

The Integration of Sustainable Development Goal 8 with in Private Sector Corporations in Zimbabwe: A Socially Sustainable Strategy

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ABSTRACT

The private sector corporates in Zimbabwe seem to have limited commitment to implementing the global development agenda, as espoused by the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This paper reports on a study undertaken to critically evaluate the reasons for limited corporate social sustainability strategy implementation that is aligned to SDG 8.

A qualitative research design was adopted using the interpretivist paradigm. Key informant interviews were used to collect data by targeting eleven employees in a group of corporations from leadership to the shop floor level, five development organisation representatives which included the United Nations, as well as four community members within the business footprint

Some of the corporate businesses have a social sustainability strategy due to compliance obligations that have little environmental contextualization and others have an embedded company strategy which is neither costed nor evidence-informed. Moreover, the programme is not needs-driven and has limited partnerships and technology integration. Some businesses lack a social sustainability strategy but are implementing unplanned, inequitable initiatives between the community and their employees, skewed in favour of the organization. Moreover, some businesses are implementing unplanned initiatives that amount to charity, rather than impactful investment for measurable return on investment. Most importantly, it was ascertained that there is no programme monitoring and evaluation system in place to measure progress and assess relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.

The research findings contributed to developing an evidence-informed social sustainability strategy proposal that the management of private sector corporates could adopt to support the implementation of the SDG 8. The strategy encompasses the adoption of a transformational leadership style from strategy visioning and execution through to the integration of systems thinking and incorporation of a Corporate Social Impact Investment (CSII) model.

Keywords: *Social Sustainability; Sustainable Development Goals; Strategy; Corporations; Systems Thinking.*

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 is stated as “To promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” (UN General Assembly, 2015).

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly highlighted its intentions to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty, to heal and secure the planet by using the SDGs which succeeded the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Most African countries, if not all, had not achieved the MDGs by 2015; therefore the UN

system task team was implored to design a post-2015 global development agenda which resulted in the SDGs (Darrow, 2012).

The SDGs have many targets, but there is no explicit guidance on what the countries should target and there is a lack of strategy for the implementation processes (Hill, 2015). The UN Resolution noted that the SDGs are focused on goals which encompass dimensions that are inclusive of inequality reduction, building of peaceful, just and inclusive societies (UN Resolution, 2015). Kumar and Vivekadhis (2016) argue that the SDGs were developed based on the valuable lessons learned from the MDGs, with the purpose of continuation of the

unfinished agenda by addressing some of the additional challenges of inclusiveness, equity, urbanisation and further strengthening global partnership by including the private sector and community service organizations.

The UN Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) highlighted that the global unemployment rate stood at 5.7% in 2016, with women more likely to be unemployed, compared to their male counterparts across all age groups (UNESCO, 2017). Furthermore, it highlighted that the youth were almost three times as likely as adults to be unemployed, with an unemployment rate of 12.8% and 4.4% respectively in 2016 (UNESCO, 2017).

Dearden (2015) posits the need for advocacy during implementation of the SDG, challenging entrenched political, economic and social power structures with special emphasis on government policies which are not fully aligned with the goals. The International Labor Organization (ILO) highlighted that there is a way of avoiding a life of poverty among humanity and this was explained as finding decent work so that individuals can gain income to meet needs for food, clothing, housing, education and healthcare (ILO, 2001).

During the MDG era, the global development agenda was a failure due to a number of factors, which included lack of strategy to implement set goals, poor implementation response from the private sector and insufficient inflow of international financial aid to African countries to execute set targets (Okeke & Nwali, 2013). In addition, the MDGs failed because of the insufficient and temporary nature of financing as well as poor coordination of aid delivery (Ooms, Stuckler, Basu & McKee, 2010). More importantly, prior to the SDG era, most African countries experienced negative impacts rooted in politics, governance as well as policy issues which reduced progress (Ogujiuba & Jumare, 2012).

