Conceptualising Corporate Community Development

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Globally there is an increasing focus on the private sector as a significant development actor. One element of the private sector's role emphasised within this new focus has been through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities, whereby the private sector claims to contribute directly to local development. There is now a substantial body of work on CSR but it is a literature that is mostly polarised, dominated by concerns from the corporate perspective, and not adequately theorised. Corporations typically do development differently to NGOs and donors, yet the nature and effects of these initiatives are both under-researched and under-conceptualised. In this paper, we argue that viewing CSR initiatives through a community development lens provides new insights into their rationale and effects. Specifically, we develop a conceptual framework that draws together agency and practice-centred approaches in order to illuminate the processes and relationships that underpin corporate community development initiatives.

Keywords: Corporate Community Development; Corporate Social Responsibility; poverty reduction; business; market-based development; community perspective; agency

Introduction

There are increasing calls globally for the private sector to play more central roles in international development (High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness: Proceedings 2011; Lodge and Wilson 2006; Pedersen and Huniche 2006), driven in part by a belief that 'governments and their international arms…have failed in their attempts to rid the planet of under-development, widespread inequalities and poverty'(Hopkins 2007). There is a certain irony in this call given the even longer-standing involvement of the private sector (through multinational corporations, private foreign direct investment flows and the like) in the 'failure' of the development project, but leaving this aside it is clear that the 'private sector' does assume a wide variety of functions and roles in the broader question of ‘development’ (Rugman and Doh 2008).

The ‘private sector’ has for decades been involved in a range of development policy and practices: through central elements of development policy (such as the still resonating Structural Adjustment Programmes); by facilitating economic growth (private-public partnerships are a contemporary expression of this long-standing trend); through private contractors and consultants involved in development (including both national and expatriate actors); and via the private sector funding, or doing, community development - typically under the guise of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Rugman and Doh 2008). This trend has strengthened over recent decades, embedded in the logic of neoliberal growth and the retreat of the developmental state. But can the private sector really work to address poverty and under-development when, as famously argued by Milton Friedman, ‘the business of business is business’? Claims made in support of private sector actors doing ‘development’ often ignore the fact that making profits and assisting the poor and vulnerable may be oppositional goals.

In the context where there are increasing expectations of the private sector to engage more deeply in development roles, there is need for a greater awareness of the limits to what large corporates are able to achieve when doing community development. Corporations have a range of developmental *effects*, some intended, some not. Some of these effects are derivative of the neoliberal context, others are due to community-level relationships and agency, and others derive from the corporation’s own intentions. The CSR lens is business-oriented and it fails to capture all these effects – it fails to do this empirically (because that lens simply does not look for some of these effects) and it fails to do so theoretically (because CSR theory derives from relatively orthodox notions of management).

Our argument is that the outcomes of CSR initiatives that are developmentally focussed are shaped not only by the imperatives, structures and effects of corporations working within neoliberal environments, but also by the relational effects and agency of the communities that are the *targets/objects* of these activities. We thus focus our discussion on what we refer to as Corporate Community Development (CCD), that is, those corporate activities enacted with the specific intent to benefit communities, and we develop a framework which focuses attention on the perspectives of impacted communities. From this vantage point the critical evaluative elements of these programmes and effects are the ways in which CCD impacts on, and is constituted by, relationships, agency and the negotiation of the meanings of and spaces for development. We argue that best way to view how community perspectives intersect with the discourses and programmes of the corporation is through an examination of CCD in place: the negotiations, practices, discourses and effects that make up the 'development interface', to borrow Long's (2001) notion (see Figure 1). We develop below an argument that a grounded, practice-based perspective is required; however this project is also part of a wider examination of CCD practices and outcomes in the Pacific Islands (see Banks et al. 2013; Scheyvens and Hughes 2015).

We begin with a discussion of the increasing roles of the private sector in the development space before moving on to look specifically at the notion of CSR, noting the limited theorisation of much of this research to date. We then focus attention on CCD, as explained, those corporate activities which are directed deliberately at supporting community development. This provides the backdrop to the second part of the paper, which maps out a conceptual framework which we argue provides a more nuanced and useful lens through which to view and analyse CCD than many of the polarised and polarising accounts of CSR in the literature. This approach is based upon the need for theoretically-informed work which seeks to understand CCD from the perspective of local communities. In so doing, it draws upon concepts of immanent and intentional development, notions of 'the gift' and broader ideas of relationships, and the recognition that individuals and communities can often exert considerable agency when negotiating developmental outcomes with corporate actors.

