

*Full Length Research paper*

# Business ethics and corporate governance: An African socio-cultural framework

James Kamwachale Khomba<sup>1\*</sup> and Frans N. S. Vermaak<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Management Studies, University of Malawi, Private Bag 303, Blantyre 3, Malawi.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Financial Management Sciences, University of Pretoria, 0002 Pretoria South Africa.

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Lately, there have been various discussions about the values of the African *Ubuntu* philosophy in many aspects as it relates to issues of human relationships, business ethics and corporate governance. As a governing philosophy, the *Ubuntu* is inclusive in nature as it considers all members of the community (organisation) as one entity aiming at achieving one purpose. There have been assertions that the ultimate success of any organisation operating in an African environment is premised on this *Ubuntu* framework. This study aimed at establishing corporate governance approach as practiced by organisations within an African context. Thus, this paper analyses and reports on research findings pertaining to issues of general business ethics and corporate governance approaches within an African context. The study results show that Africa's socio-cultural framework that is premised on the *Ubuntu* philosophy resonates with general principles surrounding business ethics and corporate governance. Central to the findings is the revelation that Africa's socio-cultural framework has a direct impact on business ethics, corporate governance approaches and overall corporate performance of organisations operating in Africa. It is expected that the study findings will influence organisations in Africa to adhere strictly to the provisions and recommendations of the new King III report on good corporate governance.

**Key words:** Africa, business ethics, corporate governance, indigenisation, King III report, Malawi, stakeholders, *Ubuntu*.

## INTRODUCTION

Apart from the requirement that organisations should run their operations in the most economical, efficient and effective manner possible to increase performance, today, there is an increasing insistence on the need for organisations to be ethical as well. Within the business framework, there is a clear relationship between corporate activities and other stakeholders within and outside the organisation (Khomba, 2011).

In corporate relationships, it seems reasonable to expect that operating organisations should serve different stakeholders in an ethical manner. A corporation should engage with its internal and external stakeholders to determine its current ethical reputation amongst the stakeholders, as well as what their ethical expectations

are of that organisation (Rossouw, 2010b). Thus, under the corporate governance requirements, a corporation should account for its ethical performance and duly report it to relevant stakeholders.

In the wake of various corporate scandals and amid increasing concern about environmental sustainability issues, there has been a great deal of debate regarding the applicability of business ethics in the modern business age. The discussion on this topic was recently highlighted with the failures of giant corporations such as Enron, WorldCom and Parmalat, largely due to corporate governance issues (West, 2009). There has also been a corporate environmental scandal involving BP (British Petroleum), when oil spilled into the Atlantic Ocean in the Gulf of Mexico. As many as 5000 barrels of oil a day spilled into the ocean waters, threatening the US and Mexican coastal areas and causing environmental and ethical alarms (BBC News, 2010). The state of Florida

\*Corresponding author. E-mail: [jkkhomba@poly.ac.mw](mailto:jkkhomba@poly.ac.mw).

declared the incident a state of emergency. As a response to the oil spill, the US administration banned oil drilling in new areas on the US coast while the cause of the oil spill off the Louisiana coast was being investigated.

Following such experiences, many parties interested in business activities have begun looking more closely at how morally corporations are supposed to behave in their operations. This has led to a renewed emphasis on business ethics considerations. Ethical issues are usually debated in terms of corporate governance, environmental degradation and global warming, corporate social responsibility, and corporate conscience (Kleine and Von Hauff, 2009; Nakano, 2007).

This article gives the background to the general business ethics and corporate governance, introduces the African *Ubuntu* philosophy, details research design and methodology used during the study, reports on research findings and finally makes conclusions and recommendations.

## FOUNDATIONS OF BUSINESS ETHICS

Business ethics entails the study of the ethical dimensions of organisational economic activity on the systematic, organisational and intra-organisational levels (Rossouw, 2010a). Business ethics focuses on what is good and right in a particular economic activity, where an organisation engages in a moral analysis and assessment of such economic activities and practices (Smith, 1790).

