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Ecosocial work through corporate social responsibility: the case of company engagement with civil society in coastal communities in Mauritius

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a case study of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in coastal areas of Mauritius where company CSR work has brought new ways of engaging with communities. The study examines in what ways companies are involved in ecosocial work and what the challenges and possibilities are from an environmental justice perspective. Based on interviews with representatives of companies and other organizations involved with CSR the study shows that CSR involvement in ecosocial work may bring possibilities for advancing environmental justice for local communities as it can enhance resources and capacity building, as well as bring actors together and play a role in advocacy and empowerment work. Challenges include that companies may have difficulties in contributing to greater justice in terms of community involvement. Moreover, inequalities and substantial environmental justice issues, such as access to land and safe housing, are difficult to fully address through a CSR framework.

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CSR; ecosocial work; environmental justice; Mauritius

Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) involves the merging of economic considerations with social and environmental aspects and it is concerned with how companies engage with those affected by their operations, such as local communities. As such the CSR work of companies bears relevance for local social and environmental development and how sustainability is achieved in local contexts. How specifically company CSR work relates to local communities and ecosocial work will be examined in this article based on a case study of CSR in the Mauritian tourism and international real estate sectors. Mauritius is a country where company CSR involvement has been made mandatory and where regulations direct company involvement in CSR towards socio-economic development and environmental issues. In this context much of the CSR involvement can be seen as activities in the field of social work since companies are involved in enhancing wellbeing and promoting social change and development through, for

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instance, setting up welfare services, organizing and providing resources for community work, and undertaking advocacy and political interventions. In part, and particularly in coastal areas of Mauritius, company CSR involvement is oriented towards addressing vulnerabilities that often concern the social as well as the natural environment. This entails companies both financing and being directly involved in interventions that could be labeled ecosocial work. The term ecosocial work refers to social work that combines social and ecological perspectives and takes a holistic approach to sustainable community development (Matthies, Närhi, & Ward, 2001; Närhi & Matthies, 2018). While this term is generally not used in connection with company CSR work, Mauritius provides an informative case on how CSR in fact may involve companies becoming key actors in local community development and ecosocial issues. However, an ecosocial work approach implies connecting vulnerability and marginalization to socio-economic structures, power imbalances in society and the upholding of injustices (Närhi & Matthies, 2018; Rambaree, Powers, & Smith, 2019). While such an approach may entail opposition to the activities of companies it can also be usefully applied to develop the way that companies interact with local communities on ecosocial issues. The values and perspectives attached to ecosocial work can then facilitate rethinking CSR engagement and taking CSR in the direction of greater positive contributions to the society.

As CSR globally has gained in importance as a framework for addressing social and environmental issues, yet faces criticism for lack of impact and significance (see for instance Banerjee, 2008; Blowfield & Murray, 2014; Fleming & Jones, 2013; Hanlon, 2008; Nyberg, Spicer, & Wright, 2013), it is important to consider how an ecosocial perspective can improve CSR involvement in local communities. This article therefore uses CSR involvement in coastal communities in Mauritius as an informative case of ecosocial work through CSR. It shows how a core value of ecosocial work, environmental justice, can be applied to assess the contributions of company community engagement. The article seeks to address two research questions: (a) In what ways are companies involved in ecosocial work in coastal communities through CSR?; (b) What are the challenges and possibilities of this involvement from an ecosocial work perspective? The paper presents the findings of interviews that were conducted with representatives of companies and other organizations involved with CSR and provides an analysis of CSR involvement in terms of environmental justice.

The article is structured as follows: First a background is provided of CSR in Mauritius. Thereafter the article outlines the theoretical framework of environmental justice. This is followed by a presentation of the methods and then the analysis. The paper ends with a discussion and conclusion