The 'private sector' and intentional development

Although the private sector has become the focus of increased developmental attention over recent decades this has not always been the case; indeed, development outside the sphere of market processes has long been considered the remit of the state, of multilateral organisations, most notably the IMF and World Bank, and more recently, of civil society. This separation of international development from the private sector was in large part the result of distrust of business by the broader development community and a reluctance to make business accountable for development outcomes (Blowfield 2012, 415). Liberal economic purists 'considered the very idea that companies should be mindful of their responsibilities to society as dangerous', arguing that companies contributed to the public good through the creation of wealth (Blowfield 2012, 415).

Despite this, the private sector has long been considered an important actor in development. In particular, a focus on the role of the private sector in wealth creation and economic growth was reflected in the emergence of the Washington Consensus in the 1980s, when 'development thinking moved away from the central role of the state, [and] the private sector increasingly became seen as more efficient, more productive and more conducive to economic dynamism' (Lodge and Wilson 2006; Schulpen and Gibbon 2001, 1). Poverty alleviation was regarded as the result of economic growth, which was best achieved through the private sector (Schulpen and Gibbon 2001, 2), whereby successful companies generate local employment and stimulate further economic activity, for example. This view aligns with Cowen and Shenton's (1996) notion of 'immanent development', development that occurs, albeit often chaotically and with little sense of overall control or direction, at the hands of broad capitalist forces, and with Hart's (2001) distinction between big 'D' and little 'd' development, where little 'd' development represents the 'development of capitalism as a geographically uneven, profoundly contradictory set of historical processes' (650). In addition to the central long-standing role of the private sector in this immanent development, neoliberal influences have lead to an increasing involvement on the private sector in development activities. For example Essex (2013) shows how during the 1980s and 1990s strong neoliberal influences came to bear on the USAID programme, thus a 'geoeconomic' approach came to sit alongside the geopolitical approach which had previously exerted the strongest influence on the agency's work. In the later 1990s and 2000s efforts were made to mitigate some of the harsher impacts of market-based decision-making and to make aid policy more socially inclusive, however the end goal, neoliberal accumulation, remains largely intact (Murray and Overton, 2011). Even efforts to enhance the role of the state have actually led to increased dependence on consultants (Murray and Overton, 2011:317). Roberts (2014) provides a prime example of this, with her recent work demonstrating how heavily USAID relies on contractors, many of them for-profit entities, to do its work. Now, more than ever, neoliberal policy has moved to strengthen the position of the private sector as an effective development actor.

In recent years, the shrinking of the state, alongside various claims that donors and governments had failed to eliminate poverty, have led to further calls for the private sector to take a greater and more direct role in development. A desire for the continuing inclusion of the private sector in development was clearly reflected at the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF4) in Busan, Korea in December 2011 (IBLF 2011), convened by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC). At the forum there was a renewed focus on, and privileging of, economic growth rather than poverty reduction (Eyben and Savage 2012; Mawdsley, Savage, and Kim 2013), and an explicit declaration that business was an 'equal partner' in development. The proceedings of this forum emphasised the central role of the private sector in 'advancing innovation, creating wealth, income and jobs, mobilising domestic resources and … contributing to poverty reduction' (High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness: Proceedings 2011, 25). The forum aimed not only to improve the legal, regulatory and administrative environment for the development of private investment, but to promote public-private partnerships in the development sector and the scaling up of efforts in support of development goals, and to explore ways to 'advance both development and business outcomes so they are mutually reinforcing' (High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness: Proceedings 2011, 26). Although the private sector was not as visible as the civil society sector at Busan, Mawdsley et al (2013) argues its participation helped to create the discourse of a 'new global partnership' and prompted observations this was a 'new direction' or 'turning point' in development cooperation.

This 'new direction' in the role of the private sector was also seen at the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012 during which there was an emphasis on leveraging the private sector for sustainable development (Clémençon 2012, 331). A Corporate Sustainability Forum was held during the conference which sought to 'bring greater scale and quality to corporate sustainability agendas' (U.N. 2012). Meanwhile, the United Nations Global Compact has identified the post-2015 development era as 'an historic opportunity for the international business community to contribute to the attainment of worldwide sustainability and development objectives' (U.N. 2013).