Ethics refers to a set of rules that define right and wrong conduct and that help individuals distinguish between fact and belief, decide how such issues are defined and what moral principles apply to the situation (Hellriegel et al., 1992). Moral principles describe the impartial general rules of behaviour that are of great importance to a society, along with the values the society represents. Moral principles are fundamental to ethics. Ethical behaviour would be characterised by unselfish attributes that balance what is good for an organisation with what is good for the stakeholders as well. Thus, business ethics would embrace all theoretical perspectives regarding the ethicality of competing economic and social systems.

The discussion of the business ethics dimensions are varied, depending largely on social and economic elements surrounding the organisations concerned. The view that prevails depend on the roles that organisations are supposed to play internally and in society in general. In macro-ethics, the central question is the fairness of the organisational choice of economic system and also ethical merit of the key elements of such a system. Essentially, these key elements comprise the profit motive, private property, the limited liability of corporations, competition, and free markets (Du Plessis, 2010; Smith,

1776; Collier and Roberts, 2001). It can be argued that whilst corporations are regarded as a means for the maximisation of shareholders' wealth, they should also ultimately improve the socio-economic welfare of local communities, although that may not initially be their intended purpose.

## AFRICAN SOCIO-CULTURAL FRAMEWORK AND UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY

The word *Ubuntu* is derived from a Nguni (isiZulu) aphorism: *Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu*, which can be translated as "a person is a person because of or through others" (Moloketi, 2009; Tutu, 2004). *Ubuntu* can be described as the capacity in an African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring (Khoza, 2006; Luhabe, 2002; Mandela, 2006; Tutu, 1999).

The *Ubuntu* philosophy represents an African conception of the human being, and his/her relationship with the community that embodies the ethics that define Africans and their social behaviours (Mbigi and Maree, 2005). Africans are social beings that are in constant communion with one another; where a human being is regarded as a human being only through his or her relationships to other human beings. Therefore, the survival of a human being is dependent on other people, such as the community and society.

Within an African environment, socio-cultural underpinnings are rigorously applied and the African *Umunthu* or *Ubuntu* (humanness) philosophies are omnipresent throughout the continent. Therefore, the *Ubuntu* socio-cultural dimensions are applied and considered critical in any organisation operating in Africa (Lutz, 2009; Mangaliso, 2001; Mbigi and Maree, 2005). Africa has its own unique socio-cultural settings, which have a direct impact on people-centred systems encompassing leadership, employee welfare, extended family systems, caring and sharing, and corporate governance. Thus, the socio-cultural diversity premised on the use of Western management systems would pose a great challenge within an Africa-based organisation.

## CORPORATE GOVERNANCE WORLDVIEWS

Whilst the above scenario could be true, organisations usually pursue wider corporate agendas. There are many views on the roles of corporations, depending on regional perspectives (Rossouw, 2009). These varied views have given rise to different approaches on how organisations are managed or governed (corporate governance) in different parts of the world. There are several corporate governance regimes around the world that are underpinned by different sets of socio-cultural frameworks,

which in turn reflect the societies in which these frameworks were developed. In addition, corporate governance regimes are also directed by the question: For whose benefit should corporations be governed?

Corporate governance frameworks can generally be classified as embodying certain ideologies. The exclusive corporate governance regime is typical of the USA (Rossouw, 2009), where organisations are perceived to be primarily pursuing the financial interests of shareholders. By contrast, the perception that prevails in Continental Europe is that an organisation is a multi-purpose institution which is obliged to serve and satisfy a variety of stakeholder concerns and interests. Thus, a stakeholder-centred approach towards business ethics is associated with most European states, Asia and Africa. The main difference is that the African perspective on the ethics of corporate governance is mostly grounded by an inclusive ethic of governance, whilst the Asian perspective on the ethics of corporate governance is founded on the expansive ethic of governance (West, 2009).

