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The lip service of Corporate Social Responsibility: A South African forestry industry perspective

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Introduction

The concern by businesses for society can be traced back centuries ago, but it was only during the previous century that we observed literature being published on social responsibility. Although the subject of CSR has been published in many countries, the United States of America have the most published literature on the subject. Companies are thus required to take economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities (Carrol, 1999). Though many definitions exist for CSR, I make use of Smit and Njenga's (2007:5) definition that defines CSR as,

“...the accountability of companies, to both shareholders and stakeholders, for their utilization of resources, for their means of production, for their treatment of workers/consumers, for their impact on the social and ecological environment in which they operate and for the way in which they exercise their legislative and fiduciary duties.”

The authors describe corporate social investment (CSI) as “...the way in which companies care for the well-being of the social/ecological environment of the communities in which they operate.” They state that Corporate Citizenship incorporates CSI and CSR to eventually lead to a sustainable future for humanity and our planet. Other important principles of CSR not contained in the definition above include its voluntary implementation and the ability of companies to go the extra mile in terms of legal requirements to address social needs. As CSR is not legally imposable, companies have the liberty of prioritizing and implementing CSR projects as outlined by their respective codes of practise (Du Toit, 2009). However, South African Legislation ties CSR with the King Reports through the 2008 Companies Act, the BBBEE and the Labour Relations Act (Esser, 2011).

Understanding CSR and its link to legislation, and forest certification

BBBEE

According the Section 12 of the Broad Based BEE Act, industries in South Africa should draw up their own transformation charters (DWAF, 2007). The South African Forest Sector Charter was published in 2009. Its main objective is to promote BBBEE in the South African forest industry (DTI, 2009). The current focus of the charter is more on black ownership and management and issues like HIV and AIDS, poverty and other social issues are not being addressed (Isaacs, 2012).

At present, compliance with the BEE Act is measured according to a standard BEE scorecard. The scorecard determines if an organization qualifies as a level one contributor or a non-compliant contributor. An organization is measured against the following criteria:

- The level of black ownership and control
- Employment equity
- Skills development
- Preferential procurement
- Residual element

It is in this residual element that CSR and BBBEE are sometimes stated as being synonymous (Kloppers & Kloppers, 2006). This residual element is divided into CSI- and industry initiatives respectively. Both types of initiatives hold a weight of 5 points each and it is recommended that organizations spend 1.5 per cent of net profit after tax on each (Skinner & Mersham, 2008).

There are a wide range of CSI initiatives and these include support of health and HIV and AIDS programmes in the community or education and training. Development programmes for youth, black women, disabled people constitutes also reflect the type of CSI initiatives that have been adopted. Where beneficiaries of these initiatives are based in rural areas or urban areas undergoing development, a bonus point is rewarded to such an organization. Non-monetary contributions like staff training community members have also been welcomed. It should be noted that companies can fail to honour their social responsibilities and still be viewed upon as outstanding contributors in terms of the scorecard. Hypothetically it would be possible for a firm to score enough points on the other sections of the scorecard to qualify as a significant contributor, even if it neglects its social responsibility (Kloppers & Kloppers, 2006).

It stands to point that genuine CSR projects can be mutually beneficial to the company and its employees. On the other hand there exists a lot of leeway for companies not to honour these commitments and participate in artificial and unsustainable CSR practises.

Forest Certification

Globally the plantation forestry industry plays a pivotal role in maintaining local livelihoods. In addition, non-timber forest products like fodder, medicines, fuelwood and recreational values are crucial to the survival of many people around the world (Siry, et al., 2005). Thus it is of principal importance to manage plantations on a sustainable basis, as this industry also supplies nearly 25% of global industrial roundwood¹ production (Brown, 1998).