The idea that the private sector can and should play a more intentional role in implementing development has thus become embedded in the mainstream of current political and economic thought. As such, the conceptualisation of the role of business in development has fundamentally changed (Blowfield & Dolan, 2014; Richey and Ponte, 2014) and businesses have been strongly encouraged to take a proactive role in international development and to become a 'consciously engaged agent of development' (Blowfield 2012, 415) rather than simply contributing to development through economic growth. In addition, as Blowfield and Dolan (2014, 25) argue, business has 'started to look for "offensive" opportunities whereby companies could burnish their reputation by tackling development challenges'. This is akin to Cowen and Shenton's (1996) 'intentional development' whereby a benevolent 'trustee' – the company in this case – might invest corporate resources to directly undertake community development initiatives; and with Hart's (2001) big "D' development, the post-second world war project of intervention in the 'third world'. These intentional corporate community development (CCD) activities are usually regarded as part of a company's broader commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), a term that generates much debate. CSR can include a wide range of activities from environmental programmes to employee benefits to community activities. From the viewpoint of community development, many of these CSR activities are of little concern or interest to communities because they do not impact on them directly: a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions is of little development benefit for neighbouring communities, for example. This is why we suggest that, from a local developmental perspective, CCD is more instructive: this helps us to focus on those corporate activities enacted with the specific intent to benefit communities, and to examine how such activities might be regarded by communities that they are directed at.

Responsible corporates?

The vast literature on CSR, much of it stemming from a business perspective, is remarkably under-theorised, in critical terms at least. Thus CSR is typically presented in the business literature as an ideologically neutral concept (Merino and Valor 2011). Hopkins (2007, 9), for example, defines CSR as a corporate strategy that is 'concerned with treating stakeholders of the firm ethically, or in a socially responsible manner', creating higher standards of living for employees and for external stakeholders (including the local community) while preserving the profitability of the corporation. Such an approach contains a number of assumptions – about who decides on criteria for socially responsible behaviour, or how stakeholders are defined, for example – and suggests that CSR is clearly a 'win-win' phenomenon, when the reality is more complex.

Blowfield and Frynas (2005, 503) refer to CSR as an umbrella term, arguing that it has become so broad as to allow people to interpret and adopt it for many different purposes. While this can suit the interests of business associations and government organisations, more critical voices are starting to come to the fore, particularly when considering the potential of CSR as a tool for development and poverty eradication (Merino and Valor 2011). This section considers some of the critical views of CSR with a view to illuminating further the ideological and theoretical basis on which they are grounded.

With most research on CSR coming from a business perspective and underpinned by 'the claim…that it is profitable to behave well' (Lund-Thomsen 2005, 621), Utting (2005) notes that business has become a 'proactive partner in shaping and disseminating the CSR agenda' (2005, 378). As such, one of the key critiques is the claim that CSR prioritises the agenda and views of the corporate entities rather than the communities who are supposedly at the receiving end of CSR/CCD. It is recognised that corporates themselves may be the biggest beneficiaries of these activities if they lead to lowering of costs (e.g. through environmental measures which result in energy savings, or reduced need for security, or enhanced brand reputation). Indeed CSR practices in communities are often driven by 'extreme economic expediency' (Akpan, 2006; Font et al., 2012), and the rationale for undertaking CSR is often couched in terms of the 'business case' (Ashley & Haysom, 2006; Blowfield, 2005, Frynas, 2008, Utting, 2005). Rather than a commitment to socially responsible practice, a Christian Aid report (2004) argued that CSR is driven by companies concerned with their own reputations and the need to continue to make a profit: companies need to defend their public image, to attract investors, to have good PR, to engage with campaigners and to obtain permission to operate.

An important rhetorical aspect of the corporate commitment to CSR is voluntarism (Dahlsrud, 2007), which is essentially a form of self-regulation. This is the understanding that companies have a responsibility for their own impact on society and the natural environment, and the behaviour of those they do business with, and that this may extend beyond legal compliance and the liability of individuals (Blowfield and Frynas 2005, 503). By developing CSR programmes, companies seek to reassure stakeholders and the public that they are responsible and ethical, while at the same time deflecting the need for regulatory intervention (Newell 2005). Contrary to the notion of voluntarism, however, some of what corporations do with communities is based on legal requirements – paying royalties or lease payments to landowners, or negotiating agreements prior to a development going ahead (Banks et al. 2013; Imbun 2007). There is no doubt that CSR activities can be used to enhance the public image of a company (through reporting of their charitable activities or 'sustainability' efforts) and can create an amicable relationship with local communities, which might be required to allow the business to function well: this is sometimes referred to as a 'social license to operate' (Harvey 2014). However in terms of specific CCD efforts, whether this is support for youth groups, educational scholarships, a health centre or related activities, some authors claim that these can be ploys to 'buy out' local support or defuse conflict with communities, rather than emerging from a genuine sense of responsibility (Bebbington 2010; Blowfield 2005; Gilberthorpe and Banks 2012; Utting 2007)