An inclusive corporate governance regime under the African *Ubuntu* philosophy signifies that an organisation has an explicit commitment to serve the interests of both shareholders and non-shareholding stakeholders. Such an organisational commitment to a stakeholder-centred approach towards corporate governance is partly influenced by African socio-cultural values. The African *Ubuntu* philosophy emphasises the importance of community, solidarity, coexistence, and the inclusion of community members (Broodryk, 2005; Mangaliso, 2001; Mbigi and Maree, 2005).

Furthermore, it has been observed that the African inclusive governance approach could also be a result of strong support of developmental activities on the African continent (West, 2009). Finally, such an inclusive approach in Africa is also partly influenced by the strong presence of state-owned enterprises that pursue both social and economic agendas. In the inclusive nature of the African society, the recent King III Report on governance for South Africa “seeks to emphasize the inclusive approach to governance” (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2009).

An expansive corporate governance regime is represented by the Asian community. Asian corporate governance engages the expansive approach, which represents a mid-position between a shareholder-centred approach and a stakeholder-centred approach (Rossouw, 2009). However, it is not a matter of a trade-off between the two governance approaches, but rather a synthesis between shareholder and stakeholder interests. The expansive approach to corporate governance with Asian society is partly the result of the lesser prominence of shareholder concerns in Asian companies, as many companies in Asia are either state-owned or small-and-medium enterprises (SMEs) owned by family members, and hence, shareholder concerns are less pronounced.

Furthermore, studies reveal that in an Asian society, informal external corporate governance through societal norms, practices and values are often more influential than the formal external corporate governance mechanisms of laws and regulations (Rossouw, 2009).

The preceding literature analysis of both the African and Asian ethics reveals that society and other external stakeholders have more influence on the internal governance of corporations than statutes and regulations do. This picture differs from that in America and Continental Europe. A leaning towards a stakeholder-centred approach is discernable in both the Asian and African perspectives. Therefore, employing the American exclusive shareholder-centred approach to corporate governance within an African framework would be a total mismatch towards an inclusive nature of the African society.

## **AFRICAN CORPORATE GOVERNANCE GUIDELINES**

Most of the corporate governance guidelines in African countries generally resemble the systems used in the UK (West, 2009), largely because many African countries are members of the Commonwealth. As a result, local company laws have been influenced strongly by British company laws. Although the British common law is not binding on African countries, it continues to play a pivotal role in the legal frameworks of many African countries. British cases still carry some weight in business applications on the African continent.

In South Africa, the King Committee was established in 1992 under the chairmanship of Professor Mervyn King (Du Plessis and Prinsloo, 2010; West, 2009). The King Committee was established with the task of providing a set of corporate governance guidelines for South Africa. This followed the release of the Cadbury Report in the UK in 1992, and an increasing interest in the subject worldwide. The King I Report covered many of the same issues as the Cadbury Report, paying considerable attention to the board of directors and the protection of shareholders. However, the use of non-financial concerns and engagement with other stakeholders were also mentioned in the King I Report.

The King II Report is notable for explicitly adopting an inclusive stakeholder-centred approach to corporate governance that has its roots in the stakeholder theory, in opposition to the model of shareholder primacy maintained in the UK and USA (West, 2009). The South African imperatives were reinforced in the passing of the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment Act, No 53 of 2003 (South Africa, 2003), which established a formal structure to reward companies meeting certain criteria, usually related to the level of black ownership, employment and procurement practices. Another development was the inclusion of the international financial reporting standards (IFRS) into corporate reports. The international

financial reporting standards have been officially adopted within the corporate governance reporting systems in South Africa and most African countries.

The King II Report was reviewed in response to the new company legislation, and this culminated in a new corporate governance report, the King III Report. The key theme of the King III Report is an even greater focus on sustainability and ethical reporting systems that should be adopted by corporations (Du Plessis and Prinsloo, 2010). In general, the King III Report adopts the same overall stance as the King II Report, encouraging companies to take a stakeholder approach while maintaining formal structures with a shareholder orientation.

