Contributions to Management Science

Pratik Arte · Yi Wang · Cheryl Dowie ·
Maria Elo · Salla Laasonen *Editors*

Sustainable International Business

Smart Strategies for Business and Society

Springer

Contributions to Management Science

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ISSN 1431-1941 ISSN 2197-716X (electronic)
Contributions to Management Science
ISBN 978-3-031-43784-7 ISBN 978-3-031-43785-4 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-43785-4

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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Foreword

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encompass a broad range of targets to promote economic, environmental, and social sustainability across the globe. Goals to protect and restore ecosystems, conserve biodiversity, combat climate change, reduce poverty and create employment opportunities, prioritize social inclusion and equality are some of the ways to contribute to a more sustainable and equitable future. In this book, the editors and contributing authors have attempted to understand the potential impacts of the SDGs, to study some of the contextual conditions that influence how SDGs are prioritized, and to move beyond mere financial gains to embrace sustainable practices.

Forging a path to ensure a harmonious coexistence is critical in our pursuit of a sustainable future. Economic, environmental, and social sustainability are inextricably intertwined, and navigating through the challenges in our modern world requires active participation, a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach by governments, businesses, organizations, and individuals. The concept of sustainability acknowledges the interdependence of these three main pillars and challenges us to rethink our patterns of consumption, resource allocation, and the consequences of our actions. Each chapter of the book reminds us of our role as catalysts for change and underscores the critical importance of international business as an agent of transformation in the areas of supply chain management, renewable energy, waste management, internationalization of firms, and social justice, among other things.

This book is an essential reading for academics, practitioners, and policymakers interested in tackling these critical and timely issues. The editors have arranged an excellent set of chapters from diverse authors around the world. The book is organized into three parts: economic sustainability, environmental sustainability, and social sustainability. In respect of economic sustainability, many regions of the world are currently struggling with a tension between stakeholder versus shareholder capitalism. Should it be the responsibility of corporations to consider sustainability, or should corporations only be held accountable to their shareholders and sustainability issues left to the hands of individuals? On the one hand, some scholars view corporate sustainability efforts as an agency problem, as corporate management does not have the information, time, and skills to decide where to spend on sustainability on behalf of its investors in a way that is more efficient than what investors themselves could do. On the other hand, other scholars view sustainability as an essential part of the purpose of the corporation, since corporate management does have access to information, supply chains, and resources that individuals do not have, and there are positive externalities from corporate efforts to promote sustainability. Networks and social media can help to promote those externalities and encourage others in the sustainability effort, but there are issues of fake news and other problems that corporations must wrestle with. Novel insights into these issues are provided in the first part of this book.

This book provides equally important insights into environmental and social sustainability. Environmental sustainability encompasses green entrepreneurship both locally and internationally and the circular economy. Also, there are measurement issues such as weather indices, and dealing with fake measurement issues that involve greenwashing. Management of environmental sustainability involves insurance and regulatory frameworks as well as sustainable development goals. Social sustainability encompasses ethics, fairness, inequality, and human rights matters. This book covers a diverse set of chapters that tackle these critical problems that are present across the world.

Successful management of sustainability is critical to the future of our planet. By critically assessing these issues, the editors and authors of this book have helped us take a significant step forward. I encourage academics, practitioners, and policymakers to reflect on the issues and analyses herein.

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Douglas Cumming
25 June 2023

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Sustainability in International Business: An Introduction

Pratik Arte, Yi Wang, Cheryl Dowie, Maria Elo, and Salla Laasonen

1 Background

In the year 2015, the United Nations (UN) presented 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030. The goals were set following a wide-scale consultation with stakeholders including governments, private firms, academic institutions, consumers, and non-governmental organizations. The SDGs are a blueprint for achieving a better and sustainable future for all. In its SDG agenda, the UN (2023) laid a special emphasis on international business as an agent of transformation. Despite this motivation, international business literature "has not kept pace with the expanding role of companies in sustainable development" (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2018, p. 209). There is an overwhelming majority of studies focusing on developed economies (Kolk & van Tulder, 2010) when regions such as the Global South are in need of scholarly attention along the lines of sustainable development (Cruz & Boehe, 2010; Idemudia, 2011). Moreover, various academic outlets have laid a greater emphasis on ethics and responsible governance than on corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainable development, and environmental

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P. Arte et al. (eds.), *Sustainable International Business*, Contributions to Management Science, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-43785-4_1

issues (Egri & Ralston, 2008). To summarize, it is safe to conclude that eight years since the introduction of the SDGs, international business scholars are yet to realize their full potential.

Sustainable International Business is a new book that adopts a global approach to studying international business and its implications for sustainable development. It stimulates research and rethinking among scholars and practitioners to understand how businesses operate internationally into lucrative markets, its role in sustainable business growth, glocal value creation, and economic development. The book covers many topics and issues that one would be familiar within international business. It provides insights into how international firms, entrepreneurs, family businesses, and other stakeholders balance the act of value creation and sustainable business. The book covers three key pillars of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental. It addresses capacity building and the grand challenges that international business needs to develop solutions for. While this book could be comprehensive and easy to understand for undergraduates and graduates, it will need supplementary resources (e.g. HBR, FT, The Economist, etc.) to keep abreast with the current situations within the international context.

