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Title >> **Corporate Social Responsibility and Attitudes towards Regulation of Multinational Companies**

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Abstract

This paper is a summary of a thesis submitted to the Kimmage Development Studies Centre, Dublin in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA in Development Studies. The paper sets out to examine the role of Corporate Social Responsibility and its contribution to influencing the debate on global governance and how oversight of the private sector can be achieved. The research examines perspectives of the Irish private sector, government, NGOs and trade unions on these questions.

The research examines attitudes to the role of business in society, the issue of regulation of business and how, if at all, steps are to be taken to create global oversight of the work of multinational companies and any related policy implications for Ireland.

The research highlights a degree of synergy in terms of perspectives on the way profit seeking and the common good can be achieved, and on the challenges in doing business in countries with weak governance[1], but demonstrates a divergence of views on the place of CSR and how best to hold companies to account for their actions.

1. The term 'countries with weak governance' has been coined to refer primarily to Sub Saharan African countries where governments are perceived to be unwilling or unable to assume their responsibilities in relation to public administration and protecting human rights.

1. Outline of the Topic

The focus of this paper is on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the perspectives of the Irish private sector, government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and trade unions on its role in how oversight of the business sector can be achieved. The paper is set against a back-drop of increasing power and influence of multinational corporations in those countries of the Global South characterised by weak governance that often leads to negative economic, social and environmental outcomes. Coupled with this phenomenon are;
1) the growth of Irish foreign direct investment around the world and
2) a growing interest of development agencies to engage the private sector in poverty reduction.
The frame of reference to analyse these issues is that of Corporate Social Responsibility.

1.1 Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR is a contested term. It is, however, the lens through which debates about the role of business in society have been taking place. Definitions from various authors include elements such as the obligations of business towards society's values, the pursuit of profit in accordance with laws, and actions beyond a company's direct interest (Carroll, 1999; Alford et al, 2006; and Sena, 2006). With no universally accepted definition, the definition proposed by the European Commission (2001, p.6) has gained popular currency;

> Most definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility define it as a concern whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operation and in their interactions with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis.

Civil society and trade unions are happy to engage in this debate but prefer to talk of Corporate Social Accountability (ICTU, 2006) implying that business is answerable to the rest of society and cannot simply be left to decide which 'responsibilities' it will choose to take on for itself.

Jenkins (2005) examines the debates on CSR taking an historical perspective, arguing that CSR should not be seen as a new phenomenon. He presents various historical events when government sought to exert power over business: he cites the anti-trust movement in the USA in the late 19th Century; the New Deal after the Wall Street crash of the 1920s; and the attempts to regulate multi-national corporation (MNC) investments in newly independent countries in the 1960s.

The Neo-Liberal agenda and modern day globalisation of the 1980s onwards marks a major turning point in this power dynamic, when governments rolled back on the regulation of business. Korten (2005) refers to a new world economic order created by this globalisation which serves to free up business to move uninhibited across the globe. It is civil society's campaigning against the negative environmental and other impacts of this globalisation, typified by the campaign against Nike (for labour conditions in South East Asian factories), that has created the latest round of CSR initiatives led by business who wish to be left alone to determine the way they work.

1.2 Critiques of CSR

Broadly there are two groups who critique CSR, namely civil society activists and neo-liberal academics. Jenkins (2005) and Bendell (2005) highlight how NGOs, trade unions, consumer groups and shareholders have been the drivers behind getting companies to think of their CSR out of concern for companies' negative social and environmental impacts. For companies, however, the motivation to engage with CSR is borne out of a desire to mitigate damage to organisational reputation. The upshot of this is that it is principally big brand name companies that engage actively in CSR processes such as company or industry codes of conduct which, they argue, are built around the need to deal with public perceptions. Research by Murphy (2002) and McGuiness (2003) into Irish companies and their attitudes to CSR highlighted this point and that companies will only spend as much on CSR as translates into financial benefit. CSR is also sometimes seen as corporate philanthropy with companies seeing the benefits in terms of staff morale and good public relations and as a way to differentiate one's company in the market and gain competitive advantage. Given this study's focus on International Development, CSR was considered from this perspective as well.