In addition, and consistent with the mixed motivations of corporations, what constitutes 'community development' to a business is typically different from how governments, or NGOs, might constitute this: a focus by corporations on concrete outcomes (often literally) in the form of roads and buildings, and on the relatively safe, high profile and often locally highly prized fields of health and education, may obscure more fundamental questions about rights, power, social justice and community empowerment. This is also reflected in the co-option of language – for example of 'empowerment' (Dolan and Rajak 2011, 3) or partnership (Gardner et al. 2012). This can conceal a tendency to favour substantive initiatives such as provision of minimum wages, while overlooking process dimensions such as labour rights and empowerment (Blowfield 2010). CSR programmes in the Peruvian and Melanesian mining sectors, for example, have defined community development options in a very narrow fashion, focusing on enterprise development and microfinance while excluding other forms of development assistance (Banks et al. 2013; Bebbington 2010).

Interestingly, some corporates – such as Chevron who have developed a ‘community engagement’ programme alongside their gas field in Sylhet, Bangladesh – have captured the language and tone of neoliberal notions of development in ways that also effectively limit their own responsibilities to communities. They thus utilise ‘discourses of sustainability and “helping people to help themselves” [which] mitigate against the long term provision of services or assistance by donors’ (Gardner et al. 2012, 174). This is a very superficial use of the term ‘sustainability’ however: many authors including Henderson (2007, 231) argue that sustainable development implies a deeper, longer and broader commitment to communities and the environment.

These critiques highlight the way in which CSR is underpinned by neoliberal ideals, voluntary approaches and embedded liberalism (Utting, 2005. 378). Because of these ideological and theoretical foundations, it can be difficult to argue that CSR can make an impact on wider development agendas. Arguably CSR initiatives typically do not contribute significantly to poverty reduction (Jenkins, 2005) and may only be able to address some of the ‘symptoms of mal-development’ (Utting, 2005). Sharp (2006) takes this critique further, drawing on Ferguson (1990) to argue that CSR discourse can effectively function as an ‘anti-politics machine’, redefining entitlement holders as stakeholders, and shifting the focus of the causes of poverty away from corporations, underlining Blowfield’s (2005) claim that CSR fails to address the structural dimensions of the relationship between business and poverty. Critics have thus lambasted CSR as a tool for inciting ‘deference and dependency’ (Filer, Burton, and Banks 2008; Rajak 2010). Bebbington concurs, raising concerns that ‘these programmes help usher in forms of institutional change that are quite distinct from those that might otherwise have been created through conflict’ (2010, p.106). This has the effect of shutting down public debate (p.107) and narrowing and defining debates on development options (p.108, see also Blowfield 2010).

Partly in response to the criticisms outlined above, some companies have made considerable strides to change their approach and their practice regarding CSR. CSR is no longer always based on paternalism: there are suggestions that it has evolved into a more participatory approach that is driven increasingly by community priorities (Muthuri, Chapple, and Moon 2008; Yakovleva, Brust, and Mutti 2010). Some companies are now moving beyond philanthropy to a more encompassing approach whereby the desire to act in a more socially responsible manner is embedded in the management style and values of a company, and long-term rather than ad hoc support is offered to communities (Ashley and Haysom 2006; see also Harvey 2014). Some CSR activities have made real improvements to the livelihoods and development prospects of affected. But equally clearly, such outcomes are not universal, inclusive, or an inevitable result of CSR. The diverse forms of engagement in and approaches to community development being developed and applied by corporations with a wide variety of motivations and methods means that CSR as a phenomenon is 'likely to deliver a bewildering variety of benefits in unpredictable ways' (Sharp 2006, 221), as well as not deliver many of those they seek to promise.

Community perspectives on private sector initiatives in developing countries

What we argue here, is that the potential of CSR activities is more likely to be realised when sufficient attention is paid to analysing them from the perspectives of impacted communities in developing countries, a positionality that is rarely adopted in the literature. This is particularly important when looking at CCD initiatives, which are undertaken with the specific intent of benefiting communities, and which often occur in contexts where there is a level of obligation on the part of the corporation, for example where the state is largely absent and corporations are expected to provide services and infrastructure.