Out of concern for the impact of human socio-economic activities, two important international events took place: the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED) was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (Bethlehem, 2002) and a decade later, the Johannesburg Summit in 2002. Although not all the countries at this summit signed the Earth Summit treaty (Reilly, 1992), 178 countries vowed to manage their forests on a sustainable basis in order to meet the social, economic, ecological, cultural and spiritual

¹ Industrial wood in the rough (sawlogs and veneer logs, pulpwood and other industrial roundwood) and in the case of trade, chips, particles and wood residue

needs of people, now and in the future. In line with its international obligation towards sustainable forest management (SFM), South Africa developed its National Forestry Programme in 1997 (Bethlehem, 2002). As a result of UNCED, Agenda 21² document was compiled that contained the Forest Principles. The Forest Principles are a non-legally binding set of principles of global agreement on the sustainable management of all forest types. In light of this the development of the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) was established. (Scotcher, 2006).

The FSC is a global certification system that was established as a legal entity in Mexico in 1994. Its (FSC) mission is to promote environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests (FSC, 2012). Although certification is voluntary in nature, a major driving force behind it was the benefit of having access to new export markets and maintaining access to existing markets in terms of exporting forest products (Ham, 2004:24). Consumers around the world are demanding wood and fibre products from forests that are managed on a sustainable basis (Scotcher, 2011). Certification is thus potentially a very powerful tool for positive change, for example in improving social conditions in forest villages. However, more attention needs to be paid to show how certification can appropriately address social issues and how it can benefit small and medium enterprise (Mayers, et al., 2001). Should worker representatives be marginalised from the process it will be difficult for them to take advantage of these opportunities (Clarke, 2000:5).

Clarke (2000:5) is of the view that the FSC is weak on social issues and "...that a set of standards and code of practice governing social aspects of industrial forestry operations in South Africa be developed/negotiated by all stakeholders." Ham (2004:24) shares this sentiment and states that "...social certification standards are still weaker than and not as well understood as environmental compliance." Certification has enormously contributed to SFM. However, more attention needs to be paid to show how certification can appropriately address social issues and how it can benefit small and medium enterprise (Mayers, et al., 2001).

One way of achieving sustainable development is through the implementation of the principles of CSR. The CSR agenda focus is on the tripartite alliance between private companies, Government and civil society to uplift urban and rural areas (Hamann & Acutt, 2003). Corporates in South Africa can play an immense role in addressing the social issues that confront rural forestry communities. This said in the light of their expertise, resources and their willingness to assist their fellow human being. Due to the legacies of apartheid, the key to approaching CSR lies in the ability to create trust between companies, Government and civil society. Companies should become more proactive and create mutually beneficial situations (Ramlall, 2012). In terms of tripartite CSR partnerships, these partnerships should go beyond opposition and confrontational politics (Hamann & Acutt, 2003). It is important that tri-partite partnerships be based on merging skills, experiences and resources (Leisinger, 2007).

Companies can only adhere to the principles of sustainable development when they offer poor people resources and technology to escape the poverty traps that they find themselves in (Kolk & van Tulder, 2006). Business leaders need to commit to the upliftment of people, the protection of the environment (Visser, 2005) and implement sincere CSR initiatives (Ramlall, 2012). This is as forestry companies still prioritise profits, invest in window dressing CSR projects as opposed to a more equal distribution of benefits among employees (Clarke & Issacs, 2005)

² A referendum and schedule for environmental protection, drafted at the United Nations' Earth Summit of 1992

This study contributes to these debates and argues for a code of practice that could inform the social aspect of industrial forestry in South Africa. It is beyond the scope of this study to redefine or contribute to the definition of CSR. The focus of this research is on the social issues that confront forest workers employed by Capepine (Pty) Ltd. in the Jonkersberg and Kluitjieskraal plantations respectively.

The Responsibility Context

Over the years, since the 20th century, the forestry industry has undergone considerable changes. The State established plantation forestry as private investors did not want to invest in forestry due to its high cost of capital equipment, high finance costs and relatively high transport costs (DWAF, 1997). One downside of the State owning the plantations was that they could sell timber at which ever price they chose. By the 1970's the private sector owned about 70% of local plantations and the remainder belonged to Government (Louw, 2004). The State privatized its portion of the forest industry in the form of the South African Forestry Company (Ltd) (SAFCOL) in 1993. SAFCOL was tasked with the management of government's commercial forestry resources (Venter, 2001). By 1998 the State sold its plantations and the former homeland plantations was returned to the then Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF). The plantations were sold, but the land was leased from the State (Mayers, et al., 2001).