Background: CSR in Mauritius

Mauritius is an island state in the Indian Ocean with a population of 1.3 million. The country gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1968 and has since experienced rapid economic growth. It has developed from a low-income economy dependent on the revenue from sugar cane to a diversified upper middle-income economy considered one of the strongest and most stable economies in Africa (Brooks et al., 2017; Svirydzenka & Petri, 2017). However, many social challenges remain to be addressed and segments of the population are experiencing increasing vulnerability and social exclusion (Tandrayen-Ragoobur & Kasseeah, 2018). Government efforts to address the social challenges have, since 2009, used the CSR framework to pool company resources into

promoting socio-economic development. This has meant that CSR has become regulated and largely directed by the government. The regulations require all profitable companies to contribute two percent of the chargeable income as CSR contributions. From the onset the funds were directed at social problems and issues related to socioeconomic development with the initial regulations stating that companies should spend the funds 'on CSR activities approved by Government or to transfer these funds to Government to be used in the fight against poverty' (National Empowerment Fund, 2011). Many large companies chose to set up their own CSR foundations that initiated projects related to social and environmental issues, often in areas where the companies have operations. These foundations remain an important part of how companies work with CSR and they are active in community development and engage with civil society at local level. However, in 2017 a National CSR (NCSR) Foundation was set up to enhance coordination and transparency and to improve the outcomes for the beneficiaries (National CSR Foundation, 2017).[1] This meant that companies had less choice in how to allocate their two percent CSR contribution: At least 50 percent of each company's CSR contributions had to be channeled through the NCSR Foundation. As from 2019, this has been increased to at least 75 percent of the CSR contribution (Income Tax Act 1995, Consolidated Version). The NCSR Foundation is governed by a council where the government as well as the private sector and NGOs are represented. The foundation uses the company contributions to fund projects by NGOs for the benefit of vulnerable groups. These projects should fall within one or more of ten priority areas: socioeconomic development as a means for poverty alleviation; educational support and training; social housing; supporting people with disabilities; dealing with health problems; family protection including gender-based violence; leisure and sports; environment and sustainable development; peace and nation-building; and road safety and security (National CSR Foundation, 2017). The part of a company's CSR contribution that is not channeled through the NCSR Foundation should be used for implementing a CSR program or funding a CSR program provided by an NGO. Also here the funding should go to the priority areas of intervention. Thus, the CSR framework in Mauritius has become to a large extent state-directed but entails the private sector being involved through funding, steering and implementation of projects and programs for the benefit of local communities.

In addition, the private sector in Mauritius is also involved in local level sustainability and socio-economic development through requirements that have been placed on the real estate sector. The real estate sector has experienced rapid growth in the last few years, facilitated by government efforts to attract foreign direct investment by enabling non-citizens to purchase residential property in coastal areas. Initially, the inflow of foreign direct investment through the real estate sector was promoted through the Integrated Resort Scheme (IRS), which facilitated conversion of large areas of coastal land into property projects consisting of upmarket villas and apartments. This was later followed by the Real Estate Scheme (RES) that enabled the conversion of smaller portions of land into property projects. Both schemes have, as from 2017, been merged into the Property Development Scheme (PDS). With the PDS the government introduced regulations intended to spread the benefits of the property projects also to local communities. The intention has been for the PDS 'to ensure that the benefits of the development of the Scheme accrue to neighboring communities and to small entrepreneurs generally' (Investment Promotion (Property Development Scheme) Regulations 2015). Thus, each PDS project has to be

preceded by a social impact assessment and a social needs assessment focusing on the local community. In addition each PDS project has to have a social fund for implementing 'a social programme identified in the social needs assessment and provide for social amenities, community development and other facilities for the benefit of the neighbouring community where the PDS Project is implemented' (Investment Promotion (Property Development Scheme) Regulations 2015). The social fund is constituted from a levy of approximately EUR 5000 per each residential unit that the PDS company has sold. Given the social element of the PDS it can be seen as a form of socially responsible enterprising or in other words a form of CSR. Consequently, in this article both the CSR scheme and the PDS scheme will be considered in terms of company CSR engagement with local communities.

In coastal areas both CSR and the PDS scheme entail companies being important actors engaging with the civil society and being involved in promoting socio-economic development and addressing social and environmental issues. Coastal areas in Mauritius are faced with numerous challenges including large inequalities, unemployment, low education levels, shortage of land, squatter dwelling, beach erosion, coral bleaching and pollution. Hotel companies and PDS companies have come to play an important role in addressing these challenges and often these companies are involved, through financing and direct interventions, in ecosocial work in the coastal areas where they operate. Their work bears relevance for local social and environmental development and it is therefore important to examine the challenges and possibilities of this new form of community engagement. Can community engagement as it is promoted by these companies advance the transition to a more sustainable society?

