AFRICA AND ASIA INVADED! CULTURAL MOBILITY EXCHANGES AND INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ENABLES GLOBAL NORTH POLICY TRANSFER

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Abstract. This paper provides a conceptual theoretical review discussing how foreign direct investment (FDI) from overseas government and private investors, results in cultural exchanges and intercultural encounters. This paper describes how Global North corporate social responsibility policies are intended to protect low-income countries from exploitation. The effect of corporate social responsibility is profound upon countries in the Global South, especially impoverished countries in Africa and Asia. This paper uses Africa as a case study to articulate key points. However, as foreign investments begin to pay dividends, the culture of the local areas where the business venture is based significantly changes. Policies begin to change as people realise the benefits of education, healthcare and social protection. As people from Global North countries settle temporarily in local villages, they bring with them their mobile phones, satellite radio and television. These digital devices enable continuous access to Western culture of popular music, news and sports. Local people come into contact with global north cultures, as they are employed by foreign investor intermediaries in the factories which have been built. This enables intercultural encounters. Indigenous cultural art, dance, rituals and theatre performances begin to wane, as more people are influenced by Western culture. Cultural mobility and exchanges take place on a social level, as overseas workers interact with local people at work and domestically. Corporate social responsibility requires good communication, learning to speak the local workforces' language, becomes a prerequisite in business and sharing cultural practices together. This ensures continuous cultural exchanges and intercultural encounters in conversation and social activities. This paper posits that corporate social responsibility policies from FDI and overseas investors have enabled policy transfer from the Global North. Environmentally sustainable foreign investment business practices in low-income are in the ascendency. Too is recognition: traditional cultural practices by Indigenous

populations in Asia and Africa must be protected by overseas government and corporate sector investors.

Keywords: Africa, corporate social responsibility, cultural mobility, cultural exchanges, intercultural encounters, United Nations Global Compact

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the main causal factors which have resulted in a diminution of the saliency of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Africa. The period considered is the 21st century from the year 2000. The business activity detailed in the taxonomy below appeared regularly in the literature review. Business and sustainable development (Wirba 2023, 4); business regulations (Ntoutoume 2023, 4; Vogel 2005, 3); corporate citizenship and environment; corporate responsibility; environment, social and corporate governance (ESG) (de Souza Barbosa 2023, 5; Bolger et al. 2021, 25); responsible business practices and virtuous corporate behaviour (Hartvigson and Heshmati 2023, 491-92; Forstater et al. 2010, 5).

CSR is a complicated multi-headed beast having numerous definitions. There are three broad themes which act to signpost the main issues which CSR initiatives should try to address (Marti et al. Harvard Business Review, 24 March 2024; See also Nardo et al. 2021, 7). *Environmental and social safeguards:* CSR schemes to identify and reduce negative social impacts, and mitigate environmental damage. (Camoletto et al. 2022, 1123). *Policies and investments to enable community development:* CSR projects self-sustaining local schemes; local job creation in agriculture, fishing and roof making. Local procurement of food and supplies to build local institutions. Deliver local training and capacity building so local people are empowered to fight corruption (Gajadhur and Nicolaides 2022, 166). *Local governance revenue transparency:* Establish local institutions which are locally run, and deliver low-level negotiation with government officials to develop stakeholder partnerships (Arenas-Torres et al. 2022, 3). Helping to agree on local partnership work between businesses on their agreed set of rules (Fayolle, African Business 24 February 2024; Gupta and Kumar,2022, 113).

CSR is a concept developed originally in the global north, which has acted to transport social values to the global south, including Asia and Africa (Stanislavska et al. 2023, 3; Association of Corporate Citizenship Professionals, 25 February 2024). CSR policies are a vehicle that transports Western cultural ideology of values which should be protected, during commercial trade and/or international development in developing countries. Policy transfer takes place of global north social values and culture onto developing countries, due to the well-intended nature of state-sponsored and private-sector FDI. CSR policies from Western corporate companies investing in Africa and Asia, change the culture of these countries due to the quasi-conditionality aspects of their foreign investments. This can be a force for good, especially in global south countries with patriarchal societies, for example, Ethiopia (Africa) and Nepal (Asia) (Degefa and Getachew 2022; UNICEF ROSA (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund Regional Office for South Asia) 2022). Government or private sector companies can apply CSR policies in their work to engender gender equality in their operations. Foreign investors can refuse to invest in countries where patriarchal inequality is a cultural norm. Where CSR policies can be damaging in the global south, is when they transfer global north practices of excessive deforestation or mineral mining. There is also CSR policy failure when foreign companies distribute local produce for free distorting local markets. Here Western capitalism changes the culture of the social relationships of small African and Asian villages on each other, in each continent respectively. The unintended consequences of well-intentioned but inappropriate implementation of certain CSR policies could result in inter-tribal rivalry or civil war (Rouget, Control Risks, 19 December 2023; See also Perdomo-Ortiz et al. 2017, 36).