Forestry is practised in rural areas where communities are isolated from basic services. Prior to the privatisation of plantations, the State used to be responsible for the provisioning of housing, schooling, creches, recreational facilities and healthcare. These basic amenities are being neglected by private plantation owners and in some instances the State. A lack of finances and human resources are often cited as contributing factors in this regard (Clarke & Isaacs, 2005).

Methods of Study

This study utilised a combination of qualitative- and quantitative methods. This integrated approach helped to simplify complex outcomes during research (Guest, 2012), allowed more in-depth understanding of the occurrence at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), and minimised the difficulties associated with singular methods (Sechrist & Sidana, 1995).

Selection of case study plantations and communities

As CSR projects should influence the whole community that is impacted by the operations of an organisation (REF), the researcher wanted to include non-forestry workers as well. However, after numerous meetings with officials from Capepine, it was decided that only forest workers would be interviewed. It was evident that some questions in the questionnaire was not being understood by the majority of participants. The questionnaire was subsequently edited. It was then agreed that the researcher would compare the social conditions and perceptions of forest workers at Kluitjieskraal plantation in Wolseley (Western Cape) against those of their counterparts at Jonkersberg plantation in George (Southern Cape). After the researcher gained ethics clearance from the University and written consent from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), he commenced with his fieldwork. This is as DAFF owns the property on which the plantations are located (Table 1). In terms of service delivery, the Witzenberg Municipality is responsible for it in Wolseley, whereas this responsibility rests upon the in George. Stakeholders that participated in informal interviews include officials from the company,

municipalities and external consultants. Swanebergpark is the forest village in Wolseley while Phillipsville is home to forest workers in George.

Table 1: Lease agreement signed between DWAF and MTO in 2015 (Adapted from Clarke, 2013)

Type of lease	Sustainable lease	Exit lease	Cecilia/Tokai lease
Duration of lease	70 years	20 years	19 years
Area (ha)	57 717	59 802	956
End of lease	2075	2020	2024
Plantations: Boland	Jonkershoek	Grabouw Kluitieskraal La Motte	Tokai Cecilia
Plantations: S/Cape	Garcia Kruisfontein Lottering Witelsbos Longmore	Jonkersberg Bergplaas Buffelsnek Homtini	

Questionnaire design and sampling

A structured questionnaire was composed in Afrikaans and English and administered to 40 forest workers in the respective forest villages. This is as Afrikaans is the preferred language of the locals. English questionnaires were distributed to Xhosa participants. The language of administration depended on the language preference of the respondent. The questionnaires were completed during face-to-face interviews. Qualitative data was also collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews to better understand the challenges faced by the company. Here two supervisors, three foresters and one social forestry consultant were questioned.

The questionnaire was not administered in a strict ‘survey’ style but rather treated as a structured guide which allowed deviation either by the respondent or the interviewer. Huber, et al. (2004) suggests that deviation from the questionnaire can have some positive spinoffs.

A single questionnaire was designed for both forest villages. In order to establish the level of social capital and empowerment, the researcher focussed on the following indicators:

- Networks
- Trust and solidarity
- Collective Action and Co-operation
- Social Cohesion and Inclusion
- Sociability

- Self Esteem
- Significance of life for individuals

Open-ended- and close-ended questions were utilized as part of the questionnaire. This combination of questions allowed for the benefits associated with both qualitative- and quantitative data collection and the relatively low cost associated with this method (Erickson & Kaplan, 2000). On average interviews took between 30- and 60 minutes.

Tools and documentation

Prior to conducting interviews, respondents were informed about their rights not to participate in the survey, the use of a camera, voice recorder and the contact details of all relevant personnel involved in the study. The researcher provided participants with consent forms for participating as well as for allowing the use of the camera and the voice recorder. This will serve as evidence that the participants were well-informed of the consequences of participation in the study. This becomes even more important where participants are illiterate. By consulting participants on all these issues, the researcher was also able to ensure that respondents were sincere in participating in this research (Shenton, 2004). Some factors that assisted the development of trust between participants and the researcher included the establishment of a working relationship with a community worker, the interpersonal skills of the researcher along with the common ethnicity (Seale, 1999).