Clemens (2007) highlights that it was the limitations of aid and other policies which hindered the achievement of the MDG development agenda. Other critics highlighted that the MDGs were a good idea but they were poorly conceptualized, thus diverting attention from more appropriate targets and more effective policies and actions (Hulme, 2009). Economic growth in Africa has generally been recorded as slow and according to the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC),

economic growth within Southern Africa decreased from 3.1% in 2013 to 2.5% in 2014 and it remained stagnant in 2015 (SADC, 2015). However, in most African countries, efforts were made during the MDG era to minimise extreme hunger and poverty through decent work provision, but the degree of success was very low, and it was recorded that 70% of the population live on under \$2 (USD) per day (Deaton, 2004). The Zimbabwe Statistics Agency, pointed out that there is high unemployment rate at national level, where domestic policies have been favoring empowerment and indigenization initiatives, whilst the informal sector has remained relatively high, at 13.7% in 2014, with the proportion of women being slightly higher than that of men (Zimbabwe Statistics Agency, 2015).

Over 4,610 companies closed shop between 2011 and 2014, resulting in the loss of 55,443 jobs (Zimbabwe Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2014). The Zimbabwean economy recorded an annual average economic growth rate of 4.5% in 2013, which declined to 3.8% in 2014 and further down to an estimation of 1.5% in 2015 (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], 2016). The Zimbabwean natural resources extraction sectors are the main dominators in contributing to the national output, which employs the largest proportion of the entire population (UNECA, 2016). This amounts to 67.2%, from agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining and quarrying which together accounted for 20.1% of the GDP in 2014 (UNECA, 2016).

Matutu (2014) posits that to ensure that the global sustainability agenda is fully implemented, the private sector among other players needs to play a role and support the target by implementing evidence informed social sustainability strategies within the workplace. Mjimba (2016) argues that there is a need for further study to gain knowledge on the sustainability agenda so that it can be viewed as a need rather than a want. It should be where new strategies are designed to address problems associated with the differences in the development status of economies. It is against the above background that this study aimed to understand the factors which are hindering private sector corporates from implementing a social sustainable strategy. This study focused on a group of corporate employees, community

members and development organizations within its business footprint. The systemic approach to the target audience was applied to scan both the internal and external environment so as to capture the program strengths and weaknesses which developed an evidence informed social sustainable strategy. The study aims to promote the strategic implementation of SDG 8 with the intention of enhancing the global development agenda. Additionally, it intends to support the SDG era and private sector response to attain the desired implementation of the SDG 8.

Research Context

The target audience was corporations which had a group of 15 agribusiness operating within three South East African countries with its headquarters in Zimbabwe. The group's commercial activities are structured into core operating platforms with business units specialising in diverse food security, cash crops and energy. The group of corporations has a long history of operating in Sub-Saharan Africa and some business units have been in operation as far back as the early 20th century. It was formed to build long term sustainable businesses in agriculture and the energy sectors, so as to positively impact communities.

The Research Problem

Private sector business organizations in Zimbabwe are scaling up their response to social management issues on employees, both in the workplace and outside, through unstructured initiatives with no clear plan, limited monitoring and a lack of critical evaluation (Werner, 2009). This view is supported by Valance, Perkins and Dixon (2011) who posit that social sustainability should be anchored on sustainable development in a way that places emphasis on human livelihoods as integral to accomplishing ecological goals through economic development, which means meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Within the group of corporations, the lack of knowledge among contracted growers about contract farming and marketing seems to be highlighted by Valance, Perkins and Dixon (2010), who write about the lack of new social sustainability strategies. Furthermore, in the workplace, male and female employees may be subject to different social vulnerabilities which could impact business performance (Carter, 2015). Prescott and Bogg (2011) point out that employees experience the world of work quite

differently due to their social and biological differences. Gross (2010) argues that studies unveiled some of the negative impacts of unemployment which includes loss of self-confidence, poor health, disruption of social relations at diverse life levels, social exclusion which has been highly linked to cases of suicide, imprisonment, alcoholism, drug addiction and child abuse. Frey and Mac Naughton (2016) therefore conclude that not all work has a positive impact on human development, as many of the jobs do not pay enough to meet basic needs. The above authors seem to provide a reflection of what is happening at the group of corporations because of gender inequality challenges and poor health systems, among other problems, which have negatively impacted on the business' performance. Some of the current business challenges emanating in the corporate world include a decline in profitability, poor customer satisfaction, company closures due to poor viability, which is partly caused by lack of long term evidence informed social sustainability strategy implementation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing Theories on Social Sustainability