This paper provides a critical review of how the CSR development sector in Africa has been diminished since the year 2000. A working definition of CSR are private sector initiatives, designed to operationalise sustainable development; by changing business processes so they are less damaging to society (Fatima and Elbanna 2023, 105; see also Ye et al. 2021, 1). The CSR concept was about businesses working with stakeholders who live in the area where they trade; to improve the quality of life of the community and make a profit. In context, international development agencies should integrate their projects to work with the private sector, so that businesses can deliver societal needs profitably (Prasad et al. 2022, 8). What has happened as we enter the third decade of the 21st century, is that the best intentions of CSR have been dumbed down due to a number of causal factors. There was a large-scale financial crisis in the global north in 2007-08. This reduced the global north's financial ability to fund international development projects and concordantly; a reduction in the political impetus for the private sector to invest in and nurture CSR initiatives. Many CSR projects in low-income countries which include African and Asian nations were cutback, now seen as a luxury not as a social political necessity (Gajadhur and Nicolaides 2022, 159). In 2020 the COVID-19 global pandemic arrived coronavirus lockdowns began in earnest. This was an exogenous shock which reduced global economic activity, by more than 50% in the early 2020s across the board. Once again this was another exogenous shock to many populations globally. Global North government spending was targeted to address immediate needs internally to keep each country's economies afloat. This meant there has been much less global north government tax revenue to spend on international overseas sustainable development. As a result, CSR in low-income countries including Africa and Asia has been dumbed down (see also Bueta 2022, 86[1]; Nikiema and Asiedu 2022, 24568); no longer the cool right buzzword for a business activity, which the private sector wanted to be associated with. Foreign investors, key partners in large international development partnerships, have followed the global north governments' lead. Overseas private investors have also chosen to curtail their international CSR activity until later in the 2020s (World Economic Forum (WEF), 12 January 2024a; see also

UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) 2021b, 70). Africa has been invaded and then abandoned. International supply and value chains have been seriously affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. There may be mid-2020s opportunities to re-ignite the CSR concept as a viable business option; by designing schemes which ensure an agreed amount of African agriculture is consumed overseas at an agreed price. The pre-arranged price will factor in any additional costs of sustainable production, resulting in environmentally responsible consumerism in the global north. Many global societal problems could begin to be addressed by re-visiting CSR (Kim 2022, 362). African rural village fishermen could be utilised to supply their produce, which has been manually caught using human-powered boats. In these scenarios an international sustainable development, private sector CSR stakeholder group would be (Hannah et al. 2023, 4): Contributing towards reducing environmental damage of coastal areas and freshwater natural habitats; preventing the overfishing of fish stocks; maintaining fishing skills of Indigenous African populations; contributing towards an African country's COP28 compliance, as there are no harmful CO_2 emissions from human powered boats (see also Amnesty International, 31 May 2023)[2].

UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL COMPACT 2021-2023

The overarching global policy framework for CSR related to sustainable business and development is the United Nations (UN) Global Compact (UNGC). "It was announced in 1999 at the annual World Economic Forum in Davos with the purpose to promote sustainable business" (Ditlev-Simonsen 2022, 61). The UNGC principles (FIG 1) provide a 21st-century global international development policy template. The ethos of the UNGC is clear, the corporate sector, civil society and local communities must work in partnership, to deliver sustainable business and development (Berlin School of Business and Innovation, 25 March 2023; Heerden et al.