Data collection

The third component of the study was a desktop review. For this review company documents, -websites, books, industry publications, research papers and reports along with relevant books were consulted. As there are relatively few workers employed in the forest operations of the company, all the forest workers along with drivers and store-men were interviewed in the respective forest villages. A minimum of 40 respondents were interviewed which was required for data analysis.

Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaires were coded and analysed through the utilization of SPSS³.

Results

Demographics

The majority of employees (55%) at Jonkersberg plantation are younger than 34 (Table 2), while 45% of employees at Kluitjieskraal are 50 years and above (Table 3). As it is often easier to train relatively younger employees, skills development in latter forest village might prove difficult (De Beer, 2012). This taken into consideration that forestry practices might be phased out in the near future and current employees might need to seek alternative means of employment. The level of education among employees at Kluitjieskraal plantation resembles that of Jonkersberg plantation with the majority of employees having some secondary education.

³ Statistical Product and Service Solutions

Table 2: Age distribution of employees at Jonkersberg

Age Group				
Age group	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-25	5	25.0	25.0	25.0
26-33	6	30.0	30.0	55.0
34-41	5	25.0	25.0	80.0
42-49	3	15.0	15.0	95.0
50+	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Age distribution of employees at Kluitjieskraal

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-25	2	10.0	10.0	10.0
26-33	3	15.0	15.0	25.0
34-41	3	15.0	15.0	40.0
42-49	3	15.0	15.0	55.0
50+	9	45.0	45.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Women make out 25% of the workforce at Jonkersberg, while only men are employed at Kluitjieskraal. When respondents were asked, “Where do you see yourself in five years’ time in terms of your career?” respondents from Jonkersberg plantation (Figure 1) showed more interest in being employed somewhere else, than their Kluitjieskraal counterparts (Figure 2).