Ecosocial work and environmental justice

Ecosocial work can be seen as social work that combines social and ecological aspects and takes the two as interlinked (Närhi & Matthies, 2018). While different perspectives exist on ecosocial work, a key element in ecosocial work is how ecosocial issues connect to vulnerability, inequalities, economic structures and corporate decision-making (Närhi & Matthies, 2018; Rambaree et al., 2019). To approach such structural aspects of ecosocial work it is useful to draw on the discourse of environmental justice. The discourse of environmental justice was initially used in discussions concerning inequities in exposure to environmental risks but has expanded to cover many more issues and new theoretical conceptualizations of the term (Schlosberg, 2013). As such, studies using an environmental justice perspective focus on, for instance, how socially disadvantaged communities are more exposed to environmental risks (Campbell, Greenberg, Mankikar, & Ross, 2016), how communities are vulnerable to the actions of companies (Ross, 2013), how environmental degradation affects particularly poor people (Dominelli, 2012), how marginalized communities are affected by climate change (Hetherington & Boddy, 2013), and how damage to the ecosystem has led to increased vulnerabilities (Ross & Zepeda, 2011).

The research presented in this study draws particularly on Bell's (2014) work on environmental justice. Bell suggests that environmental justice can be seen to incorporate*, distributive, substantive* and *procedural justice*. This framework is here applied to the case of company involvement in coastal communities in Mauritius.

Distributive environmental justice is defined by Bell (2014, p. 22) as 'an equitable distribution of environmental "goods" and protection from environmental harms for all

socioeconomic groups'. This aspect of environmental justice covers inequities in relation to different social categories such as income, class or gender and it also covers equity in relation to different outcomes, whether in terms of resources, primary goods, capabilities, welfare outcomes or environmental risks (Bell, 2014). Further, distributive environmental justice encompasses equity in the distribution of both environmental harms and environmental 'goods' such as water, clean air and energy (Bell, 2014) Distributive justice aspects are often what has been the focus of environmental justice research (Bell, 2014; see also Schlosberg, 2013). However, Bell (2014) argues that it is not sufficient to only consider these aspects and that the environmental justice discourse should also embrace substantive and procedural justice as essential components.

Substantive environmental justice is defined by Bell (2014, p. 22) as 'a healthy environment'. While 'a healthy environment' can be defined in many ways, and even regulations vary on the environmental 'goods' and the hazards that affect individual and population health, it is an important aspect of environmental justice since it is the basis of human survival (Bell, 2014). In addition, procedural environmental justice is also required, according to Bell's conceptualization. *Procedural environmental justice* is concerned with 'fair, participatory and inclusive structures and processes of environmental decision making' (Bell, 2014, p. 22). As Bell (2014) outlines, there are different views on the possibility of achieving such structures and processes, but ensuring that they are in place is nonetheless necessary for environmental justice.

Drawing on Bell's (2014) working definition of environmental justice it is possible to specify what environmental justice would imply in the context of company-funded ecosocial work with local communities. Bell (2014) suggests a set of indicators that can be used for assessing the environmental justice situation in terms of distributive, substantive and procedural justice aspects. As such, indicators of *distributive environmental justice* include for instance equal access to 'goods' such as safe drinking water, sanitation, adequate and safe transport, and green space for recreation and leisure. They also include equal access to adequate housing and safe working and living environments, as well as equal protection from environmental disruptions and hazardous substances. As indicators of *substantive environmental justice* Bell (2014) includes for instance universal access to environmental 'goods' such as safe drinking water, sanitation, adequate and safe transport and green spaces, but also that everyone has adequate housing and are protected from hazardous substances. *Procedural environmental justice* is taken to include, for instance, that all parties affected by decisions are included in decision-making, received accurate and accessible information, and are able to draw on sufficient skills and personal resources to participate on an equal basis (Bell, 2014).

Methods

The study was undertaken using a qualitative deductive approach where the theoretical perspective of environmental justice was applied to interviews on the practice of ecosocial work in coastal communities. A total of six interviews provided the main source of data. In addition, reports and other published materials on CSR in coastal communities were used in the process of preparing for the interviews. The interviewees were selected through purposive sampling to represent different perspectives on CSR issues in Mauritius. The interviewees were informed about the purpose of the study and their approval was sought before recording the interviews.