Blowfield (2005), Jenkins (2005) and Frynas (2005) examine CSR from perspectives related to the poverty reduction agenda. They critique the notion that CSR contributes to development and poverty reduction. In this regard, DfID's[1] motivations are called into question for championing CSR and supporting the initiation of certain multi-stakeholder initiatives[2] such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)[3] given that the UK is home to many of the world's MNCs such as Shell and others who are under pressure due to their negative record overseas.

Various authors including Romejin (1999), Utting (2000), Ottoway (2001), Petras and Veltmeyer (2001), Bendell (2004) Gonzalez-Perez et al (2005) and Newell (2005), consider the question of legitimacy; who is entitled to represent and speak on behalf of communities negatively impacted upon

2   Department for International Development – UK ODA programme
3   Multi-stakeholder initiative – (MSI) – A process where Government, Business and Civil society work together to resolve issues of mutual interest.
4   EITI – a multi-stakeholder process to deal with the serious corruption and ensuing conflicts emanating from the extraction of minerals by MNCs in developing countries.

by MNCs? They challenge the role of self appointed organisations such as NGOs to speak on behalf of communities and call for representative bodies such as trade unions - in the case of workers - to represent the interests of southern communities. Picolotti et al (2002) call for greater integration of work by environmental and human rights organisations in tackling the negative impacts of MNCs.

The neo-liberals are the only critics to completely dismiss CSR. Friedman (1970) in Gonzalez-Perez et al states that "[the] one and only one social responsibility of business is to increase profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud" (2005, p.8). Crook (2005) argues that this will, by its very nature, produce a social good. He highlights the economic progress of the 20th century as evidence for this. He goes further by arguing against any need for reform of capitalism which he believes CSR advocates are in favour of.

1.3 Regulation versus CSR Voluntarist Approaches

Given the opposing perspectives on the place and purpose of CSR that exist between business and civil society groups, the debate's fault line has been between those in favour of focusing on regulatory approaches versus those who wish business to be left to voluntarily take responsibility for themselves. While business wishes to focus on its CSR, civil society prefers to use the term Corporate Accountability to describe this sense of what is needed from business. The International Council on Human Rights Policy (ICHRP) (2002) argues that there is a need for legal obligations on companies which should be concomitant to the rights that companies enjoy.

Bendell (2004, p.31) agrees but also argues that the "voluntary-versus-mandatory (regulatory framework) is misinformed". According to him there is value in voluntary codes of practice being adopted by companies as they are part of the process of sensitising companies to the issues. He argues that they should exist side by side with government regulations which can work to put in place common standards and ensure that there is a level playing field for business with businesses unable to disregard rights and thereby gain a competitive advantage over their competitors.

There is an interesting apparent overlap in thinking of civil society and neo-liberal critics of CSR as it pertains to the role of the state and its role as regulator. The neo-liberals see it as the job of government to correct market failures. The neo-liberals resent any suggestion that business should be responsible for regulation, which they see as the proper role of government. This resonates with the civil society view of the role for

government to regulate the market place as opposed to this being left to voluntary initiatives of business.

1.4 John Ruggie – UN Secretary General Special Representative on Business and Human Rights

Against this backdrop of debates between business and civil society groups, there has been at the level of the UN, much debate over several years on the rights and responsibilities of MNCs. Much of this debate has been fought out on ideological grounds with many, particularly Northern world countries, resisting calls for greater accountability to be placed on business. In 2005, a proposal was tabled in the UN that MNC business be held accountable in the same manner as nation states for the range of human rights conventions that states had signed up to. These were called the UN human rights 'norms' for business. They were not adopted. However after this process failed there was the appointment by the UN Secretary General of a Special Representative on Business and Human Rights, (John Ruggie). This marked a new milestone in placing the topic of business and human rights on the international agenda. By 2007, Ruggie (2006, 2007) had presented two reports to the UN Human Rights Council. In these he outlined his view on the threats to globalisation presented by the imbalance in power between nation states and global corporations. In terms of moving forward beyond the false opposition of voluntary and mandatory approaches that had characterised much of the debate, he proposed three broad principles to move the debates forward.

Firstly, he argued that there was the need to ensure that states were fulfilling their duty to protect citizens against human rights abuses by companies. McDonagh (2005) supports Ruggie in questioning whether MNCs should not be accountable under the standards and legal mechanisms in their home countries for their actions in third countries where weak governments may be unable to provide protection. This is known as the 'principle of extra-territorial jurisdiction'. Secondly, Ruggie saw the need for corporations to begin to include human rights perspectives into their CSR policies. Finally, Ruggie proposed more effective grievance and accountability mechanisms to provide redress to those negatively affected by MNCs.

