7 percent at least rated the environment as important to
215 extremely important. The analysis revealed that the environment is a cause for concern as more than 50 percent
216 of the respondents rated the environment as least important to moderately important due to various reasons that
217 range from tax, council levies, import and export duty and licensing to tollgates. The rating of the environment
218 as 'least important' was contributed to by the fact that SME feel the government as a stakeholder and other
219 regulatory bodies are obliged to service the environment in its entirety since SME businesses pay a lot of money
220 to the government in the form of tax and other expenses that are directed to government functions.

221 SMEs see the local municipal as more obliged to preserve the environment since a local authority's obvious
222 prime duties are to manage the habitat. However, SMEs were concerned with the nature of the business that
223 they operate, which in this case (lighter industry) does not affect the environment, pointing fingers with a
224 myopic belief that heavy smoking industries are the prime source of environmental pollution and damage. In

225 essence, SMEs subscribe to an approach where they generally concentrate on their day-to-day tight busy business
226 schedules rather than wasting time trying to preserve the environment. Commenting on the issue, Boiral, Baron
227 and Gunnlaugson (2017:88) stated that SMEs in Toronto who introduced comprehensive waste management
228 programmes realised remarkable benefits and the majority reported significant savings from 30-70 percent for
229 water, approximately 30 percent for electricity between 20-60 percent for solid waste; approximately 10 percent
230 for raw materials, and from 25 percent to as high as 95 percent for consumables. The objective is committing to
231 the target of increasing terrestrial protected areas to 17 percent of the territory and marine protected areas to
232 10 percent, will also be important in maintaining and increasing ecosystem services that are a foundation for the
233 economy and society, helping in the adaptation to climate change by improving ecosystem resilience.

234 **9 b) The extent to which SMEs practise environment social 235 responsibility**

236 However, it is important to note that in Africa, the benefits depend consistently on the industry in which the
237 SME is operating. From the above, the level of savings will not be the same if one compares manufacturing SMEs
238 against retail SMEs. Manufacturing SMEs may realise large savings while minimum in the retail, service and
239 tertiary sectors. One cannot dispute the fact that correct environmental management such as waste management
240 will result in the reduction of company overheads, which eventually lead to large profit margins.

241 It is discouraging to note that an analysis of the results in Table 1 A
242 the practice, the percentage is too small to convince the existence of such as to practise in organisational
243 policies. As highlighted before, the use of recycled material is dependent on the type of business and products
244 that one is dealing with. In most cases, recycled material is used in production. In this research study, only 27.4
245 percent agreed to use recycled material. The outcome of this analysis concerning recycled material compares
246 unfavourably to a similar study which was carried out in Brazil where almost 76 percent of SMEs make use of
247 recycled material. Concerning the environment, the results discussed above are totally different from a similar
248 survey which was carried out in Kyoto, Japan. The survey revealed that SMEs practising responsible business
249 towards the environment were more successful than the ones which do not practise. It is on record also that
250 SMEs in Africa are not really under the pressure of minimising the impact of operations on the environment,
251 unlike their counterparts in Europe (Nguyen, Mort & D'Souza, 2015: 33).

252 There are international standards such as ISO 9000, 9001 and 14001. Amongst these standards, ISO 14001
253 is the standard which enforces environmental standards where an organisation is expected to weigh its negative
254 and positive exploits on the environment in line with the standard's procedures of reducing and controlling
255 pollution in the ecosystem. Despite South African SMEs progressively reported by the International Institute for
256 Sustainable Development in 2004 and 2005 to have achieved ISO 14001 certification, a report by South Africa's
257 Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism in 2007 brought to light statistics that an insignificant 5.7
258 percent of those SMEs were practising.

259 Surprisingly, some multinational companies (MNCs) who are naturally the drivers of ISO standards and have
260 been certified with ISO 14001 are found to have been flouting the same environmental laws that they are certified
261 in. As an observation, if some multinational companies can go for so many years with breaking the law without
262 authorities noticing, then surely SMEs will never be discovered, considering their size ??Fatoki & Chiliya 2012:
263 198).