In contexts where governments fail to provide services, corporations face increasing demands for both one-off philanthropic contributions and long-term service provision. Eweje (2006) notes that in Nigeria, communities tend not to make demands of government but of the company instead. This is the case in many other locations, especially in remote areas where services and infrastructure are of a very poor standard (see Banks et al. 2013; Imbun 2007; Visser 2006). Bradly (2015) found that with an industry like tourism in Fiji, the differences between the basic amenities available to local people and the luxuries available to international guests at a tourist resort or lodge in a developing country can be extreme. This also occurs in the mining sector, where the multibillion dollar investments of a resource company in infrastructure and services, housing of employees and company facilities can often occur in a context where many local residents struggle to meet basic needs and may not have access to safe water or electricity. In settings such as these, with the inequities between local and non-local lifestyles so clearly evident to all, companies typically do feel obligated to provide a level of goods and services to adjacent communities. Nevertheless the enduring disparities will typically shape community members' views of development and provide an important influence on the relationship that develops between a corporation and the surrounding community.

It is also instructive to consider community perspectives on CCD and their expectations of corporate actors in places where systems of communal land tenure exist. Landowning communities whose land is leased by corporations for resource extraction, tourism or other purposes typically will not view that land under the narrow frame of an economic 'resource': what their land means to them will be connected with their long term interests regarding their land beyond the life of the development, and such interests will typically encompass social, cultural and environmental dimensions - such as providing a connection with ancestors and a place to sustain future generations - in addition to economic interests.

These contextual factors highlight the power inequities that can exist between poor communities and corporations, pointing to a key reason why we argue it is valuable to consider CCD from community perspectives. Newell (2005) notes that it is important to draw attention to the role of poor communities as they are often inadequately represented in discussions of corporate responsibility, may not be identified as stakeholders or may be represented by intermediaries, are often the ones 'in the front line of activity by industries in the extractive sector' or targeted as 'sites for the industrial activity that no one else wants' (543). Yet these poor communities are not well represented in the policy process, and they are often in conflict, sometimes with other clans and other times with businesses or the state, over land claims.

The discussion above has drawn on a range of literature from both business and development perspectives to show both the potential and limitations of CSR in shaping community development. There is a clear need to move beyond the current polarised positions on the effectiveness of CSR activities, but like Sharp (2006) we are not pursuing some form of final reconciliation between the opposing discourses, precluded as it is by the complexity of the issues around CSR. Rather, we argue that a more productive approach is to focus on CCD activities, and to explore conceptually the developmental spaces that these CCD initiatives shape and inhabit. This in turn can provide a better understanding of the strengths, the weaknesses and the possibilities around such CCD. The following section of this paper seeks to do this by developing a critical conceptualisation of CCD, one that we argue offers a more nuanced understanding of them and specifically recognises the relational effects and the agency of communities that are the targets of CCD.

Re-conceptualising community development by corporations

The corollary to the under-theorised nature of much of the CSR literature is its overwhelmingly empirical nature – being primarily derived from the business studies literature with a strong applied theme to it ('how can CSR efforts work better for the corporation?'). Recent critical development studies work on CSR (see particularly Bebbington, Blowfield, Frynas, Gardner, Rajak, Sharp and Utting) tends to be the exception, and has noted the importance of relationships, of agency (both within the corporation and the community), and the contingent and contextual nature of CSR and its effects. Based on the discussion above and our own work in the area, we argue that a more nuanced theoretical approach to CCD, one that in a sense 'reverses the lens' on CCD by adopting a community perspective would emphasise three key insights towards better understanding the corporate role in development:

(1) The need to contextualise CCD initiatives within the wider immanent changes facing communities that result from having an enormous capitalist enterprise established in the vicinity;

(2) the creation of particular types of relationships and expectations between companies and communities, particularly in terms of the 'gift' of CCD; and

(3) the recognition that recipient communities have agency (albeit contextual and partial), and are able to negotiate power relations with companies and shape, in part at least, the outcomes of their encounters.

CCD in its immanent context

The first strand of our framework suggests that CCD initiatives ('intentional development' activities) occur in the context of broader, often rapid social and economic changes ('immanent development') in communities. This distinction is echoed by Blowfield (2012), and Blowfield and Dolan (2014) who argue that there is a difference we need to discern between corporations as an 'actor in development' – a tool of immanent development in other words – through, for example creating jobs and investments in infrastructure, and business as a 'development actor' (taking responsibility for the outcomes of its 'intentional' programmes).