1.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the current debate on the place and responsibilities of business in society is centred around CSR. This debate has been running for over a century but it has come to the fore in recent years given the great concentration of power and influence in a small number of hands

and, the consequent inequalities in income and damage to environment and society in the world.

The neo-liberals resent the threat to the homogeneity of their free market discourse. Civil society is willing to use the space created by CSR discourses for engagement with government and business to discuss and press for greater adherence and compliance with human rights. They, however, remain critical of the difficulties and limitations of the concept as understood and applied by business and government. Business on the other hand is engaging with the concept. Internationally, under the auspices of the UN there is a momentum to examine the links between business, global governance and the protection of human rights. Some questions which existing research and theory suggest are; are voluntary approaches sufficient? Can business regulate itself and what space and role is there for greater external regulation? Is the CSR discourse properly rooted in an ethical and moral framework? Is it questioning the fundamental assumptions about the dominant neo-liberal paradigm or is it simply tinkering with the symptoms of the problem? Can it contribute meaningfully to the challenges businesses face in doing business in the poorest countries in the Global South? What does all this mean for policy making in Ireland?

2. Research Undertaken

The research for this paper was undertaken between February and August 2007. The earlier months were used for secondary research and helping to focus the shape and content of the primary research questions. The method chosen for the primary research was face to face interviews with key informants from government, business and civil society groups in Ireland. A total of 13 interviewees participated from a pool of 17 that were contacted. The governmental interviewees included representatives of the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, Enterprise Ireland, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Irish Aid. They were chosen given their responsibilities for promoting Irish business, and in particular international business opportunities, and for their role in upholding Ireland's international human rights commitments, including the official Irish Aid programme. From business, 5 were interviewed. They included representatives of IBEC, the national employer's confederation, Traid-links[5], Business in the Community Ireland[6], a professor of entrepreneurship and a business advisor on doing business in Africa. They were chosen because of their representativeness of Irish business and industry including business academia, and their interest in CSR and in issues of international development. From civil society, 4 interviews were held with representatives of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Amnesty International, Transparency International and Frontline Defenders. These were chosen because of their engagement with business in Ireland and their interest in the impacts of business internationally.

The semi-structured interview conducted with each interviewee was structured under 4 areas of questioning as follows:

The role of the firm in society – profits and shareholders versus the wider common good, attitudes towards CSR and the place of human rights within CSR.

Voluntarism of CSR versus regulation – can business regulate itself? What case is there for regulation? Does CSR help companies work appropriately in countries with weak governance and what role should governments take vis a vis business and CSR?

The John Ruggie process – MNCs and their relationship with the state, global regulation of business and the possible outcomes of this process.

Public policy making in Ireland – Irish investment in the Global South, the appropriateness of conditionalities, extra-territorial jurisdiction and multi-stakeholder initiatives.

5   A business initiative providing assistance to African food processors to market their produce into Ireland
6   An Irish business network promoting CSR

3. Research Findings and Analysis

3.1 The Role of the Firm in Society

Synergies but still challenging
What is striking about the research findings in this case is that there was no immediate clash evident between the three groups of respondents on the role of the firm in society. All three groups were largely in favour of free markets. Despite this apparent overlap in ideologies, the critique of Ottoway (2001) and Petras and Veltmeyer (2001) against unrepresentative NGOs does not do justice to the civil society actors who laid down some serious challenges to business to live up to what they proclaim as their business standards; *"it is not now realistic that business will wake up today and for reasons of morality or business advantage decide to fully take into consideration the needs and aspirations of its stakeholders and act responsibly. Power relations need to be taken into account; business needs to be brought to the table for negotiation"*, according to one civil society respondent.

Rationale to engage with CSR – morality or business sense
The business group were open to achieving a greater balance between profit seeking and the needs of society, but they saw the pursuit of profit, as does Crook (2005), as contributing to social development. While business respondents referred to the morality of pursuing profit in an ethical manner, with a new generation of business leaders *"doing business in a moral way"*, they stressed that CSR needs to make business sense. The fact that business needs a business case for CSR is highlighted by Halford et al (2006), Murphy (2002) and McGuiness (2003).