Table 1. Sample overview.

No.	Interviewee position	Mode of conducting interview
IP 1	CSR Manager	Via Skype
IP 2	CSR Manager	By phone
IP 3	Leader of a social movement	By phone
IP 4	CSR Manager	Via Skype
IP 5	Leader of an NGO	Face-to-face at the office of the interviewee
IP 6	State-employed social worker working with CSR	By phone

Table 1 gives an overview of the sample. The CSR managers represent three different large companies all of which operate hotels and/or PDS projects in several locations along the coasts of the main island of Mauritius. The social movement is involved in eco-social issues in coastal areas across Mauritius and the NGO has activities with a nationwide coverage. In total the interviewees included three women and three men. All interviews were carried out during 2018 and most were conducted by phone and Skype. This approach was chosen to fit the interviews around the busy schedule of the interviewees. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 min and were recorded.

The recorded interviews were analyzed with the help of Atlas-ti software, version 7.5. Theoretical thematic analysis was used as the method for analyzing the data and this involved identifying themes and patterns in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Initially the entire dataset was coded by the author. The coding focused on searching for, categorizing and memoing types of interventions, meanings given to these as well as challenges and possibilities, seen from an ecosocial work perspective and assessed in terms of environmental justice. The codes were then combined into themes and the themes were checked for consistency against the coded extracts and the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the presentation of the findings, the names of persons and organizations were removed so that the interviewees will not be easily identified.

Given the small sample size the findings may only give an indication of company involvement in ecosocial work in Mauritius and do not necessarily reflect how other companies and organizations work with CSR and ecosocial work. Another limitation of the study concerns gender in relation to environmental justice. How environmental justice is experienced may differ greatly between men and women in a community (see for instance Stein, 2004) but the small sample size did not allow any conclusions about this.

The following section presents the analysis of the interviews. The analysis applies an environmental justice perspective – a core value of ecosocial work - in analyzing the contributions of company community engagement. The analysis is divided into two parts that respond to the research questions: (a) In what ways are companies involved in ecosocial work in coastal communities through CSR?; (b) What are the challenges and possibilities of this involvement from an ecosocial work perspective?

Findings and analysis

Company CSR involvement in coastal communities

CSR in the coastal communities is oriented towards addressing several pertinent social and environmental issues. Much of the involvement consists of the companies funding

programs and projects, but the companies are also more directly involved in provision of services and in interacting with the local communities and NGOs, as well as promoting forums for such interaction.

Addressing unemployment and low levels of education

CSR in the coastal communities is partly concerned with training and capacity building related to employment, for instance employability training and training focused on learning an occupation. Other central aspects of the CSR-work focused on promoting entrepreneurship and small businesses. This orientation of the CSR involvement has to be understood in the context of the high levels of unemployment and low levels of education in coastal areas of Mauritius. The three CSR managers (IP 1, IP2 and IP4) explained the rationale for this form of involvement. As IP 1 explained: 'Work was the issue (…) and the education level was and still is very low. It was always like this far out island with only one road and I must say that the authorities didn't pay much attention.' IP 4 also felt that unemployment is a main issue in the local area:

> Since they didn't have a good job or enough revenue when they had children they also they couldn't educate their children and it's a vicious cycle. The children also were not educated so they have these little jobs with little revenue. It's like continuous, generation after generation they remain poor. (IP4)

The training programs that are offered focus on employment in the hospitality industry and thereby provide opportunities for employment in the hotels and villas in the locality. As IP 2 pointed out 'In this region it was clear that one of the main possibilities for employment was hospitality'.

For the companies this type of CSR involvement is also serving the purpose of supplying suitable candidates for employment: 'It is also in their interest to get workers from next door; less transport, less cost […] and in the contact tourists ask a lot about the locals so the more you have locals the better it is' (IP 1). The focus on employment can also help the companies to benefit from better trained and qualified workers while assisting people in the local community. IP 2 explained that apart from providing training for employment in the hospitality sector, the company also started a program for training and licensing of persons working as skippers on boats that operate in the tourism sector: 'They were skippers but they did not have any license to operate. […] This has improved their living conditions because as they were illegal skippers they were not well paid.'