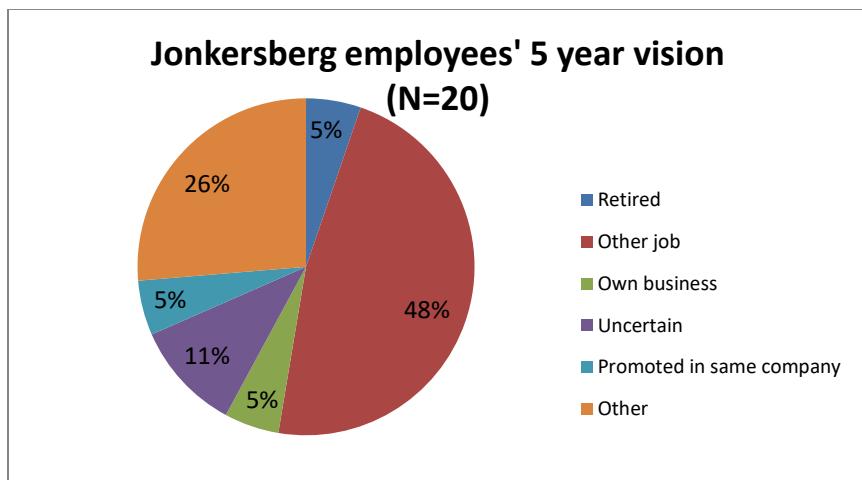


Figure 1: Jonkersberg employees' 5 year vision

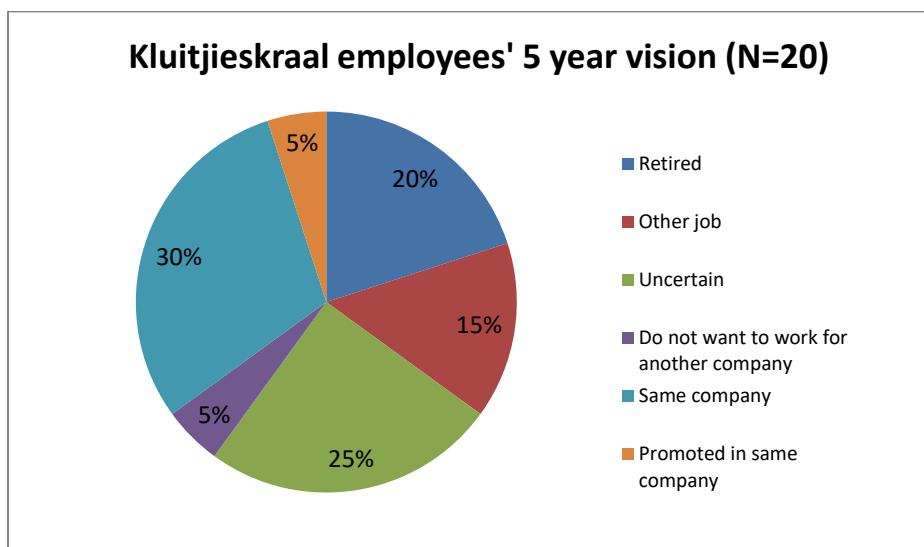


Figure 2: Kluitjieskraal employees' 5 year vision

Oddly, when asked, “What skill would be of more advantage to you?” 30% of Jonkersberg respondents indicated that a promotion within the company would be to their benefit (Figure 3). The largest percentage of Kluitjieskraal respondents (42%) indicated that a technical skill would be to their advantage (Figure 4). The level of uncertainty with regards to their future is higher among Kluitjieskraal employees. It should be noted that the procrastination around replanting Exit plantations negatively influences worker morale.

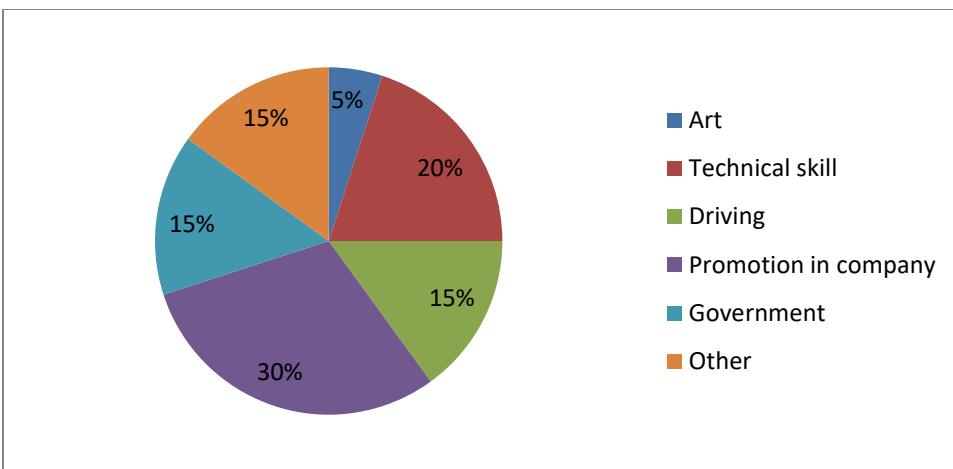


Figure 3: Skills acquisition at Jonkersberg plantation (N=20)

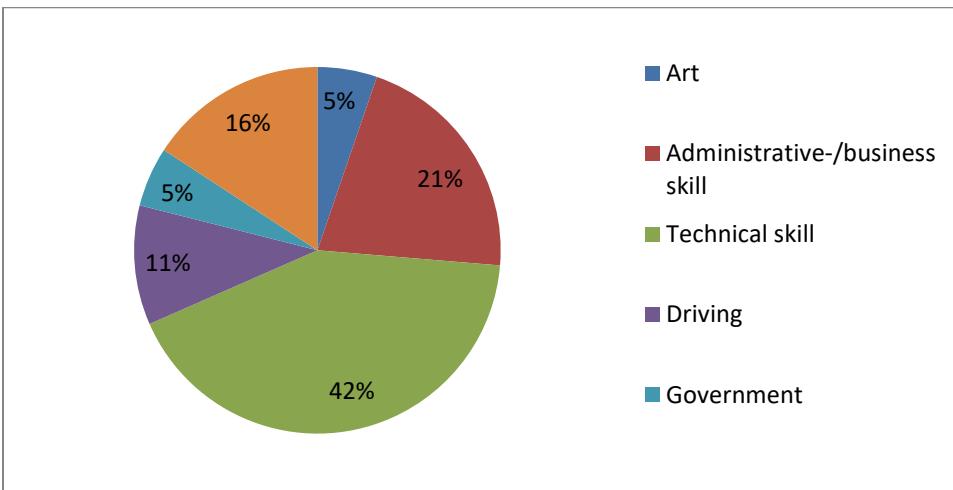


Figure 4: Skills acquisition at Kluitjieskraal plantation (N=20)