The book is structured in three parts, each representing the three pillars of sustainability. We have carefully selected 19 original works after a rigorous double-blind review process. The 19 chapters are spread evenly across the three parts of the book. The authors and topics provide a wide international representation and illustrate multi-layered sustainable business perspectives that cover developing, emerging, and developed country contexts as well as multiple directions of international business flows. In terms of methodology, the chapters range from theoretical and conceptual pieces to quantitative empirical works. Authors that have conducted systematic literature reviews have adopted both qualitative (e.g. chapter "Analyzing Accountability of Weather Index Insurance Service in Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals: A Sustainable Accounting Perspective") and quantitative (e.g. chapter "Green Entrepreneurship as Environmental Commitment and Eco-innovation Among International Businesses: A Review and Research Agenda") methods. Similarly, the empirical chapters have adopted both qualitative and quantitative methods. Some qualitative chapters have relied on secondary data (e.g. chapters "Regaining Legitimacy in an MNC After a Socio-ecological Crisis: An Un(smart) Business Strategy?" and "Multinational Enterprises as Bridging Institutional Actors Towards Sustainability") to construct a case-study, others have analysed primary data collected through interviews (e.g. chapters "Network Ties and Opportunity Recognition in SME Internationalization in the Social Media Context" and "Why Am I (Not) Struggling? Career Prospects of Migrant Academics at British and Finnish Higher Education Institutions"). Further, authors of chapters "Sense or Sensibility? Managerial Sensemaking and Responsible Business Practices in International Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises" and "Immigrant Entrepreneurs Out of the Shell? An Investigation of Individual Characteristics on the Propensity to Seek External Advice" have survey data to conduct quantitative analyses.

In terms of geographical diversity, the authors represent institutions from both Global South and Global North. The richness of geographical diversity is further highlighted by representation of institutions from thirteen countries including Finland, Greece, Italy, Peru, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, U.A.E., U.K., U.S.A, and Vietnam. The scope of analysis of the chapters also represents a rich geographic diversity where the focus has been on low-income countries/regions (e.g. chapters "Value Creation Impact: Role of Stakeholders in the Development of Sustainable Foreign Trade" and "Green Entrepreneurship as Environmental Commitment and Eco-innovation Among International Businesses: A Review and Research Agenda"), middle-income countries/regions (e.g. chapters "Mitigating the Negative Implications of Fake Social Media News on Internationalizing Firms: The Role of Social Media Capability" and "Refurbished Products and Green Mindfulness: A Qualitative Study from an Emerging Market"), and high-income countries/regions (e.g. chapters "Mitigating the Negative Implications of Fake Social Media News on Internationalizing Firms: The Role of Social Media Capability" and "Wine Tourism as a Catalyst for the Sustainable Development Goals: The Case of Casa Sicilia Winery").

The book follows a logical structure that is intended to provide readers with an intellectually stimulating experience. Part 1 comprises 6 chapters that contribute to economic sustainability.

2 Part 1: Economic Sustainability

With the recent global pandemic, individuals and society are increasingly worried about large-scale job losses, growing social insecurities, and uncertainty in financial markets (Choi & Ng, 2011). Sheth et al. (2011) have delineated two distinct aspects of economic sustainability. The first pertains to traditional economic and financial performance, while the second concerns the economic interests of external stakeholders such as economic well-being and living standards in local community, broader society, and planet as a whole. Firms are increasingly called upon to contribute to the broader economic sustainable development, and this call is even more salient for internationalizing firms given their global activities in different institutional environments. In chapter "Realisation of SDGs in Africa: An Impactful Political CSR Approach", Sorour and El-Sakhawy have attempted to answer the question of: How the constructs of SDGs and political CSR (PCSR) for development can be conceptualized in relation to the African context to maximize the impact of international businesses in society? Through a multi-theoretical framework by integrating political CSR, neo-institutional theory, and pragmatic and legitimacy notions, the authors develop a conceptual model that shows how IB can contribute to the achievement of SDGs in an African context. Chapter "Value Creation Impact: Role of Stakeholders in the Development of Sustainable Foreign Trade" by Alvarez-Risco and colleagues aims to identify the impact of the role of various stakeholders in the development of sustainable foreign trade incorporating the SDGs. The chapter shows that the development of various sustainable strategies significantly impacts corporate reputation and provides better management in various areas of a company.

At the same time, sustainability in an organization increases competitive advantage by generating an improvement in global value chains, as well as the perception of consumers and other stakeholders.

In chapter “Reshaping the World’s Supply Chain? A Case Study of Vietnam’s PAN Group Adopting the Circular Economy Concept”, Bui and colleagues addressed the question of, “What should Vietnam do in terms of economic and business strategies to navigate its economy out of the pandemic crisis and position itself in the upcoming new world order”? The authors develop a conceptual framework that allows emerging economies to embrace the concept of circular economy and develop resilient and self-reliant supply chains. The paper advocates that incorporating circular economy concept enables a supply chain system that shifts from a quasi-linear one-way supply chain arrangement to a honeycomb-like web of circular structure. In chapter “Integration of Internal Audit and Sustainability Functions: A Business Model Suggestion”, Demir analyses the dyed fabric purchasing processes of a company producing garments. It is determined that there were significant disruptions and inefficiencies in the purchasing processes. Since those problems are the subject of both sustainability studies and the work of the internal audit department, a business model is proposed integrating the two functions. With this model, it is aimed to bring together different areas of expertise, prevent overlapping and duplication of tasks, and improve interdepartmental communication.