Also the promotion of entrepreneurship and small-businesses are forms of CSR involvement that respond to the needs of the hospitality industry while assisting the local community:

> There is no market place, there are four villages but there is not even one market place so I'm going to build a market place to try and stimulate exchange. Because villa owners are willing to buy locally […] but there is no place for them to come to. And some of them [members of the local community] could sell those products that they are producing. We just need to give them the facility for it. (IP 1)

Undertaking CSR activities focusing on employment and entrepreneurship connected to the hospitality industry also means that the companies can draw on the expertise that they have among their employees: 'There are different skills that we already have in the

hospitality sector, and experts so they provide the training to these people. […] What we try to do is to make that person become employable … ' (IP 4)

Basic skills training is also a part of the CSR activities and an activity that companies engage in to promote employment in areas with low education levels:

> We had to also start with life skills management and literacy and numeracy for adults. […] One of the success stories, I can say, was a lady that has been able to set up a micro-enterprise because now she is able to use a calculator, she can read and communicate and interact with clients. (IP 2)

At the level of individuals in the local community, the involvement of companies in training and capacity building for employment and entrepreneurship translates mainly into contributions to social enhancement; but their involvement can also be seen as actions to promote sustainability in the local communities where the companies operate. To some extent, promoting sustainability is also focused on internal CSR aspects as a way of impacting on local communities: 'buy local, support local farmers, […] fair trade, training of our own staff on how they need to manage their own resource consumption and in turn they take it to their home.' (IP 4)

Addressing issues concerning natural and physical environment

The social issues experienced in the community are connected to the locality and any effort to promote community development would need to consider social issues as well as environmental issues. Some of the CSR involvement was initiated after social needs assessments that preceded property projects and, as such, it aims to broaden the benefits of property projects to the civil society. Involvement more directly oriented towards environmental issues was also part of CSR activities in the coastal communities, at times connected to training for employment: 'we also include in the training programme [on basic skills] a module on marine protection' (IP 2). Environmental education forms part of CSR, and other activities include raising awareness on protection of the lagoons, both among local residents and tourists, and organizing beach cleaning.

One of the interviewees (IP 2) also explained that the company is involved in improving sanitary facilities in the local community, in addressing the problem of asbestos in local houses and in addressing the need for social housing.

> A main project that we achieved [as member and financier of a collaborative community association] was to build sanitary facilities for the people [in the locality]. For years these people they did not have any sanitary facilities, I mean toilet and shower […] We can have five families in a very small plot of land so there is no space […] what we did is to have in one plot of land at least one shower […] It was at least one thing that we could do.

Advocating for change

In the same community another problem is asbestos, which exists in many of the houses in the area that were built by government after a cyclone in the 1960s. 'Unfortunately up to now there is no attempt to address it […] there has been no single asbestos dismantling programme' (IP 2). The CSR manager felt that the government has to develop a dismantling plan and the company is therefore involved in advocacy on the issue: 'We are still advocating, we are still having discussions with the government' (IP 2). Dismantling the

houses would require access to other housing for the residents and this is currently not available as there is a shortage of low-cost and social housing in the area, as well as a shortage of land: 'Social housing is another very big issue in this region. For more than 50 years there has been no social housing project in the region' (IP 2). Through their involvement in a collaborative community association the company is advocating for the provision of social housing, creating awareness on the issue and mobilizing the community in demanding for change. The company and the community association are putting forward the argument that the social fund provisions of new PDS should be primarily allocated to buying land from private land owners in the area so that the government can construct new social housing.

Advocacy and social mobilization were also part of company CSR activities in relation to other issues. IP 1 explained that their current CSR involvement involves focus on advocacy work.

> There are a few associations now, there wasn't then, like 15, 20 years ago […] but they don't really know how to advocate, obtaining better infrastructure from the authorities. Something simple: transport is terrible […] but they don't know how to get that done.

The same interviewee (IP 1) explained that their CSR efforts have involved helping the local community to advocate for change:

> We've stimulated a lot the CSOs, community service organisations, who are now advocating, I literally train them in advocacy, I gave them teaching in advocacy so they could know how to gather information, how to prepare a strategy to get things for people on the field.