Littig and Griessler (2005) define social sustainability as the provision of work within a society and the related institutional arrangements which give satisfaction to human needs, including the normative claims of fulfilling social justice, human dignity and participation. Barron and Gauntlet (2002) argue that social sustainability occurs when formal and informal processes, systems, structures and relationships actively support the capacity of future generations to create healthy and liveable communities which are connected, provide a good quality of life, equitable, diverse and democratic. Dempsey, (2011) and Casula, Vifell and Soneryd (2012) further argue that while the concept of sustainable development, in general, refers to the achievement of a balance among the social, environmental and economic pillars of sustainability, the meaning and linked objectives of the social pillar remain vague.

Vavik and Keitsch (2010) acknowledge that social sustainability dimensions have not received the same treatment as the other sustainability pillars. Within the social sustainability arena, there are diverse interpretations regarding the issues to be addressed (Dixon & Colantonio, 2008). The study acknowledges the above

theories as they establish social dimensional issues affecting organizational performance and decent work at the group of corporations, which led to the development of a responsive strategy. According to Vavik and Keitsch (2010), the social sustainability agenda has three main goals namely, poverty reduction, by promoting inclusion through the provision of basic needs; illiteracy reduction, by promoting access to education; and, access, by promoting participation in decision making. This theory supports a mind-set of how important it is to integrate social sustainable strategy in the private sector workplace.

Cuthill (2009) argues that social sustainability has four key factors namely, social capital focusing on promoting social networks; social infrastructure focusing on providing facilities that address need and capacity for participation; social justice plus equity focusing on providing equitable access to essential employment and endangered governance which focuses on promoting bottom-up, participatory democracy. The study intends to apply this model to investigate the social networks and facilities prevailing at the group of corporations with the view of understanding social reality from an interpretivist point of view. Dempsey (2011) further indicates that social sustainability encompasses social interaction, social networks, encouragement of participation, engendering a sense of pride, ensuring safety and security. Social equity is explained as reducing inequality in life chances by ensuring local access to key services. The theory viewed dimensions of social sustainability which this research study shall explore to understand as reasons for the poor implementation of social sustainability despite SDG 8's aims of economic growth and decent work.

Chan and Lee (2008) postulate that social sustainability has five factors which are: social infrastructure; the availability of job opportunities through employment; functional design for social interaction; preservation of local characteristics and the ability to fulfill psychological needs for security and needs fulfillment. In addition, Hussin, Rahman and Memon (2013) note that social sustainability approaches are made up of social aspects, namely, the enhancement of a participatory approach by involving all stakeholders, the promotion of public participation, the promotion of the development of appropriate institutional frameworks, assessing the impact on health and

the quality of life. These theories were grounded on key factors in the social sustainability dimension, which this study seeks to understand through exploring respondents' social risks and their link to economic growth.

Littig and Griessler (2005) highlight three social sustainability dimensions namely, basic needs aimed at quality of life, social justice and social coherence. This theory has social dimensions grounded in the social sustainability arena. However, this study seeks to explore whether the dimensions and other factors beyond the dimensions address economic growth and decent work.

Existing Strategy Theories

Nickols (2012) defines strategy as an action plan which is designed to achieve long term goals. In the strategy arena, there are diverse theories of existence such as the Canoe Theory which is explained as a business success tool for leaders and its associates (Hibbard & Stockman, 2006). The theory further explains that like canoes, businesses need every member to paddle together for greater success, as it is a strategy that needs implementation, meaning that every involved stakeholder needs to work. The Canoe Theory further provides solutions to hurdles and challenges faced in diverse business organisations by business leaders and its employees. It gives details on how to bridge and plug the gap so as to enable participants to paddle together. The researcher intends to use the Canoe Theory in terms of strategy execution by the group of corporations' management and employees. Ratogi and Trivedi (2016:385), define an existing strategic management technique called Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal (PESTEL) as "a tool used to evaluate the impact of the stated factors on a project".