In chapters “Mitigating the Negative Implications of Fake Social Media News on Internationalizing Firms: The Role of Social Media Capability” and “Network Ties and Opportunity Recognition in SME Internationalization in the Social Media Context”, Kusi Appiah explores the critical, yet sensitive, link between social media and the internationalization of firms. In chapter “Mitigating the Negative Implications of Fake Social Media News on Internationalizing Firms: The Role of Social Media Capability”, Appiah analyses how internationalizing firms mitigate legitimacy challenge caused by fake social media news. The author argued that fake news on social media adversely impact legitimacy of internationalizing firms in a foreign market because they impair consumers’ brand trust. Moreover, the author contends that social media capability of internationalizing firms can mitigate the negative impact of social media fake news on international legitimacy because it can keep the consumers and other stakeholders in the foreign markets well-informed. In chapter “Network Ties and Opportunity Recognition in SME Internationalization in the Social Media Context”, Appiah analyses how internationalizing SMEs strengthen their organizational-level network ties in the social media context and the associated entrepreneurial opportunity realization in a foreign market. Drawing from four Finnish case companies, the author found that tactical social media initiatives such as tweeting customers’ stories, retweeting stories, posting comments, and commenting on posts by followers are likely to strengthen network ties in dimensions such as duration, intimacy, and reciprocity. Moreover, social media help SMEs recognizing international opportunity such as expanding into foreign networks, creating brand awareness, and accessing to market information.

3 Part 2: Environmental Sustainability

Environmental or ecological sustainability has traditionally been at the core of business and society having to re-evaluate the negative impact they have on the environment. At the heart of the dilemma of environmental degradation lies the economic notion of externalities; costs that cannot be attributed in monetary terms. The biosphere has long served the role of an externality to human development, with overexploitation leading to the tragedy of the commons (Hardin, 1968). Up until the environmental awakening in the 1970s, nature was considered as an unlimited resource, or at worst, an open-ended sewer. Despite concerted scientific efforts to challenge the paradigm of unlimited growth, we have, to date, not been able to revise our exploitative incentive to externalize the natural environment.

Fast forwarding to the 1980s and 1990s, the environmental harm caused by industrial processes began to make way to the general awareness of citizens, especially in the industrialized countries. The era of end-of-pipe solutions, eco-efficiency, the triple bottom line, and reducing negative environmental impact still form the basis for the majority of corporate environmental practices today. Environmental management, and the notion that the environment can indeed be managed, became an institutionalized corporate practice. Going for the low-hanging fruit of pollution prevention has taken corporations well into the new millennium, and as also Matindike (chapter "Green Entrepreneurship as Environmental Commitment and Eco-innovation Among International Businesses: A Review and Research Agenda") finds, green solutions are coupled with its unwanted companion greenwashing. Similarly, as Leite and Johnstone discuss in chapter "Regaining Legitimacy in an MNC After a Socio-ecological Crisis: An Un(smart) Business Strategy?", corporate communication strategy and social licence to operate remain very relevant challenges when addressing negative environmental impact, especially in extractive industries.

At the global lelvel, we know that insufficient environmental protection, treating nature as an externality and sewer has led to serious and on some dimensions irreversible harm. The warnings of climate science and climate change have been slow and unsuccessful in motivating for radical change, and we now have scientific evidence of humanity exceeding some of the safe thresholds of the nine critical planetary boundaries (Rockström et al., 2009). The planetary boundary framework, brought forward by the Stockholm Resilience Centre, addresses the thresholds, feedback loops, resilience, and uncertainties related to safe operating spaces (green zones), the zones of uncertainty and where a likely threshold is to exist (yellow zones), and high-risk areas. Since the 2009 introduction of the boundary framework, we have only continued to move closer to high-risk areas (Steffen et al., 2015), with the latest worrying news of exceeding the safe threshold on chemical pollution and plastics (Persson et al., 2022). Given that climate change and environmental degradation have not been motivating enough, scientists are increasingly highlighting the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation on human health. The 2022 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change (Romanello et al., 2022) quite provocatively yet accurately states that "the health of people around the world is at the mercy of a persistent fossil fuel addiction".

In conclusion, the scientific evidence on the state of the environment continues to point towards degradation and overexploitation. Therefore, all the solutions solving negative environmental impact continue to be necessary to develop and adopt further. Eco-efficiency and green entrepreneurship (chapter "Green Entrepreneurship as Environmental Commitment and Eco-innovation Among International Businesses: A Review and Research Agenda"), sustainable business practices (chapters "Wine Tourism as a Catalyst for the Sustainable Development Goals: The Case of Casa Sicilia Winery" and "Sense or Sensibility? Managerial Sensemaking and Responsible Business Practices in International Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises"), circular solutions (chapters "Exploring Circular Economy in International Businesses Through the Lens of Sustainability" and "Refurbished Products and Green Mindfulness: A Qualitative Study from an Emerging Market"), and financial and digitalization instruments (chapters "Green Entrepreneurship as Environmental Commitment and Eco-innovation Among International Businesses: A Review and Research Agenda") all continue to be needed to create the necessary transformation towards a more environmentally sustainable world.