The new King III Report acknowledges the importance of stakeholders and sustainability reporting in that "reporting should be integrated across all areas of performance ... and should include reporting on economic, social and environmental issues" (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2009). The inclusion of three parameters: economic, social and environmental, is consistent with the triple bottom line reporting requirement that companies and organisations need to display a corporate conscience in respect of social and environmental sustainability as well. Consideration of future generations is vital in business ethics and corporate governance issues.

South Africa's corporate governance guidelines provide a fair representation of corporate governance on the African continent as a whole in the provision of an inclusive stakeholder-centred approach towards corporate governance. Rossouw (2005) observes that analysis of corporate governance reports across Africa, mostly sub-Saharan Africa, reveals that all reports, apart from those from Nigeria, advocate inclusive stakeholder-centred corporate governance. However, companies that wish to implement inclusive corporate governance guidelines are faced with managerial challenges. Many corporations, especially large ones, have not been able to fulfil their corporate governance requirements when it comes to their corporate social responsibility (Bendixen et al., 2007). Corporations have instead oppressively abused employees and other stakeholders in many ways. For instance, many multinational companies are making abnormal profits at the expense of the local communities and the natural environment. Such malpractices jeopardise stakeholder co-existence and the sustainability of future business.

Another challenge is that citizenship is not yet fully embedded and represented in most boards or operating structures or systems of many organisations, despite the claim that organisations have social and environmental responsibilities (Brignall and Modell, 2000). There is an indication that the needs of different stakeholders are not incorporated and that performance measurement systems do not take the effect of power relationships and conflict into consideration. Pressures from different stakeholders are usually inconsistent and contradictory, especially in the public sector.

Generally, corporate governance issues in Africa are in their infancy and are, therefore, transitional. Although corporate governance guidelines tend to take a stakeholder-centred approach to represent the African society, there is still a compromise with the application of UK laws in the legal framework that includes company laws.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### Exploratory research

Initially, some exploratory research, as recommended by Babbie and Mouton (2007) was conducted in Malawi to ascertain the general framework on corporate governance issues in African companies. During this exploratory study, questionnaires were used and interviews with business executives were carried out in 112 large Malawian companies. The results indicated that, in general, Southern African corporate governance approach inclines more on the inclusive regime rather than an exclusive one.

### Secondary research

A secondary research through a desk review of documents collected from different sources, including stock exchanges, registrars of companies, companies' published annual reports, organisational constitutions, national statistical offices, government publications, internet, university publications, chambers of commerce and industry from different countries in Southern Africa was done. Some of the documents reviewed include Malawi's Companies Act (Malawi Government, 1986), the South African Companies Act, No. 61 of 1973 (South Africa, 1973), Malawi's Capital Market Development Act (Malawi Government, 1990) and the South African Stock Exchange Control Act, No. 1 of 1985 (South Africa, 1985).

### Primary research

The primary data collection method was a field survey methodology, using correlational research design. A cross-sectional (correlational) research design studied some phenomenon by investigating different constructs at a single time (Babbie and Mouton, 2007; Welman et al., 2005).

During this study, a Likert scale survey questionnaire was used as the main instrument to gather quantitative data. The questionnaire was designed around a range of formulated statements as a means to explore respondents' perceptions of a wide range of business ethics and corporate governance issues as applied in Africa. A Likert scale provides a measurement technique based on standardised response categories (Babbie and Mouton, 2007). The researchers interviewed people who have vast knowledge and experience of corporate governance issues, as recommended by Sellitz and Cook (1964).

### Sampling

A sample was randomly selected from big corporations that are registered with the Registrar of Companies or the Malawi Stock Exchange in Malawi and from companies registered with the Johannesburg Stock Exchange or the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce in South Africa. A limited number of companies from other countries were reached via their diplomatic missions, either in Malawi or in South Africa.

A total of 518 questionnaires were transmitted electronically to the sampled participants and then followed up for feedback. For

non-responses, electronic reminders were sent via e-mail every two weeks for the two months of the questionnaire survey. The reminders increased the response rate significantly.