While the distinction between immanent and intentional development has been useful in many traditional development contexts, it does blur in relation to CCD, particularly when the wider context of the development efforts is considered. Clearly, private sector investments bring a range of potential development opportunities, some of which are directly related to the nature of the 'immanent' capitalist enterprise itself – local employment and business supply contracts, for example. In developing contexts, though, the private sector investment may also be the direct result of intentional policy decisions of governments or the actions of development institutions who support private enterprise for economic growth and development. As such, the company is both a part of the immanent development landscape, and closely linked to intentional development interventions. The distinction becomes further muddied when the impacts of immanent changes are considered. As Cowen and Shenton (1996, 438) note, intentional development 'consists of the means to compensate for the destructive properties of immanent change'. While some of that change may be positive (jobs, infrastructure), other changes have significant negative impacts particularly on local communities, and as such the development demands of local communities are often in reaction to social change created by immanent development. The resulting CCD efforts may be – as Blowfield (2012) indicates – the consequence of a corporation genuinely taking responsibility for the outcomes of its programmes, or it may (as some critics of CSR would argue, see Bebbington 2010; Frynas 2005; Shever 2010) be motivated by self-promotion and conflict avoidance. Regardless, intentional CCD efforts are integrally intertwined with the impacts of the social and economic changes resulting from the presence of the corporation, and the wider immanent changes facing communities. Communities will typically read corporate intent into both intentional and immanent changes that they experience. As such, when seen from a community's perspective, a corporation's CCD activities are embedded within and evaluated alongside, the broader impacts and immanent effects that their presence has generated.

One of the most pervasive and significant dimensions of these immanent development changes are their uneven nature across the affected societies, in part because their origins flow so directly from the immense capitalist-embedded project (be it a mine or a resort, for example) that drive them. Axes of inequality – pre-existing, and capitalist driven – typically become entrenched around such massive projects. Bebbington (2010) further argues that corporate CSR programmes are reshaping the local meanings of development itself, by creating an emphasis on specific forms and types of development (and particularly the institutional and the economic dimensions), and delivering benefits in ways that promote particular spaces of inclusion, exclusion and conflict. Blowfield (2010), for example, notes that what research has been done reveals problems related to the distribution of benefits and the alienation of intended beneficiaries. There is a need then to remain vigilant to the ways in which development outcomes will vary within affected (and non-affected) communities. In addition the definition of 'community', and of affected areas, as well as the nature of their 'responsibilities' is typically done by the corporation - both formally (see Kapelus 2002) and through their practices - allowing corporations to delineate the extent, geographic and socially, of their responsibilities (Banks 2006).

'The Gift' and the nature of corporate-community relationships

The second strand of our locally-focused framework draws on recent work on understanding donor/corporate-recipient/community relations. Relationships between communities and companies are central to the ways in which communities will respond to CCD initiatives (Groves and Hinton 2004). There is a need to move beyond the focus on the material flows that connect individuals and communities to companies – money and infrastructure, for example – to examine relationships and local perceptions of these relationships. From the point of view of communities, this means CCD needs to be situated in the context of the broader changes that the corporation's activities initiate and drive in the community: the immanent development discussed above. However CCD is only one part of the broader processes of change influencing a community, and hence from a community's perspective only one part of the relationship they have with a business or a developer.

One way of viewing these relationships is through the lens of 'The Gift', as explained in the Mauss' (1954) influential anthropological account. In 'The Gift', Mauss discusses empirical examples from a range of traditional societies, describing the obligations to give and receive, and the moral bond established when gifts are exchanged. He argues that gift-giving in traditional societies is more than just the exchange of single commodities, but is a 'total prestation' standing for all aspects of society and as such the process of gift giving and the gift itself is laden with power and meaning. This stands in contrast to earlier understandings of gifting as altruistic, something freely given without expectation of return (Kowalski 2011).

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that the self-interest in The Gift is not in what is given in return, but in the relationship that is opened up, albeit often a paternalistic one. For example Gardner et al. (2012, 174) highlight how a community is likely to seek ‘connection’ through relationships with the company, rather than becoming party to corporate ‘sustainability’ initiatives which are predicated on promoting local autonomy from projects. And relationships of trust are viewed by Eweje (2007) as critical to the realisation of local community aspirations, and with this to the success of corporate development initiatives.

While the relationship may be fundamentally paternalistic, the receiver, is still expected to reciprocate. In line with Mauss’ thinking, the 2012 report ‘Time to Listen’ which involved participatory research to gather the views of over 6,000 aid recipients from around the world, noted the following: ‘Many describe how assistance begins as a boost to people’s spirits and energies, but over time, becomes entrenched as an increasingly complicated system of reciprocated dependence’ (Anderson, Brown, and Jean 2012, 2). Rajak (2010) draws on key elements of this approach to interrogate the nature of the reciprocity that is implied in the ‘gifts’ of aid and corporate development projects. Accepting the ‘gift’ of a CCD programme means the community is obligated to the company, and can be seen as being contained. For example, if a company’s ‘community investment’ means that a community’s children have scholarships to attend school, that their health centre gets an injection of resources and that the adults can seek employment with the company, then this community is less likely to want to challenge the practices of the company.