4 Part 3: Social Sustainability

Social sustainability refers to the ability to meet the needs of members of a society, while ensuring social justice and equity are met (Michalos, 2014). Prioritizing human rights, equality, and inclusion and creating an environment where individuals have access to the basics like education, healthcare, and employment opportunities are important. While sustainability has achieved prominence in many areas, the social dimensions are often the neglected component of sustainability (Cuthill, 2010; Kandachar, 2014). On the other hand, socially sustainable societies can foster stronger social connections, trust and encourage engagement and participation among individuals and groups, to address present societal challenges such as poverty, discrimination, marginalization, gender equality, and other human rights' issues. Studies support the notion that this participatory approach promotes inclusivity, empowers marginalized voices, and fosters a sense of responsibility within communities (Dillard et al., 2008; Koning, 2001).

Social sustainability has gained increasing interest in private and public sector as well as in our societies for good reason. Its impacts are connected and spread in a society influencing its fundaments and functioning. The United Nations Global Compact defines social sustainability as a phenomenon that "is about identifying and managing business impacts, both positive and negative, on people". This links to the responsibility and accountability of private sector, in international business and entrepreneurship as well as in local business operations. Hence, the relationships and stakeholder management of companies are crucial as companies have a direct influence on their employees, customers, partners, value chain members, nature, and the communities around them. Recently, the turmoil experienced in global supply chains highlighted the sensitivities of supply chain context in terms of social sustainability. Whether the trigger is Covid-19 or an accident in the Suez channel, the impact diffuses across countries. This underlines the need to address social dimensions beyond measures related to the flow of products and goods (Hutchins & Sutherland, 2008).

The global proposal from the United Nations, known as the 2030 Agenda, requires global action to be taken by the governments, businesses, and societies to achieve shared prosperity and sustainability goals (Manzi et al., 2010). It comprises 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) that were released in 2015. This agenda sees migration as a key driver of sustainable development. Migration involves highly skilled individuals seeking better economic opportunities, and in turn contributing to the economic development and innovation in their host countries. It has significant social, economic, and cultural implications for both the migrants and the communities they become a part of. Contributing to the diversity and multiculturalism of societies can stimulate economic growth through labour market dynamics and further foster cultural exchange and enrichment (Yong, 2019). Migration is thus multifaceted as it involves numerous stakeholders including private and public sector organizations, migrants, and their communities as well as civil society.

Migration functions as a source of skills and labour market resource-base, but it also brings with it different capitals and investments. In addition, migrants shape markets and contribute with their diversity and cultural plurality to the markets, innovation, and development. These mechanisms are seen to bring benefits and positive outputs when resources are appropriately employed and institutions are functioning well, supporting safe, orderly, and regular migration as the Global Compact suggests. However, when migration governance fails the results tend to be negative, and these may reflect not only the individual migrant level, but also organizations and respective societies. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration underlines the multi-dimensional reality of migration that requires orchestrated policies and approaches (International Organization for Migration, 2023). Human rights and migration are deeply linked as migrants are not only successful talents working as international entrepreneurs and investors or in highly skilled positions, but they also represent subjects for unsustainable, illicit practices and criminality, such as exploitation and human trafficking.

Exploitative working conditions, low wages, lack of legal protection, and limited access to justice systems can trap individuals in situations of labour exploitation, including cases of human trafficking. For example, in Europe, the victims trafficked are mainly adults who are trafficked for labour or sexual exploitation. The vulnerabilities are higher for females, as women and girls represent a significant majority of over 80% of all trafficked individuals. This vulnerability is rooted in various factors, including gender inequality, limited access to resources and other support systems, socio-economic disparities, and so on. The counter trafficking data collaborative (CTDC) data collaboration of IOM shows that much of human trafficking is related to labour and linked to even close recruiter relationships while the phenomenon of labour exploitation per se has increased over time (CTDC, 2023). Interestingly, some of these business practices may evolve under the lens of institutions and governance, partly due to lack of resources and partly due to lack of understanding of the phenomenon and its relevance (Elo & Juntunen, 2021). These developments illustrate the unsustainable shadow of business and the fact that these mechanisms deserve more attention due to their negative and destructive impact on society and economy. On the positive side, many countries and businesses benefit greatly from their migration and diasporas abroad, which contribute to home country business and economic, social, and institutional development (Elo & Riddle, 2019; Rana & Elo, 2017).

Businesses play a particularly important role with their social sustainability efforts that address social development, gender, diversity, inclusion, poverty, disability, and other forms of inequalities. Business ethics and moral values may foster not only market perceptions of the firm, but also the employer's attractiveness and image. Furthermore, a positive engagement may alleviate internal conflicts, risks, and productivity issues and in international operations sustainable business engagement may contribute to transnational betterment. Social enterprises and non-governmental organizations are particularly relevant actors addressing such problems and provide ample examples of fruitful business engagement even in highly complicated, high psychic distance contexts and environments, like those in the least developed economies.

The UN Global Compact suggests that business gets engaged in:

- Improving the lives of the people who are their stakeholders, e.g., by decent jobs, goods and services and by making value chains more inclusive.
- Contributing to strategic social investments and fostering public policies and programmes on social sustainability.
- Partnering across actors and markets for pooling strengths that make positive impact (UN Global Compact, 2023).