Cadle, Paul and Turner (2010) have their own differences which include Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological (PEST), Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, Political, Legal and Ethical (STEEPLE) and Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, International, Environmental, Demographic (PESTLIED). The researcher shall apply a combination of these strategic frameworks during the research study. Recklies (2001) explains a strategic management tool named the McKinsey Business 7S Model which is made up of Structure, Strategy, Systems, Skills, Style, Staff and Shared Values. The

The Integration of Sustainable Development Goal 8 with in Private Sector Corporations in Zimbabwe: a Socially Sustainable Strategy

model is centered on these seven areas targeting internal aspects within an organization which need to speak to each other for business success and were relevant for exploring issues at the study target audience. The study shall apply the model to scan internal social challenges which shall assist with strategy development.

Community Challenges

Surrounding communities within the business footprint such as the employee's household, members tend to get attention on development through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Secch (2007) and Lee (2008) debate the definition of CSR which they view as dynamic in practice and meaning. Earlier, CSR was closely linked to market performance through social well-being, whilst emerging markets viewed it as philanthropy focusing on business

societal relationship in solving diverse social problems (Sen, Bhattacharya & Korschun, 2006). This research study investigates the reasons for limited implementation of social sustainability programming which encompass CSR initiatives.

Conceptual Framework

In order to address the research issues, a conceptual framework (Figure 1) was developed after reviewing a number of diverse theories, models, concepts and existing philosophies on social sustainability strategies to inform the processes (Maxwell, 2005). The conceptual framework was used by the researcher to guide the research design, refine study objectives and assist with the development of appropriate questions.

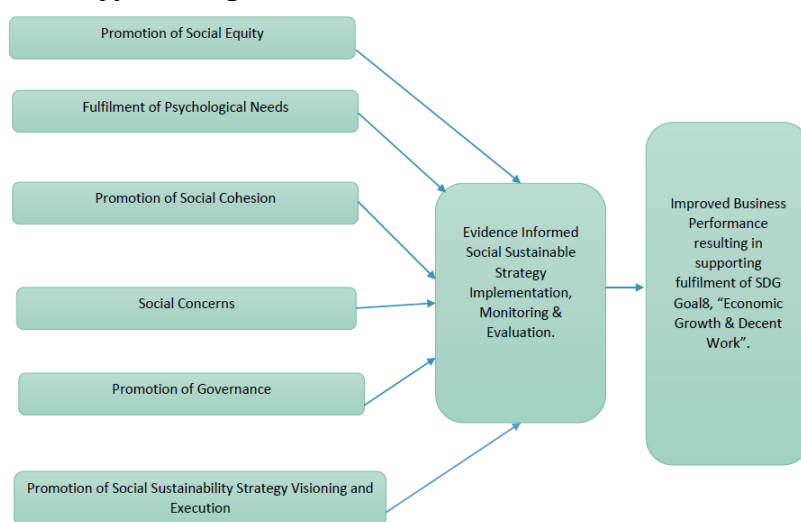


Figure1: Conceptual Research Model

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher employed qualitative design, interpretative research paradigm and inductive type of inquiry.

The study employed explanatory research, which answered the research questions and led to the achievement of the research objectives. Furthermore, the researcher applied purposive sampling by engaging a total of twenty participants from the target audience using non-probability sampling strategy. Data was collected using key informant interviews from eleven employees, surrounding five development organisation representatives and four community members within the business footprint was analyzed using coding and the identification of patterns.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Social Sustainability Strategy Visioning and Execution

The study has shown that respondents were not fully aware of the social sustainability projects offered by the organisations. The respondents who were fully aware of the projects provided examples which encompass sustainability trainings; sports such as soccer; onsite clinics for healthcare access; borehole drilling for provision of clean water; scholarship for orphans and vulnerable pupils as well as wellness information dissemination. These above mentioned projects were stated to be part of the organisational strategy mainly due to compliance obligations. However, diverse business units were implementing unplanned initiatives which were not part of the overall