In terms of these relationships, Harvey (2014) issues a salutary warning that the notions of trust and relationships cannot simply be attached to CCD initiatives by companies without attention to the ways in which the same ethos is promoted internally within the corporation. In this context, it means that research on CCD needs to be cognisant of the ways in which different management styles will influence attitudes to and relations with those living in adjacent communities. One element of this, and an aspect that Harvey (a senior player within the global mining giant, Rio Tinto) particularly notes is the fact that many corporate managers have business and/or technical backgrounds, rather than expertise in community development or relationships (see also Ashley and Haysom 2006; Bebbington 2010; Frynas 2005; Yakovleva, Brust, and Mutti 2010)

What this indicates, then is a need for research on CCD to explore the ways in which power relations and varying relations of trust/distrust at a range of levels, and in often complex ways, construct the relationships between corporations and differently positioned individuals in the communities around them. This includes exploration of how corporate structures and culture at the level of corporate headquarters versus their local in-country offices might influence the nature of relationships with communities. Most significant is how these relationships are viewed by community members.

Agency and practice: negotiating power

Linking the two threads above together is a focus on agency and practice: the actual development activities of these corporations and the ways in which individuals and communities negotiate and respond to CCD. Here we find it useful to engage with agency and practice theory (Ortner 2006), and Long's (2001) conceptualisation of a dynamic, situated and relational 'development interface' as the space in which corporations and communities negotiate these power relations and shape the outcomes of these CCD activities and encounters. In particular Long's (2001) actor-oriented approach addresses the multiplicity of practices and the interactions of individual actors in development. This approach emphasises the centrality of agency, and the ability of people and groups to carve out spaces for their livelihoods and development even in very difficult social, economic and political environments. Long's account of the 'development interface' - the space in which the culturally-encoded discourse, power, agendas and priorities of different development actors intersect – provides a means of accounting for how the tensions between broader structures and agendas and local agency are played out in practice. This focus draws attention to micro-level processes, and the individual and local-level practices that determine development outcomes. The heterogeneous mix of individuals within communities can thus be recognised as active participants in shaping CCD activities and their outcomes, not simply passive recipients, and the dynamics of the local context – local politics, and the relationships between kin and with outsiders – are acknowledged as important in shaping relationships between communities and corporations, and by implication the form and effects of CCD activities. The end result is often a 'complicated mix of intended and unintended consequences of human action' (Long 1992:272).

Emphasising agency can also help to open what Lie (2008, 132) terms the 'black boxes of discourse' by highlighting the connections between policy and practice and drawing attention to actors' practices and their 'valuable, reflective insights on how they receive, translate, interpret, resist, manipulate, or embody development discourse' (Lie 2008, 132). As Ortner (2006, 151) notes, individuals and groups are always embedded in webs of relationships, power or affection, and their agency is continuously negotiated. To address the tension between power and agency, Ortner uses practice theory, an anthropological perspective that restores the actor to social processes without losing sight of the larger structures that constrain (but also enable) social action (2006, 3). She argues that there should be a dialectical rather than oppositional relationship between structural constraints and the practices of social actors. Ultimately, such approaches enable an examination of agency in the face of capitalism.

In summary, we believe that deploying agency and practice-centred approaches to understand community conceptions of CCD illuminates the processes and relationships that underpin CCD. This enables us to recognise both the structures that enable and constrain development activities of corporations, and the ways in which individuals and communities negotiate the inherent power relations and shape the outcomes of these encounters.

Conceptual framework for examining CCD

Together the deployment of these three conceptual lenses allows for the construction of a novel understanding of CCD initiatives from the perspective of communities, and provides the discursive space to extend existing theorisation of corporate/community engagements, and of the developmental role of the private sector. One way to represent this is schematically, and although such approaches do lose much of the sophistication and nuance that sits behind the argument, they can also highlight some of the key linkages that we are trying to make (see Figure 1).

The substantive point that we would make is that the relationship between corporation and community in the development context as illustrated here is complex, and while CSR/CCD initiatives form part of this relationship, they are far from being the only elements. Other effects of the corporate presence (immanent elements such as local business development, employment, price effects, environmental transformation for example) intersect with local agendas, structures, power relations and agency, shaping the development outcomes and relationships that evolve.