Social capital and empowerment

The level of social cohesion was found to be considerably higher in Swanebergpark (70%) than in Phillipsville (45%). When asked who can be trusted, 77.5% of respondents (N=40) did indicate that they trust people to varying degrees. As Goldin (2005) notes, trust is a critical part of human well-being and according to this author this is the ‘glue’ of society that soothes relationships between people. Of the 36 participants who disclosed their average monthly household income, one third of them have a household income of between R1000 and R3001. Out of this group, 66.7% are dissatisfied with the current state of their lives.

Discussion

A part of the FSC social assessment criteria, states that there needs to be, “support provided for local infrastructure, facilities and social programmes at a level appropriate to the scale of forest resources” (Clarke, 2000). The author points out that it is unclear what constitutes an “appropriate” level and concludes that FSC criteria be altered to adequately address social issues in the South African forestry industry.

In Phillipsville, anecdotal evidence suggests housing maintenance and service delivery are the most pertinent issues in this village. In Swanebergpark at Kluitjieskraal plantation, the desire for sport development was strong and also the need to repair the community hall. Drug abuse was another concern. Some common concerns of respondents from both plantations include their relatively low salary, insecurity around the pending Exit Strategy, alcohol abuse and lack of projects that contribute to capacity building among community members.

CSR Projects at Capepine

The company currently has ECD⁴ centres at Jonkershoek plantation (Stellenbosch), Buffelsnek plantation (Knysna) and Jonkersberg plantations respectively. At present the parents of the children at the respective ECD centres are responsible for the payment of fees. A community library was setup at the Bergplaas plantation in George in 2011. The company provides the infrastructure and a community worker manages it. According to a community member, the library is under-utilized as the majority of children attend school in town and return home at around 17:00. In collaboration with the Wilderness Foundation, the company runs the Khula Nam⁵ Project. The project’s intentions are to create awareness and educate grade 7 learners in the communities that are around commercial plantations between George and Port Elizabeth on nature and commercial forestry.

Company CSR Project challenges

Although the company does currently have a CSR strategy in place, it experiences the following challenges:

- Lack of capacity building among community members
- Lack of resources
- The relatively large operational area from the Western- to the Eastern Cape that needs to be covered by one stakeholder manager
- Many municipalities do not have an IDP⁶ in place for the respective areas where the forest villages are situated
- CSR projects are not multi-stakeholder driven

The lack of participation in decision-making processes has had a negative effect on the relationship between forestry communities and the company in terms of project implementation. Respondents were asked if they would participate in a community development project if one would be implemented in their respective villages. The majority (90%) indicated that they would participate in a potential community project. Of these, 52.5% indicated that their participation would be motivated by the potential improvement of their communities.

⁴ Early Childhood Development

⁵ It means: “Grow with me.”

⁶ Integrated Development Plan

Although social capital can affect many facets of life, the relevant benefits to this study include its ability to influence career success (Burt, 1992), help workers find jobs (Granovetter, 1973), reduce turnover rates (Krackhardt & Hanson, 1993) and enable entrepreneurship (Chong & Gibbons, 1997). Community officers are in a good position to assist the Stakeholder Relations Department with its mandate and it is recommended that officers also be selected in villages where the villages had been transferred to the Municipality or other owners. Over the years communities have been promised many things that have never materialised. Community members blame community officers for the lack of community upliftment in these villages and this has eroded trust between community members and community officers. Hence it is important to have workshops that could broker trust among participants and between them and other role-players such as the company for whom they work and the State.