Interestingly, one in the business group held a neo-liberal outlook which resonated with those of Crook (2005) and Sternberg (2001, 2005). The view held was that CSR was of no use to business and actually hindered the true purpose of business.

Civil society believe in profits, without undermining standards
The civil society group were of the view that profit is central to business. Crucially, they didn't see this as posing a challenge to respecting the needs of the wider society. They believed that there should not be a conflict of interest between seeking a profit and behaving responsibly and cited companies with a Quaker heritage to make their point. They didn't envisage business adopting moral values, *"ethics are for philosophers".* They advocated that the business case be made to business to behave more responsibly and saw it as important that companies not gain a competitive advantage over each other through the undermining of standards.

Only the neo-liberals are anti-CSR
Business, civil society and government respondents were not anti-CSR. All three groups saw it as contributing to the debate that is needed in society on these issues as highlighted by the ICHRP (2002) and Blowfield (2005). The only sentiment that was anti-CSR came from the pure neo-liberal perspective, as highlighted by Blowfield (2005).

Shared perspectives of left and right
Civil society representatives highlighted that socially responsive businesses are those that have better corporate governance and show respect to their shareholders. Interestingly, Sternberg (2001 and 2005), a neo-liberal, argues that a corporation's only social responsibility is to respect its shareholders. Neo-liberals are arguing that companies should only listen to their shareholders; in this research civil society was arguing that those companies that truly listen to their shareholders will be socially responsible. Does this demonstrate a potential point of congruence between left and right? It would suggest that perhaps a stronger and more stringent corporate governance regime may assist greater social responsibility of business.

Government respondents expected the accepted norms of society to ensure that the interest of business and society coalesce. They viewed the development of society as in parallel to the growth of the economy and in this way resonated with some of the thinking of Crook, "the private search for profit does advance the public interest" (2005, p.13). However, one of the civil society respondents lamented the fact that in his view *"the government's attitude is that what is in the business interest is in the public interest"*.

CSR is consumer driven
All parties viewed the impetus for CSR to be in large measure driven by external pressures, in particular by consumers. According to a business respondent, *"people are watching 24/7"*. This is in line with Jenkins (2005) and Bendell (2005) who refer to the move in the 1990's to re-address CSR due to pressure from environmentalist and human rights NGOs and trade unions.

Human rights – only linked to MNC abuses?
Only civil society saw the need to place human rights discourses, and, in particular, economic social and cultural rights, centrally at the heart of the debate and practice of CSR. The example was given of water borne illnesses in India being exacerbated by the activities of a soft drinks company accused of absorbing a huge amount of ground-water and thereby increasing this problem. Business and government did not perceive human rights issues as relevant to Ireland as they were perceived largely as labour rights issues and the perception was that

Ireland had achieved a satisfactory level of protection in this area. Interestingly they did associate the discussion on human rights with acknowledged abuses of multinational companies in countries of the Global South.

3.2 Voluntarism Versus Regulation

CSR – does it deliver or is it PR?
Business people saw CSR making a positive contribution to ensuring that business meets wider social obligations. Regulation on top of CSR or of CSR was seen by business as counterproductive. Bendell (2004) notes that business people believe it will produce a lowest common denominator effect rather than best practice. Civil society in contrast believed that CSR without enforcement is "public relations", a view put forward by Murphy (2002). They pointed to the fact that normally no sector of society is left to fully "self regulate itself". This is supported by Kerkow et al (2003) who highlight the demand for accountability that imposes sanctions/penalties on companies that fail to behave responsibly.

Government respondents were equivocal on the matter of how well business can regulate itself and the contribution of CSR to this. The Government group noted the potential motivation of business to engage with CSR as a way of forestalling the imposition of regulation, a view shared by Utting (2000).

Who can ensure rights and what brings change?
Government and civil society were in agreement that it is the role of government to ensure people's rights and that this is not something that can be left to business. "*If a corporation wants to be a responsible citizen then it cannot write its own standards, business cannot re-write people's rights and take or leave what they don't like",* according to one civil society respondent. Business people however wished to be left alone. They believed that good practice will be generated through pressure from consumers and the drive for new ethical markets, all of which CSR will support. Jenkins (2005), however, cites that it is principally business in high profile retailing which will be influenced by consumer pressure.