Addressing gaps in service provision

In addition to such interventions, company involvement is also concerned with direct provision of assistance and services to individuals in the local community. IP 1 was in the process of setting up a center with two social workers in one of the coastal villages. The center is intended to connect local residents to services and resources and provide training for employment. IP 2 has also, through the company's involvement in a collaborative community association, been involved in the setting up of a social center where counseling is offered, as well as training, awareness campaigns and prevention programs on alcohol and substance abuse, and music sessions.

The challenges of promoting ecosocial work in coastal communities through CSR

Substantive environmental justice

Substantive environmental justice entails a healthy environment for all with universal access to environmental 'goods', as well as adequate housing for all and protection from hazardous substances (Bell, 2014). While company CSR involvement in coastal communities in Mauritius involves a wide range of efforts to address social and environmental issues, it is apparent that the CSR framework does not fully address substantial issues such as shortage of land, crowded housing and the dismantling of houses with asbestos. IP 2 pointed out that the private sector can be part of addressing such issues but felt that the government has to get more involved: 'Social housing is not the responsibility of the private sector. Private sector of course can help […] It is not because we talk about

CSR that we have to substitute the responsibility of the government'. On the issue of asbestos IP 2 also called for more government involvement: 'I'm not saying the private sector should not be involved, but the government should drive it'. Companies, such as the one that IP 2 represents, may have a role in drawing attention to these problems and in this way bring the local community closer to achieving substantial environmental justice. The same may be the case with other issues, such as public transport, where companies can assist communities in demanding improvement. However, CSR on its own does not solve these issues.

Distributive environmental justice

Distributive environmental justice concerns equal access to environmental 'goods' and equal protection from environmental hazards. Companies in coastal communities of Mauritius contribute in important ways to improve the situation for the villagers but the inequalities that exist in these communities are often difficult to address through CSR. An important part of CSR in these communities is for instance company involvement in training and capacity building related to employment in the hospitality industry. This entails training for relatively low-paid jobs and may do little to change the unjust distribution in coastal communities and the inequality in access to land and housing. As waiters, gardeners and housekeepers many villagers obtain employment and an income but often would not be able to afford better housing and remain marginalized in communities that have increasingly become segregated with the upsurge of gated communities for the well-off. IP 3, representing a social movement working on issues related to coastal communities, was critical of the direction of development in coastal areas:

> … you've got lots of people that are descendants of slaves and these guys are more and more feeling completely forgotten. You've got these huge millionaire villas popping up everywhere and they are being trapped in poverty. […] You have clearly, a society going increasingly with de facto segregation and exclusion […] The supply of social housing is woeful. The priority is on millionaire, expat villas … We are going straight towards a social explosion on the coast. (IP 3)

The risk is also that some companies can exacerbate problems in coastal communities by purchasing or leasing land for property schemes or hotels. Large corporate developments may create jobs and revenue opportunities but at the same time they restrict how environmental 'goods' are shared and how opportunities to gain an income from tourism are distributed:

> A beach for a poor coastal village is their ticket out of poverty, it's their asset. That's what enables people to set up their SMEs, their little business in restaurants, rental of accommodation, guest houses, rental vehicles, bring people to do tours … That's how people can work their way out of poverty. (IP 3)

As IP 3 pointed out, large corporate developments on the beachfront, restrict opportunities for the local community.

From an ecosocial work perspective another challenge is that CSR initiatives and funding cannot comprehensively cover everyone in need.

> A company "would never ever have enough CSR funds to fund the charities to actually do the work that should be done nationwide. A company's main focus is to make profit. It's a business, so they are not really here to look after the community. What they can do

> is try to improve […] It can't become as a main focus. I mean for community development and social development, there is something called the state, it's the state's duty … " (IP 3)

Procedural environmental justice

Looking at procedural environmental justice further points to the challenges of doing ecosocial work through CSR. Procedural environmental justice concerns 'the fairness and transparency of the processes by which decisions are made' (Bell, 2014, p. 19). When companies promote and undertake ecosocial work activities they might be seen by themselves and others as the providers. An ecosocial work approach would instead build in participatory approaches where power is shared. From this perspective it is clear that when the company is the provider the civil society are the beneficiaries and the two would not be working to address issues on an equal basis. This can mean that companies plan and undertake activities to which they invite civil society organizations and members. The company would then set the agenda and the civil society has restricted involvement in the decision process. From the perspective of the 'provider' it can then be challenging to get the community to take the opportunities provided and to get appreciation for the work that is put in.