Yet, many organizations face claims of white- and greenwashing while many of them are trying to develop organizational strategies around social sustainability and migration through their corporate social responsibility strategies, equity, diversity, and inclusion strategies, corporate social performance assessments, and corporate citizenship endeavours. Organizational strategies are intertwined reflecting a firm's overall orientations, values, and plans. Strategies involve planning, goals and employing respective resources and capabilities to achieve those goals. Typically, strategies related to internationalization, geographic diversification, corporate governance, market and non-market strategies, talent and resource strategies, communication strategies and different forms of philanthropy and even activism form challenges how to tackle with the plethora of stakeholders and complexities while working towards the goals and objectives given. As Napier et al. (2023) note, the new global dynamics, such as geopolitics, digitalization, and activism, may shape corporate social performance in multiple ways. These dynamics create a context in which corporate social performances are strategic imperatives for businesses as companies are increasingly recognizing the need to integrate social and environmental considerations into their operations and respond accordingly to global issues that can help ensure their actions align with the broader societal expectations (Napier et al., 2023). They also highlight that today corporate social performance must be substantive, unequivocal, inclusive, and efficient calling for practical and operational approaches. In their model, "value creation for the firm" and "for society" is the highest organizational achievement and goal (Napier et al., 2023, p. 68).

In a nutshell, private business plays a central role in developing solutions that create such value through business operations, investments, and entrepreneurship. They are also accountable for their activities in front of their stakeholders, similarly as institutions (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2021). Especially in international and transnational context, the complexities of addressing inequalities and vulnerabilities require particular care as one seemingly positive action in one country may actually generate a negative impact in the other country. Issues such as human stickiness impediments, developing country brain drain, human trafficking, and workplace exploitation show how complex and interconnected these flows and impacts are and who little understood the real-life impacts tend to be (Emmanuel et al., 2019).

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Part I
Economic Sustainability

Realisation of SDGs in Africa: An Impactful Political CSR Approach

M. Karim Sorour and Ahmed El-Sakhawy

Abstract The realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires input from international business (IB) as a key stakeholder within the society. In an African context, given the sheer complexities impeding sustainable progress towards the SDGs, this input is critical. Whilst corporate social responsibility (CSR) can facilitate IBs' contribution, the literature shows that that many IB work on ad hoc CSR activities without necessarily considering how far these activities yield tangible developmental benefits. This conceptual paper adopts a theory synthesis approach to answer the following question: *How the constructs of SDGs and Political CSR can be conceptualised in relation to the African context to maximise the impact of international businesses in society?* Through a multi-theoretical framework based on the PCSR, neo-institutional theory, and legitimacy notions, the rejuvenating SDGs in Africa model shows how IB can contribute to SDGs in their host country via adopting a PCSR approach. In an emerging participatory governance model, IB can achieve moral legitimacy through compliance with normative institutions introduced by the government and society. This model is evolving in nature and is based on an ongoing dialogue between policy makers and IB to formulate effective strategies to ensure PCSR activities are yielding benefit to the society.

1 Introduction and Research Background

In 2015, 10% of the world's population lived in extreme poverty with 11% malnourished, 5% had no access to basic healthcare services, 35% of women were subject to domestic or sexual violence, 36% lacked basic sanitation facilities, and 15% did not have electricity (Kulkarni & Aggarwal, 2022). These disturbing figures are all related to the so-called grand challenges, a term which covers global hunger,

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P. Arte et al. (eds.), *Sustainable International Business*, Contributions to Management Science, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-43785-4_2

poverty, labour exploitation, diseases, corruption, inequality, gender biases, climate change (Jamali et al., 2021). In this context, sustainable development score for Africa was more startling with poverty rates close to 59% in many countries at the rate of 3.2$/day (UNCTAD, 2021). Given the grand nature of these ongoing sustainable development challenges, the world leaders have agreed to combat these staggering conditions at the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable development (Rio +20) which was articulated in the outcome document "*The Future We Want*" indicating the benefit of creating the sustainable development goals (SDGs) as a focused and coherent approach to address these challenges and become the successor of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (UNECA, 2015). The development of the SDGs was of crucial importance as the continent was off track in achieving most of MDGs goals, with slow progress achieved in relation to health, gender, and women empowerment indicators, whilst poverty, inequality and extreme hunger, basic infrastructural service, quality of education as well as poor social protection remain a tremendous responsibility that the SDGs must address (UNECA, 2015).

In 2019 (just before COVID-19), Africa scored an SDG progress score of 52.8% highlighting a gap of more than 47%; indeed, different African regions have performed slightly differently, with North and South Africa showing higher progress scores compared with East, West, and Central regions (ASDGR, 2022). Unfortunately, COVID-19 as well as the Ukraine-Russia crisis has further slowed down the progress on achieving the SDGS with the African GDP expected to decline by a negative of 3.3% score (ASDGR, 2022). Of note, the Ukraine-Russia war has a negative direct impact on Africa in terms of "trade disruption, food and fuel price spikes, macroeconomic instability, and security challenges ... At the same time, food grain prices continued to rise even higher as supply disruptions from Russia and Ukraine (actual and anticipated) rocked global markets ... the pass through of consequent inflation will be swift and hard-hitting, especially for vulnerable groups like women and children" (UNDP, 2022, p.i). Overall, the latest Africa SDG report published in November 2022, concludes that most African countries are currently struggling to achieve most of their SDG targets (ASDGR, 2022). Clearly, measures have to be taken to enhance domestic resources mobilisation, as Africa requires around $200 billion annually to achieve required progress towards their SDGs with climate finance adaptation costs about $30 to $50 billion annually, as such the "*path towards sustainable development requires significant policy shifts and the scale of resources required ... will be immense*" (UNECA, 2015, p. 67).