2022, 14). Table FIG 1 details the main international development issues the UNGC addresses, they closely align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN 2021, 8-25). The UNGC acts to identify the policy areas where international CSR should apply to foreign business operations, to be non-socially damaging in African countries (UNGC, 24 February 2024; UNGC 20 September 2021, 13). The UNGC also acts to enable policy transfer of global north values during partnership work with local communities in Africa and Asia. Cultural mobility takes place when people from local villages are accepted and promoted within overseas business operations. Such local people are invariably bi-lingual, best able to explain the benefits of overseas-owned factories to their local communities. Foreign investors will not invest in African and Asian countries, if there are signs of human rights abuses, child labour usage or government corruption. Overseas developers will wait for independent verification from UN observers of compliance with the UNGC principles before they make the decision to invest. The UNGC principles are in essence a quasi-conditionality instrument, enabling policy transfer of global north values to African and Asian countries.

Fig. 1. The Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact
(UNGC, 26 February 2024)

Human rights
Principle 1: Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights and;
Principle 2: make sure they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

Labour
Principle 3: businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
Principle 4: the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;
Principle 5: the effective abolition of child labour and;
Principle 6: the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

Environment
Principle 7: businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;
Principle 8: undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; and
Principle 9: encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

Anti-Corruption
Principle 10: Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR): HISTORY, SOCIETAL JUSTIFICATION AND POLICY EXPLAINER

CSR began in the post-war period, in the 1950s, when critical observers linked profitability with the social responsibility of business owners (Dash 2024, 85; Carroll 2016, 1). In the 60s and 70s, there was also a lack of regulatory concerns regarding some FDI. There were visible reports in the media of exploitation of people in least developed countries (LDCs) including African - nations, by foreign companies (Petkoski and Twose 2003, 20). LDCs tend to have weaker regulatory and legal frameworks, which enables the exploitation of low-income populations, working in dangerous conditions that reduce business productivity costs. There was growing recognition of the argument profit from foreign investment is acceptable: provided those profits are not obtained by the exploitation of impoverished nations populations, who see little of the fruits of their labour (Hohner and Potts 2007, 53-54). The corporate sector should also reduce environmental damage and remove any pollution caused by their business operations in foreign countries. The corporate sector should put something back into economically weak countries where they have made a profit. This can be manifested as a hospital or school building program, or as a scaled-down education or healthcare covenant for the low-income country (Avadhani 2024, 235 and 243; see also Atlantic Methanol, 30 April 2022). This line of thought provides a pragmatic working definition of CSR, from the initial conceptualisation in the 1950s. The business case aspect of CSR began to gain political impetus in the 1980s, as an economic interface with international development (Zhao 2021, 2; Agudelo et al. 2019, 6-7). The 1990s recognised an increased interaction between CSR and corporate performance, which heralded business strategies consisting of effective corporate social investment. Initially, when the 21st century arrived in the year 2000, business involvement in CSR was still going strong. As the 21st century progressed, the business case for CSR was buffeted by the global credit crisis of 2007-08 (WEF, 26 January 2024b). Then, in 2020, there was another global emergency, this time in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic. These two global events resulted in a decline in business productivity, consumption and economic growth in the 21st century. Suddenly there is less headroom. Less expectation that corporate social investment to deliver CSR whilst still making a profit is an effective business approach (Gupta and Kumar 2022, 113).

Benz (Prowly, 4 April 2024) and Vogel (2005, 1-2) provide us with some examples of how large corporate giants have implemented CSR initiatives in the past: Google have an extensive computer, data centre and laptop remanufacture program, which recycles computers, helping to sustain the environment. Levi Strauss had a Worker Well-being initiative which creates a more sustainable supply chain, the programme was worker-driven and locally owned. The Levi Strauss initiative delivered a yield of 4.1% on company investment in some areas. British Petroleum has significantly reduced its carbon emissions. Citibank has designed CSR-driven criteria, to consider the environmental impact of its operations, particularly its ending decisions. Chiquita has adopted sustainable environmental practices which its banana suppliers must adhere to. Home Depot no longer uses wood from ancient sources or endangered forests. Ikea insists its rug suppliers do not employ child workers. They also provide financial loans which help reduce children having to work (Bartlett 2012 [orig. 2006], 3). McDonald's franchise has applied the European Union's (EU) restrictions on growth hormones in farm produce, for its supplier's beef and chicken in the United States (US). Nike closely monitors the working conditions in the factories of its suppliers in LDCs. Pepsi has withdrawn its investments in Myanmar due to human rights concerns. Shell has designed policies to address environmental and human rights concerns, perceived to be caused by its investments in developing countries. Timberland enables its employees to work one paid week a year for a local charity in the area where they trade (See also Cheruiyot-Koech and Reddy 2022, 9). For a long time, Starbucks sold coffee which is ethically sourced and responsibly grown with the Fairtrade logo. Liaison with Fairtrade delivers CSR by ensuring that coffee suppliers, many of whom are African countries, receive and retain premium prices for their produce (Raynalds 2022, 716; Banga et al. 2020, 29). In the early 2020s, this began to change in some international markets, for example, the United Kingdom (UK). The change in Starbucks' relationship with Fairtrade, is an exemplar of the diminution of international CSR in Africa in the 21st century (Saker-Clark, The Independent, 17 February 2022).