organisational strategy. In addition, leadership decision making has shown to be visible among other organisations whilst others employed the bottom-up approach. The economic impact of the projects was stated to be in place because mainly of the sustainability training programmes. These were reported to increase knowledge leading to application of best practice agricultural standards. However, other organisations within the group of companies were not measuring return on investment from these projects. Furthermore, project impact was stated to be positively enhancing crop production and yields. a.) The ultimate results shared included foreign currency generation from exports as well as increased healthy workforce thereby enhancing SDG 8 proposals. In addition, the study employed a combination the following strategic management techniques to scan corporate social sustainability external environments: PESTEL PEST, STEEPLE and PESTLIED. However, these strategic management tools focused on the external opportunities and threats in corporate social sustainability programming which included surrounding community challenges. Furthermore, the study employed strategic management tool, the McKinsey 7S Model which scanned the organisational internal strengths and weaknesses in corporate social sustainability programming. This employed strategic management tool was made up of Structure, Strategy, Systems, Skills, Style, Staff and Shared Values. the model was centred on these seven areas targeting internal environment to identify gaps which supported the development of a proposed corporate social sustainable strategy.

Reasons of Poor Social Sustainability Programme Implementation

The reasons highlighted for poor social sustainability were both organisational internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external threats. The findings encompassed programme strategic vision, strategic execution and leadership decision making involvement. Limited reasons were noted to encompass the following:

- Programme's did not have enough strategy visioning and execution partnerships;
- Programming was not evidence informed to guide initiatives implemented;
- Programmes lacked globalisation to fit local environmental contexts;

- Programme's did not have a no dedicated budget;
- Programme lacked cost benefit analysis on initiatives to be able to measure return on investment;
- Programme has no functional holistic monitoring and evaluation system in place from programme inception;
- Programme beneficiaries were not fully aware of the programmes offered;
- Programmes are accidentally implemented and not strategically positioned within the overall organisational strategy;
- Programmes are implemented as a compliance issue so as to access international markets rather than organizationally strategic driven;
- Programmes employed community focused lens only without employees' integration;
- Programmes employed employee focused lens only without community integration;
- Programmes did not have adequate competent human resources.

More importantly, the programmes employed a charity approach lens, rather than corporate investment lens without factoring in impact perspective. The findings led the researcher to develop a Corporate Social Impact Investment (CSII) model which the corporate world could adopt to enhance the implementation of SDG 8 proposals.

Corporate Social Impact Investment (CSII) Model

The study has shown that some of the programmes run by the company have not been sustainable because they were not implemented based on research evidence but using a charity approach lens. It is on this basis that the researcher developed the "CSII" framework which seeks to address the problem. The greatest challenge that was discovered in the study was that programmes were not developed using a business model, but rather it was vastly using the charity approach. The findings reveal minimum impact on economic growth and decent work proposal due to the lack of monitoring and evaluation. Therefore, it is not sustainable for corporate organisations to invest a lot of money in support of social sustainability programmes without realising a return on

The Integration of Sustainable Development Goal 8 with in Private Sector Corporations in Zimbabwe: a Socially Sustainable Strategy

investment. The corporate sector viewed social sustainability concerns and problems as a threat to business' sustainability, thereby impacting negatively on economic growth and decent work proposals as indicated in SDG 8. Therefore, social sustainability programmes have to be a strategic business informed response which can be adopted to minimise or mitigate or avoid or offset risks, concerns and problems on the ground so as to support business sustainability.

There is a need to quantify programme initiatives translated into monetary value so as to fully understand the impact of initiatives on economic growth. However, the findings to some extent have shown that social sustainability programming in the corporate world makes business sense. *Figure 2* shows the steps which corporates can take to implement the CSII model.