Business believed that the role of Government is to provide incentives instead of regulation to achieve societal change. One respondent gave an example from the equality debate arguing that one *"cannot legislate for the fact that men do not do their share of house-work".* Civil society took a different view and cited the unionisation of working people which over the years has brought social progress. This is backed up by Barrientos et al (2001) who challenge the role of social auditors in ensuring good conditions. They argue that these processes could not hope to achieve

what working people could achieve through their own agency as members of an active trade union.

CSR and countries with weak governance

As regards regions of the world with weak governance, the business respondents differed from the other two groups. Their feeling was that CSR does and can help business to operate in weak governance countries and that business can raise the standards above what is legally required there. However particular cases such as Darfur and Burma were cited where CSR thinking was not of help to business; *"disengaging from Burma left the market to the Chinese, was this any better?" "Google going into China, is this an abandoning of its principles or is it contributing to a gradual opening up of the country?"*

While civil society acknowledged that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) can potentially bring advantages to such countries, it is not evident that CSR is of value in assisting business in countries with weak governance. It was felt that in such circumstances, business is most likely to simply go for the minimum standard required which in most cases will be low and not in accordance with internationally recognised standards. The question was posed by one respondent. *"Should a commitment to CSR not mean focusing on countries that respect rights, thus providing an incentive to countries to respect rights so as to attract FDI".*

Market failures to be dealt with by government

Business representatives believed that the exploitative extraction of resources from countries of the Global South is not desirable. Government was also concerned about the potential negative consequences to Ireland's reputation should Irish companies be so implicated. Very often such exploitations have serious consequences in terms of lives lost or environmental destruction. This cost to peoples' lives and to the natural environment represents an externality and is not addressed by the market. Interestingly, Crook (2005) a neo-liberal, calls for market failures to be dealt with by government and not by business.

China and level playing fields

All parties mentioned China and its role in the world. Business and Government feared being undercut by China while civil society questioned the corporate credentials of companies going to invest in China where working conditions do not respect ILO[7] standards.

Civil society saw the need to create a level playing field such that one cannot get a competitive advantage through the denial of people's rights. This resonates with Bendell (2004) who articulates a business case for regulation so that a level playing field can be created and business not undercut by competitors. In a similar vein, the private sector did not feel it

should take the full responsibility for the difficult environment in countries with weak governance. This suggests that some manner of regulation can be countenanced by them.

3.3 Global Regulation and the John Ruggie Process

Business and anti-imperialists

The business group was reluctant to engage with the question as to the global imbalance between nation states and MNCs. Instead they focused on the imbalance between the Northern industrialised world and the Global South and the institutional divide in power resulting from unfair trading rules and trade subsidies. *"Why regulate the actions of MNCs while having unfair trade rules that block developing countries from progressing"?* Interestingly, though they may not have agreed with Petras and Veltmeyer's (2001) anti-imperialist analysis, this does resonate with their view that the Northern industrialised world has constructed globalisation to favour largely northern head-quartered MNCs. Government and civil society identified with the divide in power and felt the need for change. However the civil society view was that if whatever Ruggie proposed does not get the approval of the private sector then it is not likely to be adopted.

Ireland's positive example

Civil society felt that Ireland's social partnership could be held up as an example of business being done under regulation that guarantees human rights and manages to attract FDI. Civil society's position is allied to that of the International Council on Human Rights Policy (ICHRP) (2002) and Amnesty International (2004), namely that as MNCs benefit from international law they should at the same time be beholding to international law.

Whose standards will be observed?

Government sought to proceed cautiously and most likely at a very slow pace so as to bring business along with what is agreed in terms of standards. They suggested limiting the focus to deal with grave abuses with examples such as child labour being cited. The business respondents equally advocated caution, in particular in relation to Northern industrialised world standards being imposed on the Global South. This runs contrary to McDonagh (2005) who calls for the actions of MNCs to be judged by the standards in their home countries rather than the ones in which they operate. Despite this, one business respondent stated that *"business recognises that the debate is moving from providing goalposts to schools to asking where does our oil come from".*

Big business and state capture

Civil society representatives were worried that there is an element of state capture by big business which is something Petras and Veltmeyer also highlight as "the corporate gun pointed at the heads of workers and legislators" (2001 p.71). The European Coalition for Corporate Justice (2006), also point to this in their commentary on the European Commission's launch of a CSR alliance in 2006 which they said had been taken over by business interests.