The exploitation of African and Asian populations by overseas business practices has been rampant, and the implementation of CSR has brought some of the worst examples to an end (Shayan et al. 2022, 10; see also Seriki 2020, 2). Global north corporate bodies have incentivised cultural mobility and intercultural encounters with local people, to provide transparency and to gain soft power. Visual images of impoverished African and Asian local people, relatively well-fed and well-dressed after foreign investment, garner societal buy-in of Western values and policy transfer. Traditional cultural languages are forgotten in favour of Western languages, most notably English; especially after cultural exchanges from Africa and Asia to the overseas business owner's homeland. Due to English being the global language of, for example, business, the creative industries and international trade licenses, English is culturally absorbed (Deloumeaux 2022, 163; see also Schneider 2023, 121). In this sense CSR represents an existential threat to many African and Asian countries due to its potential ability to enable 'language extinction' (Vermillion, National Geographic, 25 July 2022). CSR can act to undermine intercultural encounters, replacing such interaction with colonialist-laden forms of cultural mobility. Potentially due to CSR, cultural exchange can become derailed, a pale imitation of what is meant to be and fortunately often achieved. Many African and Asian people could be motivated to disown their cultural heritage, in favour of global north values; especially if their birth languages have been erased by their own national governments, who have prioritized the pursuit of overseas investment alongside CSR policies (Walton and Truong 2023, 394)[3]. Here, CSR is a causal factor of both cultural extinction alongside language extinction.

REDUCING CSR IN AFRICA AND ASIA, RESULTING IN LIMITED INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

Globalization has continued apace throughout the 21st century while CSR has receded (Dash 2024, 86; see also Tengblad and Ohlsson 2010, 653). Globalization complete with global supply chains, often keeps African country's workforces waiting for work and income, this tension clashes with the ethos of CSR (Hickel et al. 2022, 8; see also Gorg et al. UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organization 2018, 5). This power relationship situation can be described as "weaponised interdependence"; "a condition under which an actor can exploit its position in an embedded network to gain a bargaining advantage over others in a contained system" (Qobo and Mzyece 2023, 38). Internationally there has been an exponential growth in world trade and investment since the post-war period. Many countries, including weak African nations, have a private sector, which has been able to decide its own business, employment and trade rules and regulations (Azampo

2023, 86; see also Ward et al. IIED (International Institute for Environment and Development), 2008, 2). Often the business rules align with other countries in trading blocs whose members cooperate with each other, on economic, trade and working conditions deregulation. There is little in the way of governmental or non-state governance of business practices, so CSR has taken a back seat in recent times. Without the accountability and scrutiny agency of CSR, due to globalization, intercultural encounters between Africa, Asia and the global north are limited (Kim and Koo 2022, 370). Cultural mobility has only regularly occurred in Africa and Asia for business purposes.

CSR regulations in many countries are voluntary, in numerous other countries where they are mandatory, the legislation is barely enforced; in such cases CSR becomes symbolic, part of political posturing and greenwashing (Warren 2022, 170; see also Lin 2021, 434). CSR matters much more in the 2020s for advanced economies with digitally connected educated masses, which is simply not the case in many African and Asian countries. Increasingly large corporations find themselves the most powerful entities on the international stage, private enterprises that are a law unto themselves. Due to their global scope and influence, there is little national governments can do to control the business activities of these corporate giants (Wenqi et al. 2022, 3; see also Harrison and Coussens 2007, 84; Tamvada 2020, 4). One policy response has been to grant large government subsidies to foreign investors and international companies. This is in the hope large conglomerates will implement effective CSR policies that are environmentally sustainable, whilst conducting business in their country. In practice the profit motive comes first, African and Asian cultural practices take a back seat.