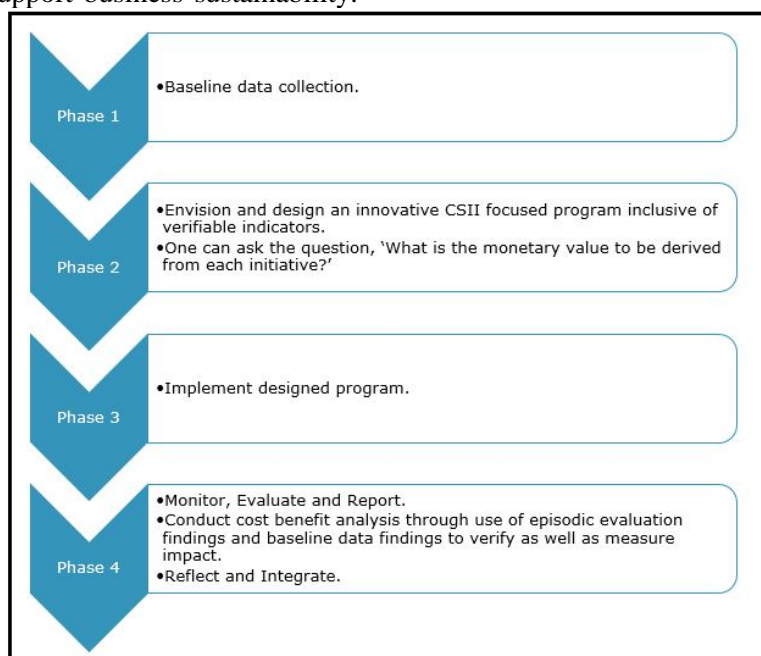


Figure 2. Corporate Social Impact Investment (CSII) model steps

Social Concerns

The respondents noted social concerns which were affecting business productivity, thereby impacting negatively on SDG 8, and these were stated to be caused by organisational factors as well as external factors.

In addition, they were said to be linked to the provision of developmental services. Examples of these were mentioned to encompass limited soft social infrastructure initiatives, limited hard infrastructure initiatives as well as limited implementation of labour rights and practices. The impacts of these gaps were stated to affect basic needs fulfilment and the SDG 8 proposals.

Social Equity Promotion

The study showed that organisations had an equal promotion opportunity policy. However, the policy was not fully adhered to in terms of implementation. It was reported that males are still dominated in the agriculture corporate sector due to various reasons which included gender dynamics, nature of the job which was

stated to be masculine, cultural factors and socialisation issues. These were explained to hinder the females to fully take up roles and responsibilities as compared to their male counterparts. In addition, the study has shown that within diverse corporate environments, female and male workforce showed different social vulnerabilities in some instances. The findings were supported by Carter (2015), who posited that male and female employees in the workplace may be subject to different social vulnerabilities which could impact on business performance. Therefore the developed social sustainable strategy encompasses integration of the social equity lens.

Examples of fairness in the workplace were shared to encompass job grading which determine remuneration and employee packages as well as annual awards to recognise commendable employee performance. Education and training opportunities were reported to be provided by the organisation; however, some gaps were stated where few departments were beneficiaries of the initiatives.

However, it was noted that some departments were not receiving training and educational opportunities which affected technology integration. Furthermore, reporting was noted to be affected due to limited knowledge of technology. These hurdles were reported to affect the implementation of the SDG 8 proposals.

An additional factor which the study revealed is that respondents were aware of stress experienced by employees and within the surrounding communities. The root causes were both external and internal related and the effects of stress were highlighted to affect employee performance and business productivity. These were noted to affect the implementation of the SDG 8 proposals. The need for corporate stress management within social sustainability programming was highlighted to be vital, since it would positively impact economic growth and the global vision of decent work.

Psychological Needs Fulfilment

The study showed that respondents were partially aware of the wellness programme offered by their organisations. Furthermore, it was explained that there is information dissemination on HIV and AIDS, non-communicable diseases which include hypertension, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases such as heart problems as well as cancers. More importantly, a link between the provision of these programmes and employee performance was highlighted to be positive, due to the creation of a cohesive society through the services. In addition, some organisations which offer onsite clinic services were noted to support a healthy workforce. These services were reported to impact positively on employee performance thereby support implementation of the SDG 8.

Governance Promotion

The study showed that respondents were partially aware of community development projects supported by organisations. The effects of beneficiary non-participation were stated to be low programme uptake as well as limited impact on economic growth.

However, it was reported that the programmes are managed in a transparent and accountable manner where newsletters on the programme are published on a quarterly basis both hard and soft copies. Cuthill (2009) argued that social sustainability has four key factors namely, social

capital focusing on promoting social networks; social infrastructure focusing on providing facilities that address need and capacity for participation; social justice plus equity focusing on providing equitable access to essential employment and endangered governance which focuses on promoting bottom-up, participatory democracy. The study applied this model to investigate the study scope with the view of understanding social reality from an interpretivist point of view. Governance and participation in social sustainability programme development has shown to impact on SDG 8 proposals.