Sustainable development generally refers to "*a development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*" (WCED, 1987). Sustainable development concept is based on three interlinked dimensions: economic growth, social development, and environmental sustainability (UNECA, 2015; Harris, 2009; Nwozor et al., 2021). As increasing economic growth incurs inevitable environmental and social costs (Muniz & Cruz, 2015), sustainable development can only happen if economic growth is socially sustainable and environmentally responsible. As with the increased GDP growth comes an increased pressure on "*biodiversity, climate change and the* *undermining of human livelihoods*" (Martines-Alier, 2012, p. 62). This requires making radical political and environmental changes that alleviate serious socio-environmental impediments (Muniz & Cruz, 2015) for Africa and the developing world in general. Not only that, but to mobilise all members of the society to contribute towards the UN 2030 agenda (Bardal et al., 2021) including "*public, private sector, civil society, youth organizations, and women's organizations [with] . . . Leaders in all sectors of the economy and society must actively steer the sustainable development agenda and ensure commitment by all stakeholders*" (UNECA, 2015, p. 68).

One pivotal concept which has received an increased attention in the extant literature as a facilitator in the realisation of the SDGs is corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Kulkarni & Aggarwal, 2022; Huber & Gibert, 2017; Mitra & Chatterjee, 2019; Rendtorff, 2019). CSR can be defined as an umbrella term that encompasses a range of concepts and practices; however, the essence of CSR is that businesses should have responsibility for their impact on natural environment and society which goes beyond the letter of law (Blowfield & Frynas, 2005, p. 503). While the conventional CSR theorising and practices could potentially compliment governments' efforts to achieve the SDGs targets, the complexity of the grand challenges in hand, renders it ineffective (Kulkarni & Aggarwal, 2022; Jamali et al., 2021; Blowfield & Doian, 2014). This is because, CSR can be perceived as a facet of "*economic and cultural imperialism by local suppliers in developing countries*" (Jamali et al., 2015, p. 460) where international companies set the target price and quantity in response to fierce competition and then pass these demanding requirements to local suppliers, hence creating small margin for nearly ceremonial CSR activities.

Therefore, CSR is to a great extent overshadowed by instrumental short-termism which focuses on the bottom line and is inspired by the business case for CSR, instead of genuinely contributing to the sustainable development narrative (Adelopo et al., 2015; Sorour et al., 2021a). Furthermore, the Western-centric assumptions and construction of the CSR concept are problematic in the context of developing countries, "*where notions of 'private' sector, 'civil society, 'stakeholders' and 'transparency' are not always clearly delineated*" (Sorour et al., 2021b, p. 89). The peculiarity of developing countries context, i.e., such as Africa adds a further dimension of complexity based on the different set of institutional factors and unique socio-political dynamics (Sorour et al., 2021a); hence, non-western contexts provide a fertile ground for exploration of how CSR could be conceptualised differently to enable impactful contribution of businesses to the SDGs in Africa. Due to these impediments, this CSR perspective is insufficiently utilised in practice (Kulkarni & Aggarwal, 2022) and not adequately understood in the extant literature (El Alfy et al., 2020), highlighting a gap in our understanding and conceptualisation of how CSR could practically work as a sustainable development tool and hence facilitate the realisation of the SDGs in an African environment. As such it becomes significant to address such gap in the literature and to find some answers to the fundamental question of how CSR programmes could yield "*tangible development benefits in communities*" (Jamali et al., 2017, p. 3).

Against this background, this chapter focuses on the role of a key stakeholder group, international businesses in Africa and how their CSR can be an effective tool which systematically contribute to social development and hence to the SDGs. Here, international businesses could align their CSR plans with national SDGs priorities. This conceptual paper argues that the role of international business in the realisation of SDGs in Africa could be effective, if understood through a combined theoretical lens (Sorour et al., 2021a) that encompasses the political CSR (PCSR) framework (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011), the neo-institutional theory, and the notions of organisational legitimacy (Suchman, 1995).

First, the PCSR concept distances itself from the neo-liberal notions of economic rationality that perceives businesses as economic rather than political player in the economy (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011). It posits that businesses should perform the two roles, i.e. economic and political, and give back to the society which in the first place offered them the license to operate and profit from its members. PCSR "*. . . entails those responsible business activities that turn corporations into political actors, by engaging in public deliberations, collective decisions, and the provision of public goods or the restriction of public bads in cases where public authorities are unable or unwilling to fulfil this role*" (Scherer et al., 2016 p. 276). The PCSR concept captures the dynamic relationship between international businesses and the institutional context which affects and is affected by these businesses as political actors (Scherer, 2018). As political actor, international businesses play an effective role to address deficits in public services (normally considered as a state responsibility) (Sorour et al., 2021a).

Second, CSR expressions must be understood within the African institutional environment where these businesses operate and respond to institutional pressures (Scott, 2014) rather than considered in institutional vacuum. Here, neo-institutional theory is key to understand the idiosyncrasies of the institutional environments in which these businesses operate. Third, it is important to note that a key motivation for international businesses' engagement in enhancing the social welfare of the communities in which they operate is to achieve moral legitimacy (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011; Scherer, 2018; Sorour et al., 2021b). This is a type of legitimacy which goes beyond the logic of instrumentality and the notion of pragmatic legitimacy[1] which no longer suffices as an acceptable means of giving back to the society (Brammer et al., 2012; Adelopo et al., 2015; Marquis et al., 2016; Sorour et al., 2021a).