Large corporate bodies can threaten to leave a country if they feel changes are going to be introduced which would negatively affect their profitability. Similarly, international countries could use the threat of defaulting on government loans to influence trade policies in the host country (Do 2022, 2). The threat that members of a nation's corporate sector could choose to leave a country is very powerful even in advanced economies. African nations have little chance of resisting the effect of globalization on their trade climate and the opportunity to apply CSR in business (Mamo et al. 2023, 3; see also Zueva and Fairbrass 2021, 637). Global supply chains are kept moving by African governments and workers, who are too weak to insist on ethical, sustainable business practices (Shourkaei et al. 2024, 1479[4]; see also Villena and Gioia, Harvard Business Review, March-April 2020). Due to globalization, the corporate sector pays the government its taxes, alongside the wages for many families' food, accommodation and heating fuel. It is with this economic power that essentially the corporate sector alone, decides if they will indulge in CSR or not. African and Asian nations must comply with the terms demanded by private-sector corporate giants, or they will pay their taxes elsewhere. This enables the corporate sector to enable favourable policy transfer and prevent the exchange of cultural ideas, which are not conducive to their business. Such corporate practices put the investment destination host African or Asian country, in direct contravention of Article 6 of the Paris 2005 UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), Convention where: "each Party, may adopt measures aimed at protecting and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions within its territory" (UNESCO 2022, 299).

The lack of effective governance of the international corporate sector by African governments, is another causal factor which has reduced CSR activity in Africa (Bezzola et al. 2022, 4; see also Boidin and Ballet 2020, para. 28). Media images are another causal factor. When people became aware of corporate giants using sweatshop child labour working ten hours a day and more; alongside children losing their fingers or a limb in dangerous machines, there was public outcry, brand boycotts and more negative media attention (Sabates-Wheeler and Sumberg 2022, 47). Once exposed, exploitative corporate sector giants quickly released media statements, which included CSR responses to deflect public attention from worrying revelations. African nations hardly get any global media attention, so the business impetus to implement CSR initiatives is nowhere near as strong (Madanaguli et al. 2022, 452). Lack of governance with little to no oversight can result in Africa being abandoned, with a critical explanation of its social needs dumbed down.

From the start of the post-war period, Africa's transformation to having fewer countries correctly classed as LDCs is ongoing in the early 2020s (Vickers et al. WEF, 22 April 2022). Issues of clean water supply, African people not having access to affordable, unrationed, electricity and digital connectivity throughout the day impede international development. Sound political and economic reforms, underpinned by democratic principles, market-driven productivity and consumption are facilitating Africa's transformation. Widespread poverty caused mainly by illiteracy, and unhealthy social lifestyles including child mothers and children being required to work; impedes the development of a significant number of independent African states (UN, 5 February 2024; see also UNESCO 2021, 143). The poorest quintiles of individual African countries, often benefit last and least from any economic growth in the country. Poverty and inequality go hand-in-hand with political instability, creating societal uncertainty, which increases the risk of any CSR activity operating in the country (Sharma and Sathis 2022, 85). This means that political instability is a causal factor resulting in less international CSR in Africa.

The main approach to poverty reduction in Africa has been through accelerated economic growth, through the export of agriculture and minerals to overseas markets (Bjornlund et al. 2022, 853; see also UNCTAD 2021a, 33). In the 1990s globalization demanded the integration of African economies into the global economy. Globalization focused on profitable business with little thought of the economic, environmental and social consequences of its actions. African international development used to focus on the challenge of poverty reduction for all its population by 2030. This was in keeping with SDG 1 (UN 2021, 8). CSR governance requires and can contribute towards political and social stability in a region, which is essential for long-term economic sustainable development. Equally without international CSR and economic development, poverty reduction, political and social stability in Africa will be non-existent or short-lived (Bertelmann Stiftung, BTI Djibouti Country Report 2022, 5; see also Gebregziabher and Massarongo, World Bank, 2 June 2022). That's the failing international development cycle which many African nations are facing in the 2020s, exacerbated by the reduction of CSR by foreign investors. Effectively, Africa has been invaded by globalization, not being offered sufficient COP28, UNGC or UN SDGs complying alternatives, in favour of profit. Africa's international CSR sustainable business initiatives have been dumbed down.