Central to understanding these outcomes is the ‘development interface’ – the spaces in which the different actors interact, each differentially endowed with culturally inflected agency and constrained or enabled by elements of cultural, economic or political structures. Long (2001) describes the interface as spaces where ‘discrepancies of social interest, cultural interpretation, knowledge and power are mediated and perpetuated or transformed at critical points of linkage or confrontation' (50). It is in these spaces that relationships are negotiated, deployed, reshaped and, occasionally, severed, and from these – rather than the corporate intentions and motivations recorded in tidy accounts of CSR reports – that the practices and outcomes of CCD activities flow. Power cuts through the interface, which means at times and in places, one party to the relationship has greater ability to shape agendas and outcomes, but this is rarely predetermined or static. This points to the need for a better and deeper understanding of the context around the 'interface' encounters. Context matters as it shapes the ways in which agency can be expressed: we also need to be aware of culturally specific notions of agency (Strathern 1988; Long 2001) and the ways in which this affects negotiations and practices.

Flowing from this figure and the above discussion of the contribution of critical development studies approaches to an understanding of CCD, we finish below by reflecting on the value of a community-centric CCD research agenda, showing how this can inform thinking on appropriate policy and practice interventions around CCD activities. We argue that the following will help to elucidate the value of CCD initiatives from the perspectives of local communities, whose views have been underrepresented in most past work on CSR/CCD.

Conclusion

As noted at the outset of this article, there are high expectations of the private sector playing an increasingly prominent role in the realms of intentional development. Beyond the hype and promise of the private sector responding to calls to direct more resources into development interventions and to engage in more development partnerships, it is important to reflect on the fact that corporations work from a particular perspective (profits) and in a narrower development space than other development actors (Banks 2006; Bebbington 2010; Rajak 2010; Scheyvens and Russell 2010; Scheyvens 2011). There is both potential and risk associated with the private sector playing a stronger role in 'social good' functions such as community development. On a positive note, corporate initiatives in remote areas of developing countries can bring significant benefits. Apart from contributing to immanent development (Blowfield's 'development tool', or Hart's little 'd' development) via large scale investments in infrastructure, creation of jobs and so forth, they are also involved in a range of increasingly large and sophisticated community development initiatives (Blowfield's 'development agent', or Hart's big 'D' development).

The aim of this article was to re-focus discussions of CSR so that they are centred on the interests and perspectives of local communities. We have thus explored some of the conceptual issues associated with corporations which operate in developing countries and are increasingly taking on specific development functions in surrounding communities, focusing specifically on what they do that impacts on communities by analysing Corporate Community Development (CCD).

We have proposed a theoretical perspective that we argue offers an understanding of these initiatives that is more nuanced than that found in the business and development literature to date, and that specifically recognises relational effects and the agency of communities that are the targets of CCD. As noted above CSR is actually a complex system and as such it should not surprise us that in particular contexts, individuals and communities will experience a wide range of different, often novel, effects: 'a community development project here, an initiative aiming to advance the situation of one or other category of stakeholders there', as Sharp (2006, 221) puts it. We would argue that the foundations for a new conceptualisation of CCD lie in a focus on practices – what is done, what happens and how people and communities respond to it – rather than rhetoric, and in particular to do this from a community's point of view. To date there has been a lack of research which seeks to understand the impact of CCD approaches from the point of view of the supposed 'beneficiaries' (Idemudia 2011; Blowfield and Frynas 2005; Frynas 2008; Merino and Valor 2011). Understanding CCD activities and processes from a community perspective will help to illuminate the complex flows and interactions, and to better account for the diverse and often contradictory outcomes.

There have been calls also for a new agenda for critical research on CSR, including the development of impact assessment methodologies that are 'people-centred and use alternative indicators of people's well-being' (Prieto-Carrón et al. 2006, 987). One recent development on this score has been an industry initiative to develop 'better' indicators for linking mining with development outcomes (see ICMM 2013). As Sharp (2006) warns, though, there is a need to go beyond improved empirical studies of the 'impacts' of CCD initiatives because many of the differences in positions between writers, and in the polarized rhetoric around CCD, are not simply 'amenable to arbitration on the basis of empirical evidence': they revolve around more fundamental questions such as the ways in which the developmental spaces for communities are actively shaped and reshaped by these initiatives, and by their collision with broader processes of containment and transformation. Relationships are of course central to whether communities will have the opportunity to effectively negotiate the development space and interface to their own benefit.

In all these contexts, for the developmental potential of CCD to be realised, community views of these activities need to prioritised, and if this is to happen the particular shape and processes around CCD initiatives will almost certainly assume a qualitatively different form to the dominant corporate-driven ventures.

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Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: A post-development approach to Corporate Community Development.