Given that international businesses might not be familiar with the developmental priorities in their host country, the SDGs would offer a distinct opportunity for international businesses to impactfully contribute to sustainable development. Specifically, the national 2030 agendas provide a detailed plan for a country's priorities

[1] Moral legitimacy reflects a positive normative evaluation of the organization and its activities (e.g. Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Parsons, 1960). Unlike pragmatic legitimacy, moral legitimacy . . . rests not on judgments about whether a given activity benefits the evaluator, but rather on judgments about whether the activity is "the right thing to do" (Suchman, 1995, p. 579).

to achieve the SDGs by 2030. As such, this could facilitate international businesses' engagement in development through explicitly aligning their CSR plans with national 2030 agenda in their host country. This means that international businesses could redirect their investments towards SDGs serving initiatives that can change lives and maximise value creation in their host countries (El Alfy et al., 2020). However, and as mentioned earlier, this CSR perspective as a tool for systematic implementation of SDGs still not adequately understood in the extant literature (El Alfy et al., 2020) and practice (Kulkarni & Aggarwal, 2022).

This chapter, hence, offers an integrated conceptualisation of the SDGs implementation in Africa based on these three concepts. We argue that without this multi-perspective understanding, policy making will fail to unleash the huge potential role of international businesses in society. Especially with emerging normative institutions gaining momentum, non-compliance would impair international businesses' legitimacy in their host countries. Here few attempts such as Huber & Gilbert (2017) discussed PCSR and how through multiple stakeholder initiatives, firms can contribute towards social development in Bangladesh. However, given the complexities posed by the African situation in relation to the progress towards the SDGs as well as the prevalent business case-driven CSR, the conceptualisation of PCSR requires further consideration of the institutional environment and motives behind CSR engagement. We unpack PCSR in terms of institutionalisation and legitimatisation constructs that could mobilise international businesses to assume their political responsibilities in a more systematic way.

In doing so, we heed El Alfy et al. (2020) call for future research to investigate the role of MNC's CSR in SDGs in more detail. As such, this chapter contributes to the CSR for development as well as the international business literature by conceptualising how PCSR can be adopted by international businesses to enhance their social impact via systematically contributing to the realisation of the SDGs and hence improve their moral legitimacy within their host countries.

Against this background, this chapter poses the following research question:

RQ1: ***How the constructs of SDGs and Political CSR can be conceptualised in relation to the African context to maximise the impact of international businesses in society?***

This chapter has developed a model for rejuvenating the SDGs in Africa using impactful PCSR. The model offers a realistic, theoretically dense conceptualisation which contributes to the CSR for development literature and can assist policy makers and practitioners in formulating effective strategies that can nurture progress towards the SDGs and other African developmental agendas. This model hence applies to the 17 SDGs. It shows the importance of international businesses' engagement with the host country government and local community to agree a strategy to address specific SDGs by 2030. This approach could potentially shift the focus of international businesses working on ad hoc CSR activities that they consider important, to CSR activities that yield "tangible development benefits in communities" (Jamali et al., 2017, p. 4) and hence contribute to the realisation of the SDGS in African countries. This is particularly important to international businesses as non-compliance with emerging normative institutions could negatively affect their legitimacy. Finally, this model can also underpin knowledge exchange endeavours between academia and practice.

The rest of this chapter is organised as follows: Sect. 2 provides an overview of the progress and challenges in achieving the 2030 agenda SDGs in Africa and the role of international business. Section 3 discusses the research methodology. Section 4 discusses the theoretical framework based on the concepts of PCSR, neo-institutional theory, and legitimacy. Section 4.1 discussed how the integrated theoretical framework could further our understanding of the symbiotic relationship of sustainable development and CSR, hence offering an opportunity to rejuvenate the SDGs in Africa. Finally, Sect. 5 offers the conclusion and future research agenda.

2 The African Progress Towards The 2030 Agenda

This section provides an overview of Africa's progress on the 2030 agenda, highlighting the impact of COVID-19 and the Ukraine-Russia crisis and sets the scene for the potential role of international businesses towards sustainable development in their host African countries.

The African continent is rich in natural resources such as crude oil, natural gas, minerals, forests, and wildlife, holding a significant share of the world's renewable and non-renewable natural resources; nonetheless, unsustainable use/extraction alongside corruption costs around $195 billion annually in wasted resources (UNECA, 2015). Hence, it is not surprising that the African continent is facing "*extreme poverty, rampant corruption, human rights abuse, environmental degradation (due to extractive industry activities), extreme inequalities, HIV/Aids, conflicts, and weak rule of law*" (Mangena et al., 2023, p. 2). The 2020 Africa sustainable development report (2022) thoroughly analysed the performance of 52 African countries across all five SDGs pillars: people, prosperity, planet, peace, and partnerships. The results show that four North African countries; Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt as well as the Island states of Mauritius, Cabo Verde, Botswana, and Ghana are ahead of other countries in the continent, having said that these top performers are 35% away from achieving the SDGs by 2030.

Africa has achieved an average staggering score of 53.82% which means that the continent is only halfway towards achieving the SDGs. According to the same report, no African country has been categorised as progress is on track (known as green category), with the greatest challenges related to SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), whilst the strong performance was recorded against SDG 13 (climate change) and SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production). In relation to corruption and transparency, the report shows there were some improvements achieved; however, the continent scored 17.1 on transparency related to the laws and records of state-owned companies, which suggests that corruption is severely impacting the effectiveness of both the private and public sectors.