Corporate bodies have to assess all their business practices whilst trading in a region or foreign country and interacting with the local community. The assessment needs to balance profitability, with the socio-political impact of the business operation whilst generating those profits. In the 1990s numerous corporate bodies had a requirement to participate in CSR with actions, which "must be beyond the firm's direct economic interest" (Cheruiyot-Koech and Reddy 2022, 2). From 2000 this focus changed, many in the foreign investments corporate sector in Africa, felt little need for the social impact of business activity assessments. Buffeted by globalization and intermittent political instability in numerous independent African countries, they simply would not practice international CSR. Corporations regularly conduct general assessments of business strategy, which can consider CSR schemes. During such general assessments, a corporation is often required to conduct a due diligence assessment, of the effects of its business practice. During this period, evaluation of CSR initiatives could take place to respond to potential concerns raised by general business strategy assessments. Once the evaluation of potential CSR practice reaches a certain value, corporate decision-makers particularly risk-averse CEOs, are less likely to approve implementation. Effectively the requirement for CSR "due diligence" in the corporate sector, acts as a policy driver, reducing international CSR in African countries

(Camoletto et al. 2022, 1124). ESG disclosures would have a similar effect, influencing corporate decision-makers to cutback or embark on CSR programmes. CSR implementation which would depend upon the business, economic, political and social climate at the time (Nugroho et al. 2024, 2; see also Thacker, The CSR Journal, 15 December 2021). Cultural mobility and intercultural encounters seem to operate in a separate sphere from business. With cultural artistic trends and doctrines only being recognised when it suits the dominant ideology, the international corporate sector and the host national government do so. CSR ameliorates this process, often acting to protect cultural heritage, whilst ensuring that FDI results in global north and global south company profit.

COVID-19, Global Supply Chains and International CSR in Africa

International supply and value chains in Africa, have been seriously affected by the COVID-19 global pandemic (Panwar et al. 2022, 12; see also Banga et al. 2020, 11). Food inflation has risen, staple food price rises have dramatically increased, speculative hoarding and food market cartels can form acting to push up prices (Thukwana Bloomberg, 11 March 2024; see also OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) 2020, 8). International CSR can be coordinated between competing corporate bodies, to source the ventilators African countries need to get through the ongoing pandemic. Individual or corporate partnerships can set up a chain of food banks at the rural village level to help reduce food poverty.

As part of international CSR, foreign investment banks can defer payments and freeze interest during COVID-19 (UNEP FI (United Nations Environment Programme - Finance Initiative, 21 April 2022). Corporations can supply small mobile COVID-19 clinics, to get as many African people vaccinated as possible. Tourism could also be supported by international CSR provision of independently verified tour guides, who can show people around the towns and cities in Africa. Final and intermediate goods for export from or import to Africa have been disrupted by COVID-19 (Usman et al. 2024, 14). This has led to delays, cancellations, and financial late delivery penalties, all of which have resulted in price rises for manufactured goods in Africa. A cross-border CSR initiative between numerous countries could temporarily lower some of the regulatory checks required, to remove blockages due to COVID-19. This can happen in parallel with the next phases of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) (Sun et al. 2022, 8; OECD, 2023, 4).

An unintended consequence of COVID-19 is that it has provided an early 2020s opportunity, to re-ignite CSR initiatives in business activities in Africa (Omidire 2023, 23; see also GOV.UK, Policy paper, 14 November 2023). Some corporate enterprises switched from transporting heavy goods to COVID-19 protective equipment. In the UK, the telecommunications corporate giant Vodafone increased the amount of internet data for existing users; and provided free access for new users. African countries where Vodafone has a presence could do likewise, as part of CSR in response to COVID-19 (Hannah et al. 2023, 3; see also He and Harries 2020, 177). African nations who are tea and/or coffee suppliers could organise groups of volunteers to call on households where elderly vulnerable people live. This would be to offer support in shopping, general home keeping and companionship to combat social isolation during the pandemic.