3.4 Irish Public Policy Making

There is a need for dialogue

Civil society saw the need for dialogue with the private sector, be it directly in a confidential fashion or through more structured dialogue through multi-stakeholder initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. They, however, did not see the private sector as willing to engage. The concern was expressed that *"the scene is awash with guidelines but no enforcement"*.

The private sector indicated its willingness to engage with aid agencies and Irish Aid in the case of Irish mining interests in Africa. Some respondents also expressed concern at the multiplicity of guidelines and processes involved in CSR. The private sector and Government were rather uninformed of many CSR initiatives, aside from the Global Compact[8] and anti-corruption legislation. Those with a view on 'the Compact' saw it as lacking any impetus in Ireland and there was little knowledge of other multi-stakeholder initiatives.

Conditionalities – ok, but...

All three groups were open to the idea of conditionalities being applied to government contracts. The only caveat was from the business group who were concerned that the conditions should not be too onerous or embedded in Northern industrialised world moral pre-occupations.

Ireland not likely to follow Europe on extra-territoriality

All parties acknowledged that the principle of extra-territorial jurisdiction had in some way already been conceded with legislation on sex crimes and corruption legislation being in place. However the private sector and government were in the main equivocal on the introduction of legislation to hold to account the actions of MNCs. They highlighted difficulties in its operation and applicability, *"would such a provision for example put Irish business at a competitive disadvantage to other operators in that country?"* Government and civil society imagined that the will of the private sector would most likely hold sway on this issue and that this would prevent its introduction. No parties cited knowledge of the

8 The Global Compact is a UN Secretary General initiative to mobilise major business to declare themselves in favour of labour, human rights and environmental standards as set down in various UN treaties and conventions.

European Parliament resolution of 13th March 2007, which called for *"the Commission to implement a mechanism by which victims, including third-country nationals, can seek redress against European companies in the national courts of the Member states".* Unfortunately this issue was not raised with them at interview, so it is not possible to ascertain what their reaction to this would have been.

4. Recommendations

In the light of the research findings and analysis, the following recommendations are made to business, civil society and government:

4.1 Business

- The business community needs to embrace the thinking and concepts of rights based approaches and bring these into their CSR discourses.

- The business community needs to increase its engagement with civil society and government in the context of its work in countries with weak governance. To this end it needs to join and engage with relevant multi-stakeholder initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

4.2 Civil society

- Civil society should mobilise citizens for greater oversight and accountability of the activities of MNCs as they impact on communities in Southern countries.

- Greater efforts need to be made by civil society to ensure that consumers are more aware of the ethical issues involved in their consumption and investment decisions.

- Civil society needs to utilise existing complaint mechanisms that are in place to hold companies to account such as are contained in the OECD Guidelines for MNEs (multi-national enterprises).

- The NGOs involved in human rights work internationally need to find new and creative ways of engaging with business as a sector which has a significant role to play in ensuring people's rights.

Particularly in low-margin employments such as plantations, support for trade unions should be promoted over and above social auditing or NGO monitoring of workers' conditions.

4.3 Government

- Within the context of Irish Aid's commitment to ensuring policy coherence across all areas of government policy, the link between human rights and the work of Irish MNCs should be examined.

- Irish government support for the internationalisation of Irish industry should seek to identify ethical issues in supply chain management and support industry to deal with these effectively and proactively.

- There is a need for Irish Aid to examine the role played by the Irish private sector engaged in extractive industries in their programme countries and to consider engagement with the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

- The Irish government should show best practice by ensuring that the state pension fund uses ethical and sustainability criteria in the investment choices used. Similarly, conditionalities concerning human rights, in particular labour standards, should be contained within government procurement contracts and grant aid.

5. Conclusion

This research sought to investigate Irish attitudes to the global regulation of MNCs. It situated this research within the existing CSR discourse and within on-going global processes and debates on the future of globalisation and the role of MNCs within this. The research highlighted that there is a desire and a willingness in Ireland to ensure that the activities of MNCs, and in particular those from Ireland, stay within the boundaries that are set by the rule of law and social convention. There is a divide in opinion however as to what extent it is necessary to establish these boundaries by law based on underlying human rights principles, and alternatively how much should be left to the public's engagement with what is considered morally acceptable.

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