In a further update, the 2022 Africa Sustainable Development Report evaluated Africa's performance in relation to SDG 4: Education and shows that the continent made slow progress in the provision of quality education for all; SDG 5: gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls and highlighted that progress towards inclusivity is slow and the institutional infrastructure to protect women and girls is weak; SDG 14: life below water with a key takeaway that the organic and chemical pollutants remain a risk to Africa's marine ecosystem; SDG 15: life on Land, here the report warned that loss of forests, biodiversity, and land degradation is prevailing and hinders progress on this aspect. Finally, SDG 17: partnerships, here the report emphasised the importance of this objective in underpinning successful progress in other SDGs, through domestic resources mobilisation. Finally, the report assessed the impact of COVID-19 and Ukraine-Russian crisis, which had unfortunately reversed some of the progress made on achieving the SDGS.

Of essence here is to ask who should take the responsibility of implementing the UN agenda 2030 and the SDGs? The Africa regional report on the Sustainable Development goals (2015) attempted to answer this question, when the authors recommended that "*the process of implementing the sustainable development goals should be led at the highest level of political leadership at local, country, subregional and regional levels. Effective political leadership is crucial for ownership, commitment, galvanizing support,* ***mobilizing resources*** *and* ***ensuring accountability*** *... Effective participation of all stakeholders public,* ***private sector****, civil society, youth organizations, and women's organizations – should be vigorously cultivated, encouraged and sustained*" (UNECA, 2015, P. 68, emphasis by the authors). As such, implementing the SDGs on ground remains a joint responsibility between the government, society, and the private sector. Here, the role of the government is crucial in offering the vision and policies which instigate and foster the participation of various stakeholders in this agenda, as the SDGs resemble a social contract between African governments and the governed (Odusola, 2017).

3 Research Methodology

A research design is related to the *"decisions about how to achieve research goals, linking theories, questions, and goals to appropriate resources and methods"* (Flick, 2018, p. 102). Thus, it is a plan on how to collect evidence that enable researchers to answer the research in hand (Jaakkola, 2020). This chapter utilises a conceptual research design in order to answer the research question. In doing so, the chapter follows Jaakkola (2020) theory synthesis's template which suggests that a conceptual paper starts from a "*focal phenomenon that is observable but not adequately addressed in the existing research ... and then argue that the aspect of interest is best addressed in terms of particular concepts or theories"* (P. 19). The focal phenomenon in this chapter is twofold: first, the grand developmental challenges in Africa expressed in the slow (in some cases stagnant) growth and realisation of the

SDGs in many African countries. Challenges that cannot be simply left to the African governments to deal with solely.

Second, whilst the CSR concept sets some expectations from international businesses contribution to alleviate these grand challenges, the "*pre-occupation has been mostly with types of CSR programs and processes, rather than the more fundamental question of how CSR programs are yielding (or not) tangible development benefits in communities*" (Jamali et al., 2017, p. 4). In this situation, the business case motivation for engaging with CSR is more prevalent than the moral case, i.e. doing the right thing. Moreover, research on the relationship between CSR and development is inconclusive (Huber & Gilbert, 2017). This led many scholars to highlight the need to further investigate and better understand the role of international businesses' CSR in development (El Alfy et al., 2020). We heed these calls by mobilising a multi-theoretical framework (Sorour et al., 2021a) based on the integration of PCSR (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011), neo-institutional theory (Scott, 2014), and legitimacy notions (Suchman, 1995) to conceptualise addressing grand SDGs challenges in Africa through international business' impactful CSR expressions. The aim here is to offer an overall understanding that applies to all SDGs. Jaakkola (2020) opines that the choice of concepts in a conceptual paper is based on "*their fit to the focal phenomenon*" (p. 19). Hence, we argue that our multi-theoretical framework offers a unique understanding and appreciation of the phenomenon of sustainable development, taking into consideration the political role of international businesses, as well as the complex institutional environment within African countries and competing logics for achieving organisational legitimacy. The relevance of each element of our multi-theoretical framework to our focal is discussed in Sect. 4.

Finally, linking the structure and process is a key element of theorising exercises (Strauss & Corbin, 1992). The quality of our model can be judged against "*thick description" as a useful tool for "performative rethinking*" (Gibson-Graham, 2014, P. 147) of the CSR concept. Thick description is attentive to the details, context, and social relations pertaining to a phenomenon (Ponterotto, 2006; Denzin, 1989). Good thick description (1) . . . gives the context of an act; (2) it states the intentions and meanings that organise the action; (3) it traces the evolution and development of the act (Denzin, 1989, p. 33). In Sect. 4.1, we elaborate how these criteria are fulfilled by rejuvenating the SDGs in Africa through Impactful PCSR model.

4 Theoretical Framework

This chapter adopts a multi-theoretical framework which integrates Scherer & Palazzo (2011) PCSR, Scott's (2014) neo-institutional theory, and Suchman's (1995) notions of pragmatic and moral legitimacy as a lens to synthesise an understanding to inform policy making and practice around the role of international businesses as a salient political player that can further facilitate the realisation of any of the 17 SDGs in Africa as deemed relevant to the circumstances of the country in question.