264 To establish the reason why SMEs behave negatively towards the environment, a further literature review
265 reveals some facts. ??atoki and Chiliya (2012: 191) boldly stated that the limited environmental involvement of
266 SMEs has been attributed to attitudinal and behavioural characteristics. In particular, a lack of knowledge about
267 relevant legislation; the assumption that the impact of SMEs on the environment is negligible; and the failure by
268 SMEs to integrate the environment into business activities. There is a larger number of shortcomings as far as
269 preservation of the environment is concerned since the majority of SMEs in developing countries are of the view
270 that preservation of the environment is the duty of large corporations who produce much smoke in the ecosystem
271 and that the SMEs operations effect on the environment are of less than large corporations. Nevertheless,
272 Boiral, Baron and Gunnlaugson (2018: 456) concluded that strengthening the regulatory framework becomes
273 a fundamental requirement for inducing improvements in the environmental behaviour of small and medium
274 enterprises.

275 Nonetheless, considering the analysis above, results are below expectations as SMEs is developing African
276 countries' attention to environmental responsibilities is invisible compared to similar businesses around the world
277 like Canberra Beach City in Australia (Preston, 2004:80).

278 Furthermore, there is a contradiction where a large number of SME owners agree to pay attention to
279 environmental responsibilities, but on the other hand, fail to acknowledge a link between environmental
280 responsibilities and business growth.

281 This acute condition seems to reflect that a substantial SMEs in Africa's developing countries view that
282 a business can actually practise responsible business while at the same time not necessarily consider being
283 environmentally responsible. This view arises as SME owners believe that following responsible business does
284 not actually reflect being environmentally responsible. These SME owners are not satisfying the practices of
285 Stakeholder theory in that the moment one identifies with being a socially responsible business, then automatically

11 CONCLUSION

286 the Stakeholder Theory comes into play, which implies that all Stakeholders including the silent ones(environment)
287 must be treated equally. It is their view that they can practise CSR selectively and avoid the need to consider
288 other building blocks of CSR, like the environment.

289 10 IV.

290 11 Conclusion

291 SMEs in developing countries regrettably distanced themselves from extra-curricular responsibilities, apart from
292 their core business. Concerning the environment, SMEs are aware of the need to take part in protecting and
293 preserving the environment as part of their SR. However, most of their views point to large corporates as the
294 major culprits. Once they pay tax, SMEs expect the government to take care of the environment.

295 According to the definition of sustainable growth, the business must maintain a growth rate without
296 disadvantaging or creating other significant economic problems, especially for future generations. A future
297 generation is when a business considers the effects of its growth on its employees, community and the environment.
298 It is highly recommended that SMEs be involved in all programmes meant to stabilise, maintain and conserve the
299 environment (e.g. the yearly Durban Climate Change Conference). In Zimbabwe, South Africa and Ghana, SMEs'
300 environmental impact cannot be ignored since they constitute a significant percentage in the economy. SMEs in
301 developing countries have the obligation to support environmental initiatives and improve their environmental
302 performance. For this to be achieved it is recommended that to achieve sustainable growth, SMEs in developing
303 countries must balance their growth with environmental obligations. Therefore, it is recommended that developing
304 countries' environmental policy framework should be galvanised/strengthened to enforce SME participation
305 and support by cultivating a positive attitude and behaviour towards environmental issues. Otherwise, the
306 maintenance of the environment guarantees African SMEs sustainability of business with its preserved natural
307 resources.

308 Furthermore, it is recommended that the environmental regulatory authorities improve their monitoring on
309 SMEs and make sure environmental laws are adhered to. The regulatory authorities should create policies that
310 will treat businesses the same, in line with the laws of the country and SMEs must be encouraged to regard
311 themselves as fully-fledged businesses required to carry the responsibility according to Stakeholder Theory and to
312 move away from the belief that environmental responsibilities are for large corporations because of the assumed
313 impact of their operations. Not forgetting the challenges that SMEs in Developing countries go through in terms
314 of their balance sheets, it is worth considering the adoption of the following low-cost environmental conservation
315 approaches Park and Ghauri (2015: 34):

316 ? Send used plastic and waste paper to recycling companies rather than dumping or littering or leaving them
to fly in the streets. ^{1 2}