A total of 102 hard copy questionnaires were administered through the deployment of research assistants who collected data from targeted companies. The research assistants delivered the hard copies to the business executives concerned, and thereafter collected them at an agreed time. The hard copy administration proved to be more effective in terms of response rate than the electronic copy administration. This is largely because the follow-ups were more personalised than was the case with the standardised electronic administration via e-mail. The electronic administration had a response rate of 58.5% (303 responses out of 518 transmissions), whereas the hard copy realised a response rate of 82.4% (84 responses out of 102 remittances).

#### **Data reliability and validity**

Data reliability as a measure of the internal consistency of the data constructs was determined by means of the Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) –  $\alpha$  coefficient above 0.7 is considered reliable (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Costello and Osborne, 2005; Field, 2009). In this study, the overall  $\alpha$  coefficient was 0.898, which suggests that the internal consistency of the data constructs was excellent.

Though data was collected from organisations in different countries across Southern Africa, the statistics indicate that the Bartlett test of sphericity  $X^2(68) = 1572.79$ ,  $p < 0.001$  was significant for all factors indicating that we can be confident that the sample was homogenous and that multicollinearity does not exist under these survey data according to Field (2009). Thus, the Bartlett test of sphericity statistics  $X^2(68) = 1572.79$ ,  $p < 0.001$  indicates that the study results are valid for any conclusive discussions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Demographics analysis**

#### ***Country of origin of participating organisations***

The demographics of the participating organisations ( $n = 387$ ) indicate that 168 respondents (43.4%) were from South Africa, 187 respondents (48.3%) were from Malawi, and 32 (8.3%) respondents were from other African countries, which included Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, Botswana and Zambia. The results indicate that the majority (91.7%) of respondents were from Malawi and South Africa, combined with 8.3% in other African countries. The prominence of respondents in Malawi and South Africa was necessitated by the fact that the two researchers, Dr JK Khomba and Professor FNS Vermaak are based in these two respective countries.

#### ***Managerial level of respondents***

The study targeted both senior and middle management teams, who should be conversant with issues concerning business ethics and corporate governance. Other business executives, such as board members, were also interviewed during the study. The results indicate that 60.7% of the respondents were in senior management,

while 37.0% were middle managers and 2.3% were members of the board. The participation of the vast majority of senior management (60.7%) in this study suggests that the survey results can be considered valid and reliable, as already confirmed by the reliability and validity statistics above.

#### ***Work experience of respondents***

Respondents were also asked to indicate their work experience in terms of the number of years that they have been serving on the organisational management team. The study results show that most of the respondents (71.3%) had work experience in this capacity of over five years and above, whilst 40.6% of respondents have work experience of over ten years. Work experience and management knowledge are critical tenets in understanding issues in business ethics and corporate governance.

#### ***Industry of participating organisations***

The study focused on the commercial sector, where all statements made on the structured questionnaire would be addressed. The study results indicate that all industries of the commercial sector were represented, with most of the respondents in the information and communication (19.4%), finance and insurance (17.3%), manufacturing (14.5%), and wholesale and retail trade (13.7%) industries. The "other" industry category (9.8%) consisted largely of educational institutions, consulting groups, and health practitioners.

#### ***Number of employees***

The participating organisations were also asked to indicate the number of their employees, as this data provided a way of assessing the size of each company. However, some companies, especially those that are service-oriented, are not labour intensive, but rather capital intensive, as most of their business processes are automated – this is very typical of financial institutions.

The results indicate that majority (84.2%) of the respondents have over 100 employees. Furthermore, the data indicate that 64.1% employ more than 400 people, and majority (57.6%) employ more than 500 people. Research findings also indicate that 27.6% of respondents employ over 1,000 people that make up the biggest category of the companies interviewed. These statistics show that the majority of participating organisations can be classified as large-scale companies, rather than Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

#### ***Organisational stakeholders***

Each participant was asked to indicate the stakeholders

that they consider when executing their corporate planning and performance measurement. The results indicate that some of the popular stakeholders include external shareholders (99.0%), auditors (90.2%), competitors (78.6%), regulatory bodies (78.0%), the community (69.5%) and debt providers (66.7%). However, majority of the respondents (69.3%) indicated that they do not consider the natural environment as their main stakeholder.