Many global societal problems could begin to be addressed by re-visiting CSR. African rural village fishermen could be utilised to supply their produce, which has been manually caught in human-powered boats (Peters University of Birmingham, 14 July 2023[5]; see also Smith and Basurto 2019, 13). An international sustainable development, private sector CSR stakeholder group would be: Contributing towards reducing environmental damage of natural habitats; preventing the overfishing of fish stocks; maintaining fishing skills of indigenous African populations; and contributing towards an African country's COP28 compliance, as there are no harmful CO_2 emissions from human powered boats (Sahara and Sahel Observatory 2022, 122; see also Ditlev-Simonsen 2022, 221). These are just a few international CSR initiatives, which are currently or could be relatively easily developed in Africa in the mid-2020s. All this suggested or actual international development activity in Africa will herald a profitable return for foreign corporations utilising international CSR in business. Adherence to COP28, the UN SDGs and the ten principles of UNGC 2024, will enhance ethical international CSR practice substantially.

CONCLUSIONS

The EU, a transnational actor in the global north, has a policy of "strengthened cultural diplomacy" towards developing countries, for example, Africa and Asia. The EU's policy is clearly to use cultural diplomacy to transfer its own democratic values to other countries it engages with (Serodes 2022, 71; see also Shiferaw and Di Ciommo 2023, 4). In this sense, the EU implements exchange diplomacy, intercultural dialogue and international broadcasting, as part of its policy towards cultural relations. The EU could extend its "Partnerships with universities" initiative, alongside the 2018 China-Africa Co-operation scholarship scheme, which has been successful in advancing cultural diplomacy (Serodes, 2022, 70; see also El Allame et al. 2022, 43). Chinese and African students were professionalised beyond work in the cultural sector, enabling the circulation of ideas between the two. One way to reverse the anti-international CSR trend in Africa since 2000 would be, for international development agencies, to work with the corporate sector on profitable business ventures (Yu et al. 2022, 5; Alizadeh, 2022, 2). The corporate body benefits from such partnership arrangements, being seen to be involved in CSR participation, which will then help build trust in African communities. Local regions can see that international development aid workers and corporate sector people are working together to deliver societal needs. Local governance revenue transparency type CSR can be implemented, so local African people become enabled to think and act independently. African populations should have the capacity to be consulted with, and then make decisions (Wu et al. 2023, 3; see also Bolger et al. 2021, 25 and 36). With the help of international development organisations, corporate bodies will feel that business risks have been reduced. This will give the African corporate sector the social space in the 2020s, to revisit CSR with profitability as they did in the 1990s. Effectively instead of Africa being invaded then abandoned, international development policy would come full circle to what is intended by the UNGC principles.

NOTES

1. Bueta's (2022) study is regarding how a circular economy can enable the adoption of plastic waste reduction policies. Bueta (2022, 90) discusses a form of cultural exchange, in the 'A policy shift alongside a cultural and societal shift' section of his study. This is manifest in Bueta's (2022, 90) indication, that 'education and information campaigns' are important to engender societal buy-in of plastic waste reduction in developing countries. Such countries including Africa and Asia have changed culturally, to be more environmentally aware of plastic waste disposal after global north foreign investment. The circular economy concept is complementary with and can be implemented using the ethos of corporate social responsibility for environmentally sustainable activity; both become dumbed down if there is a lack of political will. There is a paradox regarding Bueta's (2022) study, policy transfer has been enabled in Asia by utilising a circular economy, a concept that became popular in China in the 1990s. China can be considered to be both a global north and global south country developmentally and culturally.
2. Amnesty International's (2023) article describes the effect of illegal, unregulated, unreported fishing in Gambia. The article has duality, providing a critical comparison of the damage foreign investment can inflict upon vulnerable countries, for example, Gambia, if there is no consideration of corporate social responsibility.
3. Walton and Truong (2023, 391) discuss the "minority model myth", which is a causal factor that can result in people from ethnic minority communities, choosing to abandon their language as part of societal assimilation.
4. Please note, Shourkaei et al. (2024) use Patagonia a South American country as a case study.

5. This Peters (2023) one-page article provides a summary of a sustainable cooling and cold-chain project, which is targeted at African countries. Human-powered fishermen in Africa can benefit from refrigerated vehicles.

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