As per BBBEE⁷ requirement, it is suggested that companies contribute 1 % of net profits to CSR projects. During this study it became evident that the amount that used to be spent on CSR projects had been reduced and that the company is not obliged to honour its CSR should it experience financial difficulty. Although the King Reports emphasizes the importance of transparency in corporate governance (Hough, et al., 2010), the researcher was not able to establish the annual amount spent on company CSR projects.

It is recommended that the company become more transparent in terms of financial reporting. There are major financial resources needed to contribute to the addressing of social issues in forest villages. As per lease agreement, forestry communities hold 10 % stake in the leased forestry land. This fund should uplift communities and finance local projects. The problem that the company face is that the State never provided them with these shares. (Clarke, 2013a).

One way of addressing the food insecurity problem at the household level, would be to educate people responsible for housekeeping on budgeting and the importance of a well-balanced diet (Grosskopf, 1932). Another possible solution to food insecurity could be for the company to provide workers with subsidised ration packs. There is an opportunity for the community to collaborate with the company, for instance, community members can be trained as caterers. This also presents a job creation opportunity as the community could serve areas outside the forest villages. An increase in the salary of forest workers is recommended. This increase should be in line with CPI⁸ and should constitute a decent living wage. It is recommended that this wage increase should be set by forestry industry specialists, the Department of Labour, forestry companies, employees and their respective worker representatives. The funding of more frequent visits by healthcare professionals or the investment in a health clinic would benefit forestry villages. The establishment of a community clinic would allow forest workers to go for more regular health check-ups. People from the community along with forest workers could be trained as health care professionals.

In terms of substance abuse, counselling and referring people is a crucial mitigation mechanism. A fulltime social worker could be employed to serve the forest villages along with neighbouring farms. Many people cannot afford the relatively high rates of inpatient- or other substance abuse programmes. Thus the low threshold interventions that social workers provide are crucial to people from poor rural communities (Burnhams, et al., 2012). Providing sports facilities could also contribute to stress release as substance abuse is linked to boredom and stress (Waldman, 1993)

With regards to housing maintenance Capepine is in a better position to attend to overall housing maintenance in forest villages as the State lacks capacity and resources. Currently the company has a

⁷ Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment

⁸ Consumer Price Index

bursary scheme. It is recommended that this bursary scheme should be expanded in order to accommodate students who wish to study in other fields besides forestry. It was also found that some forest workers cannot read and write. This problem could be addressed through ABET⁹ classes. Forest workers would also benefit from career guidance workshops.

As the Exit Strategy is a reality for both these areas, the development of alternative skills is of critical importance. The age distribution among Kluitjieskraal plantation employees might pose a challenge as it is easier for younger employees to be trained. Kluitjieskraal plantation employees might further be disadvantaged by their age when it comes to alternative employment.

There exists a unique culture in these forest villages. In Jonkersberg plantation the youth have been educated in terms of their San heritage. Anecdotal evidence exists for the inclusion of arts, crafts and theatre plays as both an extramural activity and an income generator.

⁹ Adult Basic Education Training

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the commercial forestry industry in South Africa has grown to be a world leader from its humble beginnings in the 19th century. Its success can be attributed to its ability to adapt the changing business environment as new needs arise. The privatisation of commercial plantations has brought with it new challenges and has not yet been able to address the problems of poor working conditions, the lack of decent worker accommodation and relatively low worker remuneration manifesting. My research has also shown that South African legislation, international certification, industry charters and voluntary CSR measures are all measures that have been put in place to contribute to the overall well-being of forestry workers.

However, these policies have proved difficult to implement and the plight of the workers in the forestry industry is a concern. The vulnerability of the research forestry communities is aggravated through a lack of home ownership and a lack of skills that would provide opportunities for them to be employed in other industries. The research has also shown that CSR projects implemented through the company are having little effect in terms of skills development that might prepare forest workers and community members for the possible impacts of the Exit Strategy. However, we believe that there are opportunities to develop an integrated CSR program that has positive spinoffs for both the current workers and the community at large. We have also argued that the Exit Strategy becomes critical at this stage because a carefully thought through Exit Strategy will avoid unnecessary disruption to the community through loss of employment and other negative spinoffs.

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