Social Cohesion Promotion

The study has shown that the respondents felt a sense of belonging to the organisations as well as the surrounding communities. The main reasons encompassed promotion of social cohesion initiatives. Examples of these include, provision of boreholes for clean water, social clubs, wellness programmes, training, educational opportunities, scholarships for vulnerable and orphans.

In addition, social network promotion through social cohesion initiatives showed to make business sense. The study has also shown that the cohesive corporate work space tends to increase employee performance which impacts the SDG 8 proposals. More importantly, the results reported that once cohesive environments exist within the corporate world, employees cooperate to achieve set goals, thereby boosting business productivity. Furthermore, this is what a strategy business success tool such as the Canoe Theory advised (Hibbard & Stockman, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS

The study sought to address the reasons for poor social sustainability strategy implementation by the private sector in line with SDG 8 (UN General Assembly, 2015).

Some of the current business challenges emanating within the corporate world were reported to include a decline in profitability; low morale among employees affecting performance; absenteeism; high turnover; poor customer satisfaction and company closures due to poor viability which has shown to be partly caused by lack of long term evidence informed social sustainability strategy implementation. However, the study has shown that these challenges in the

The Integration of Sustainable Development Goal 8 with in Private Sector Corporations in Zimbabwe: a Socially Sustainable Strategy

corporate world are emanating from both the internal and external environment.

Given the views discussed above, it is recommended that private sector organizations to play a role in addressing the challenges in developing data driven social sustainability strategies. The study developed a social sustainable strategy for the integration of SDG 8 which could be adopted by corporate sector

management to enhance implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the framework depicted in Figure 3 below be implemented to develop a social sustainability strategy and its application may support the successful implementation of selected SDG 8 proposals “Economic growth and decent work.”

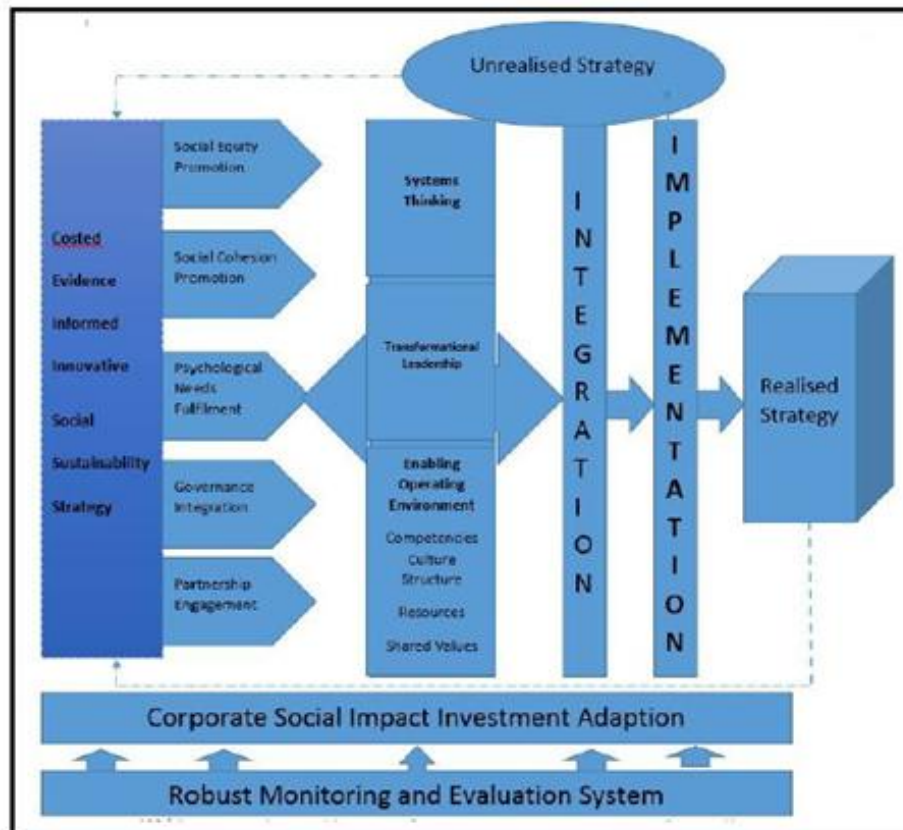


Figure3. Private Sector Corporate Social Sustainable Strategy Execution Model

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