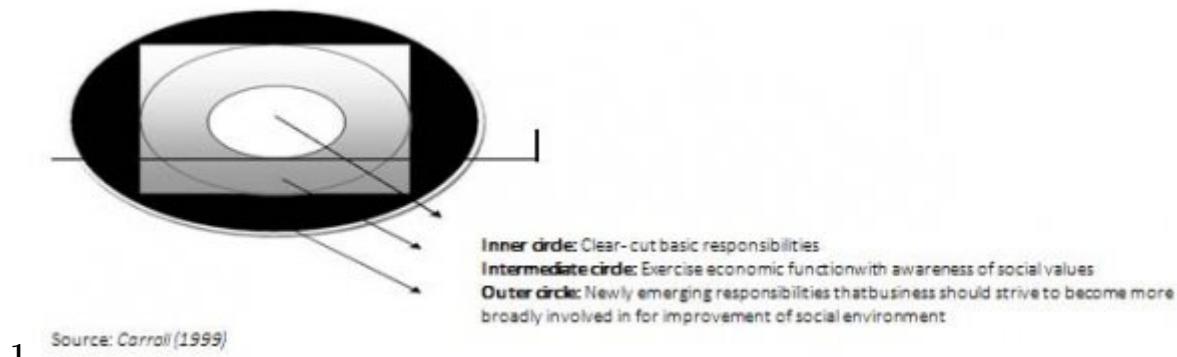


Figure 1: Figure 1 :

317

1

No. Variable			Yes	No	N/A	
			Freq	%	Freq	%
1	Does the company have measures in place to reduce pollution from company operations?		40	11	225	61.6
2	Does the company comply with environmental laws? Are there measures put in place by the		190	52.1	75	20.5
3	company for compliance with national and international environmental standards?		50	13.7	250	68.5
4	Does the company utilise recycled material		100	27.4	240	65.8
	Does the company practise waste				25	6.8
5	management by disposing of waste under environmental friendly methods?		140	38.3	185	50.7
6	Other practises not listed		30	8.2	200	54.8
					135	37

Figure 2: Table 1 :

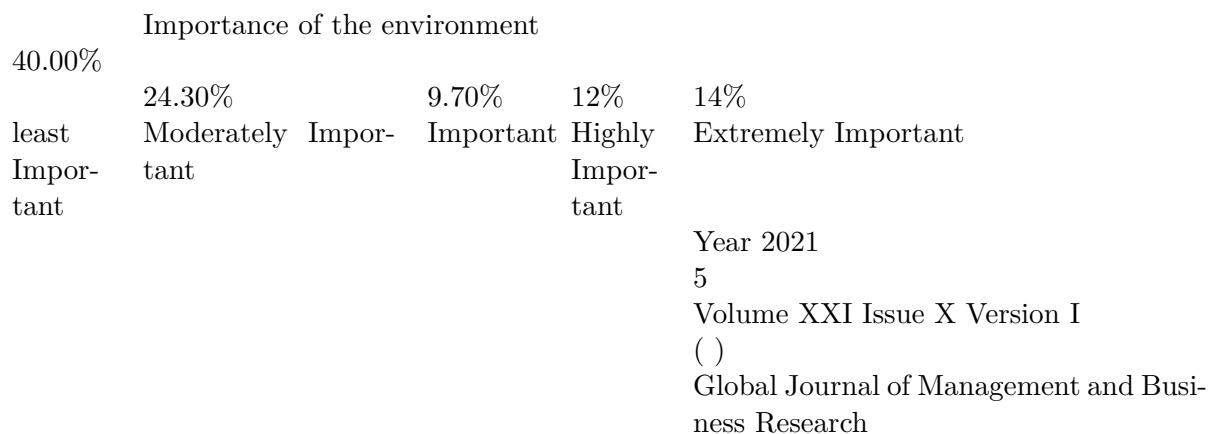


Figure 3:

Figure 4:

11 CONCLUSION

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334 .5 Data availability statement

335 The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Bobo Chazireni,
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337 .6 Disclaimer

338 The views expressed in the article are by the author and not an official position of the institution or funder.

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11 CONCLUSION

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