> … it needs to be a two-way traffic we cannot force people, you know people need to help themselves. We cannot force. We can propose solutions but in the end we should not be taken for granted. Nobody should be taken for granted. There needs to be gratitude … (IP 4)

When the company is seen as the provider the local community is disempowered:

> it's not good to do it in their place because they will think private sector can do it all. You have to understand the sugar industry world. The big boss was the boss, he was the king of the area, and they still … they are disempowered. […] When I go there they ask me things, not understanding that I can't obtain that for them. I have a role, no, for them I should be the one giving the permits, giving this, giving that. I'm the provider, so it's a process getting them to stop thinking that way and understanding they've got the power and it has to come from them. (IP 1)

Another aspect of procedural environmental justice relates to how company CSR funds are allocated. With the new CSR regulations 75 percent of company CSR funds have to be channeled through the NCSR foundation and the companies are then less free to allocate the funding by themselves. While the respondents expressed that this can enable a more systematic and transparent approach to allocating CSR funds, fears were also raised about the reduction in influence of NGOs and companies in the decision making. IP 5, leader of an NGO, saw benefits in having the NCSR Foundation: 'I think it is a good move to create the NCSR Foundation', but also explained that the more bureaucratic procedures have impacted on their ability to obtain funding:

> Since they were created they took two years to make one disbursement. So what do you do in the meantime? Now we have used the funding they gave us. What do you do? You sit and wait? Do I sack all these people? (IP 5)

Particularly at a transition phase, NGOs that have previously worked in close collaboration with companies may experience that they have less influence in the decision making. However, over a longer period of time, the new regulations can enable equal access to

information and funding possibilities for all NGOs and hence greater procedural environmental justice. The centralization can provide better opportunities to include also smaller NGOs but, as IP 6 who works with CSR funding explained, this can be challenging:

> We have to train these people because we have very small NGOs who are coming now. […]You know they don't have the know-how, they don't have the experience. […] Before giving the money we have to train them. (IP 6)

The possibilities of promoting ecosocial work in coastal communities through CSR

The interviewees all saw possibilities and benefits in using CSR to promote social development and address environmental issues in coastal communities. The possibilities and benefits are mainly in terms of developing *procedural environmental justice*. Through CSR it is, for instance, possible to improve resources and techniques among NGOs and hence enhance the ability of such organizations to take part in decision making and have the possibility to influence decisions concerning the local community. Through direct financial contributions from companies and through the funding channeled via the NCSR Foundation, the CSR framework benefits NGOs financially. Their contact with companies has also meant possibilities for capacity building:

> Since 2009 there's been a huge improvement in governance, and strategic thinking, you know, vision, mission, values, […] We have not only given money, we have given a lot of resources in the way of people to the civil society. […] When we were having training I would bring a few of the NGOs in the private sector training, so they could learn the techniques. […] Now they can compete and ask for money internationally, for example EU. (IP 1)

CSR can also help local organizations to get the opportunity to voice their concerns, to do advocacy and to be empowered to work for change:

> Now that the people are under [name of collaborative community association] they are well aware, they are really conscious of the problem […] Last week they had a press conference and they said that listen we are fed up with this problem […] and we were not there, we left them to speak to the press because we want the community to come forward. (IP 2)

The CSR involvement of companies was also perceived to assist communities by bringing actors together to collaborate and work for change:

> We put in place a platform which regroups all the major stakeholders within the catchment area […] All the major stakeholders were on the platform and we had communication, interactions, about the project, about the situation in the region. We were a driving force in this respect. (IP 2)

Indirectly, and over a longer period of time there is then also a possibility for CSR to contribute towards greater *distributive* and *substantial environmental justice*, since the CSR involvement assists communities to raise concerns and work collaboratively to address these concerns. As Bell (2014) points out, better environmental conditions depend on citizens being able to obtain information as well as organizing and stating their preferences.

