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Optimising Community Development through Corporate Social
Responsibility: An Examination of the Tourism Industry in Livingstone,
Zambia

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Abstract

This thesis explores the potential for corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices of hotel and lodge companies to contribute to community development. A critical review of relevant literature is followed by focused discussions of the CSR practices of these companies, their community engagement approaches for seeking community voices in CSR, and policy frameworks for promoting CSR and managing stakeholder relationships. The empirical domain is the practices of hotel and lodge companies on Mukuni community land in Livingstone, Zambia.

The discussion in each of the main empirical chapters is based on the analysis of perspectives and experiences of participants. Primary data was collected by conducting document and website reviews, and interviews with senior government officials, hotel and lodge managers, the local tourism association, leaders of relevant local and international NGOs, and leaders from Mukuni communities. Data was also collected through group interviews, network mapping, and pairwise ranking and comparison analyses with community farmers and crafts traders. Site observation of some CSR projects in communities was also undertaken. Thematic analysis was applied to code and analyse data. A theoretical framework focusing on “ensuring equity in CSR through multi-stakeholder measures” was developed and applied to understand the findings.

Study findings suggest that power relations are a critical issue in CSR when initiatives are carried out in poor communities. It is shown that dominant corporate power and traditional power and cultural influences of community leaders, coupled with weak policy frameworks for promoting CSR and managing stakeholder interactions, are the main factors that determine the effectiveness of CSR as a vehicle for community development. These findings show that although criticisms are justifiably targeted mainly at corporations, communities and government also fall short in a number of ways as parties in promoting CSR.

In view of these findings, key stakeholders, including government, hotels and lodges and communities, are challenged to adapt their respective policies, structures, mentalities and practices to ensure equity in CSR. The study has shown that multi-stakeholder involvement in CSR can encourage equity and might be helpful in shifting CSR from reflecting company interests alone to interests and needs of communities. This argument is based on evidence that in some cases, measures that seek to encourage multi-stakeholder involvement in CSR have proved to contribute to promoting equity and to widely spreading opportunities and benefits. It has also been shown that the role of government and other stakeholders is important for improving the overall effectiveness of CSR as a vehicle for community development.

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