### **Ratings on and analysis of questionnaire statements**

The following reports results and discussion on ratings on each statement on the research questionnaire. Overall, the analysis shows that there were varied responses from participating organisations regarding the extent of their agreement on each on the questionnaire statements with regard to issues involving business ethics and corporate governance as per the following study revelations:

#### ***Extent on shareholders' wealth maximization focus***

The study assessed the extent of exclusive shareholder-centred governance approach within organisations in Africa and thus assessing the application of the popular maxim of "shareholder wealth maximisation" that is the beginning and end of shareholder-centred management theories. The study findings reveal that only 45.5% agreed (24.3% "Agree" and 21.2% "Strongly agree") that their organisations put more emphasis on the maximization of shareholders' wealth other than stakeholders' wealth. A total of 27.9% disagree, while 26.6% "somehow agree" with the statement. The analysis of the study findings indicates that there are still some companies that are still inclined to focus on the maximization of the shareholder value rather than look at value for other stakeholders too. However, other companies have embraced an inclusive stakeholder-centred approach within their visionary focus as is revealed in the next study analyses.

#### ***Recognition of interdependence of stakeholder relationships***

There seems to be a general understanding that an organisation can succeed only if all stakeholders are recognised as members of and contributors to company's success. All the respondents agreed (45.2% "Agree", 46.5% "Strongly Agree" and 8.3% "Somehow Agree"). The analysis thus indicates that the majority of contemporary managers in Africa take cognisance of the stakeholder-centred approach towards their corporate governance. Thus, an inclusive stakeholder-centred management approach is practiced within the African

framework.

#### ***Profitability contributions by stakeholders***

The study evaluated organisation's recognition of stakeholder involvement in the value creation activities in terms of the financial bottom line (profit). The vast majority of the respondents recognise that their profitability bottom line is a result of inputs from different stakeholders from within and outside the organisation. Thus, 81.9% agree (47.0% "agree" and 34.9% "strongly agree") with the above statement, while only 3.9% disagree and 14.2% "somehow agree". This analysis indicates that most organisations recognise significant contributions by different stakeholders towards their operations. This result is in line with the inclusive nature of African management systems.

#### ***External reporting and ongoing stakeholder dialogue***

Apart from open communication and feedback systems, the study also aimed at assessing the extent of the external reporting systems that are intended to meet stakeholders' informational needs. The study results reveal that a majority of 78.1% of the respondents agreed (40.6% "Agree" and 37.5% "Strongly Disagree") that their external reporting systems are primarily meant to maintain stakeholder dialogue with the respective corporations. Only 2.8% disagree, while 19.1% "Somehow Agree" with the preceding statement. This analysis indicates that the majority of managers take cognisance of good stakeholder dialogue, which is achieved through external reporting systems. This kind of stakeholder relationship would enhance cooperation and active participation amongst different stakeholders who are fully aware of corporate operations and overall performance.

#### ***Interaction with and help the local communities***

The study further aimed at establishing the extent of the relationship between an organisation and the local community and its organisational culture in this regard. Whilst the majority agree (63.3%) with the preceding statement, some do not (13.7%). Of the respondents, 23.0% "somehow agree" that they constantly interact with the local communities within which their business operates, casting doubt on the quality of such a community relationship.

Whilst the majority are in relationship with the local communities, the study results demonstrate that still some organisations are not involved in helping their local communities. With full sensitisation, one would expect full compliance with corporate citizenship ethical obligations,

which include sustainability reporting, as recommended by the King III Report (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2009).