Overall, much of the CSR involvement is long-term involvement and the company representatives saw their work as bringing lasting benefits to the community. For instance, IP 2 explained that the company, together with other corporate actors and a number of

civil society organizations set up the collaborative community association as a continuation of what was initiated under a PDS social fund: 'Once we will sell all the properties there will be no more funds, so what we thought of was a strategy that will pursue what we started and in this context we launched the [collaborative community association]'. The association is today an NGO that has 'its own strategy and programme' (IP 2). It is funded through CSR contributions and private donations. IP 4 also shared the perspective that company involvement is a long-term undertaking:

> We are not just like [doing] philanthropy, going to give some money and then that's it, no. What we try to do is to make that person become employable and empower the person so that he can stand on his own feet […] It's more long-term …

The possibilities of relying on CSR for promoting ecosocial work are however dependent on how CSR is used in connection with government policies and interventions and the involvement of other actors in society. The private sector can provide important resources and capacity but as the interviewees pointed out it is important to further develop collaboration and partnerships. IP 3 argued for a modified framework that involves closer collaboration between the state, the private sector and the civil society:

> You can have a system whereby CSR can fund social innovation, can fund interesting programmes. A company can set up an excellent project, but the idea is that if you do something excellent then it should be replicated across the country. No company can have that kind of resources, it's up to the state so we should be having some kind of healthy partnership where the NGOs, charities come up with very innovative programmes, these are funded by the CSR. If it works great the state can take over and replicate it or fund a charity to do it nationwide. If it doesn't, well it's only CSR money by company X, Y, Z that has been lost. […] Risk is taken by private sector CSR and state therefore invest taxpayers' money in successful programmes.

Discussion and conclusions

This study has examined in what ways companies are involved in ecosocial work in coastal communities in Mauritius and what the challenges and possibilities are from an environmental justice perspective. Taken as a whole, the CSR involvement of companies in coastal regions of Mauritius encompasses both social and environmental issues and entails a broad approach to addressing issues and improving conditions for people in the local area. In this way the CSR involvement has some similarities with the approach to community work that was developed by Jane Addams in the early days of social work. Similarly to the community work undertaken by Addams, it entails efforts to aid by seeing the social environment as well as the physical and built environment (see Addams, 1910). An important difference however lies in the profit-interest, which by necessity would be reflected in CSR interventions. A company is a for-profit entity with responsibility also towards shareholders in terms of making a profit. A risk with CSR is then that it may aid the local community in some ways but at the same time do little to change the unjust distribution and prevailing inequalities in a society. As Ross (2013, p. 196) points out, 'From an anti-oppressive social work perspective, CSR reinforces "relations of domination and subservience" under the guise of "doing good"'.

However, to simply oppose company efforts on this basis would be to reject an opportunity to collaboratively work towards greater sustainability and enhanced well-being. McKinnon and Alston (2016) argue that a collaborative approach between social

workers and other actors can make a difference in addressing issues of sustainability. As is evident from this study, companies can be important contributors, not least in terms of resources. It is then important to look critically at the possibilities and challenges of working with these issues through CSR. Applying an environmental justice perspective can be useful in this endeavor. As a core value of ecosocial work, environmental justice points to the importance of seeing the structural aspects of vulnerability, marginalization and ecosocial issues (Närhi & Matthies, 2018; Rambaree et al., 2019). These are aspects that have to be taken into consideration if we are to use CSR in a way that goes beyond the current limitations of how companies engage with communities.

The findings from this case study suggest that CSR involvement in ecosocial work brings possibilities particularly in terms of advancing procedural environmental justice for local communities as it brings resources, capacity building, helps to bring actors together and plays a role in advocacy and empowerment work. There are however also challenges in term of procedural environmental justice since companies may get the role as provider and thus face challenges in involving civil society. In terms of substantive and distributive environmental justice the challenges seem to currently outweigh the possibilities. Inequalities and substantial issues affecting the coastal communities are difficult to address through CSR, at least without the involvement of other non-corporate forms of intervention and active involvement of the civil society. To extend on the possibilities and benefits of company involvement in ecosocial work it is necessary to see how CSR can move in the direction of also promoting substantive and distributive environmental justice. That however requires more emphasis on a collaborative approach to CSR, as stated below:

> If we think that CSR is going to be solving all the social and environmental problems in the coastal community, well that's dishonest. It can only be part of a solution that has to be driven by the state in proper consultation with all the stakeholders. (IP 3)

Note

1. After this study was carried out the NCSR Foundation has changed name to National Social Inclusion Foundation (NSIF).

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