### ***Respect for maintaining and promoting environmental protection***

The study findings indicate that only a few agree that their organisations are respected for maintaining and promoting environmental protection. A total of 44.2% agreed (20.2% “Agree” and 24.0% “Strongly agree”) with the statement. The results revealed that a total of 27.7% disagree (25.6% “Disagree” and 2.1% “Strongly disagree”), while 28.2% “somehow agree” with the preceding statement.

Further analysis indicates that this lack of corporate respect is a result of either a corporation’s disregard for environmental protection matters or, if it is engaged in such environmental protection projects, there is non-disclosure of such information through the corporate external reporting systems, thus ignoring the recommendations of the King III Report (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2009). Lack of focus on natural environmental matters should be a worrisome development for corporate sustainability and future generations.

### ***Treatment of employees as most valuable assets***

The majority agree that they treat their employees as the most valuable assets of their organisation. A total of 73.6% agreed (34.6% “agree” and 39.0% “strongly agree”) with the statement, 10.6% disagree, whilst 15.8% “Somehow agree” with the statement. This analysis indicates that most organisations value their employees as a sole source of the human resources for their operations. Employees are the internal stakeholders and indeed should be considered highly in good governance issues.

### ***Organisational sustainability programmes***

The majority of respondents report that their external corporate reporting systems take into account the triple bottom line as recommended by the King III Report (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2009). A total of 63.1% agreed (36.7% “agree and 26.4% “strongly agree”), while 15.7% disagree and 21.2% “somehow agree” with the statement.

The above analysis indicates that whilst many companies have embraced the triple bottom line reporting system, some are not fully adhering to the triple bottom line reporting requirements, signifying the transitional nature of triple bottom line reporting system within corporate reporting and governance systems.

### ***Open disclosure of wealth distribution to stakeholders***

The study aimed at ascertaining whether or not organisations are open in distributing their wealth to different stakeholders through corporate reporting systems, as recommended by Sz wajkowski (2000). A vast majority (80.9%) of respondents agree (46.0% “Agree” and 34.9% “Strongly agree”) that they deploy open resource allocation disclosure. Only 3.1% disagree, while 16.0% “somehow agree” with the preceding statement. This analysis demonstrates that most organisations prefer open disclosure of resource allocations which is in line with good corporate governance principles. Disclosure of wealth distribution would ultimately encourage participation by different stakeholders in the overall business activities and corporate sustainability in the long term.

### ***Non-practice of corruption that deprives other organisational stakeholders***

The study also aimed at determining whether or not corporate executives illegally and inequitably share organisational resources in a corrupt manner. The research findings show that a vast majority of 79.1% agreed (25.6% “agree” and 53.5% “strongly agree”) that their managers do not practice corruption, which deprives the very same stakeholders that an organisation is supposed to interconnect and depend upon. However, some respondents disagree (2.8%) and others (18.1%) only “somehow agree” with the statement. Although the evidence is slim, the survey results reveal that corruption still occurs amongst managers in Africa, which is against the teachings of the African *Ubuntu* philosophy and good corporate governance.

### ***Employee knowledge investment***

The research findings reveal that most organisations invest heavily in supporting employee knowledge for better understanding of business foundations that include good corporate governance. A total of 77.3% agreed (42.4% “Agree” and 34.9% “Strongly agree”), while only 8.3% disagreed with the statement. Out of the total number of participants, 14.5% “somehow agree” with the questionnaire’s statement. These research findings indicate that most organisations recognise the significance of investing in employee knowledge activities that boost better business understanding, new innovations and overall corporate performance.

### ***Contribution of knowledge about the local culture***

The study further aimed at assessing the role that knowledge about local culture plays on overall corporate

performance. Regarding the contribution of knowledge about local culture towards corporate performance, the majority (74.6%) agree with the statement, whilst only 7.7% disagree and 17.6% “somehow agree”.

The analysis demonstrates that most corporations recognise the significance of local cultural settings for their operations. Largely, this recognition comes as a result of continued interactions between an organisation and its local communities, which are identified by their unique socio-cultural frameworks. The local community, with its African *Ubuntu* philosophy, is the main provider of the labour force and final consumers for corporations operating in Africa.

### ***Financial support on educational projects***

Most of the respondents indicate that they are involved in financially supporting educational projects as a basis for the continuity of business operations. A total of 72.6% agree with the preceding statement. Only 12.1% disagree and 15.2% “somehow agree”. The study findings demonstrate that most organisations make a point of promoting education, thus encouraging the sustainability of future business operations and future generations as well. Unlike other factors of production, such as land and finance, a knowledgeable workforce is considered a critical factor of production in the modern business environment as observed by Drucker (1993).

### ***Corporate social responsibility***

The study aimed at assessing the level of ethical treatment to the society. The research findings indicate that most companies take direct responsibility for the social problems that they cause in the course of their operations. Majority (69.0%) agree that they take corporate social responsibilities, while 12.7% disagree and 18.3% “somehow agree”. The figures from the analysis indicate that issues of corporate social responsibility are still not fully implemented or reported upon by some companies as is recommended by the King III Report (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2009).

### ***Reserved funds for ecological preservation projects***

45.9% of the respondents indicated that their organisations reserve funds for the preservation of the natural environment, while 28.5% did not. Out of the respondents, 25.6% indicated that they “somehow agree” that their organisations allocate funds to natural environmental projects.

These research findings demonstrate that issues of environmental preservation and protection are in

transition, as many organisations are still not putting much emphasis on the issue of environmental protection. This finding is worrying, because the sustainability of current and future businesses and generations depends on how organisations conserve the natural environment today. Amidst global earthly calamities, attention to ecological issues should be a hot topic in modern business management systems.

### ***Contribution towards overall welfare of the society***

Generally, the vast majority of respondents indicate that their organisations contribute substantially towards the overall welfare of the local society. A vast majority of 79.1% agree (40.6% “agree” and 38.5% “strongly agree”) with the statement. Only 8.8% disagree and 12.1% “somehow agree”.

Whilst the majority of the respondents’ organisations recognise the presence of local communities through their contributions, the overall analysis indicates that there are still some companies that are not ploughing back into the local communities in which they operate. Within the framework of the King III Report’s recommendations (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2009), one would expect the majority of companies to adhere to the provisions of good corporate governance and duly report the social and environmental sustainability together with an economic element in their corporate reports.

### ***Conclusion***

This paper revealed the extent to which companies in Africa deal with issues regarding the business ethics and good corporate governance. It has been established that the Africa’s socio-cultural dimensions affect the inclusiveness of corporate governance framework. The study reveals that operations of companies in Africa are revolved around the fulfilment of governance issues based on different phenomena. Largely, companies in Africa are premised on an inclusive stakeholder-centred approach of business ethics and corporate governance rather than on an exclusive shareholder-centred approach in business ethics and corporate governance.

The research findings support the rationale that an inclusive stakeholder-centred approach accommodates all organisational stakeholders, including shareholders, government, customers, suppliers, management and employees, the community and the natural environment. It has also been established that the stakeholder-centred approach to corporate governance is in resonance with the African *Ubuntu* philosophy, where an organisation is seen as a community consisting of different interested members (stakeholders). Therefore, the premises of the *Ubuntu* philosophy that governs the African continent are in support with principles and practices of modern



business ethics and corporate governance.

Practically and on moral grounds, all stakeholders as part of the organisational community are supposed to be included in organisational settings and systems. Stakeholders should have a share in terms of information disclosure and wealth distribution. The inclusive stakeholder-centred approach towards governance would therefore ensure continued interdependence and co-existence of all stakeholders and hence the entire corporate and eco-systems system. It is envisaged that the inclusive stakeholder-centred approach towards corporate governance guarantees corporate sustainability for future business operations and profits as well as sustainability of future generations. Therefore, such an inclusive approach towards corporate governance should be deployed by all organisations operating within an African framework.

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