

The relationship between Institutions and Corporate Social Responsibility Practices in Algeria

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Abstract:

This study discusses the relationship between institutions and the adoption of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Algeria SMEs. This study introduces several key factors that condition the interplay between institutions and CSR. Based on the evidence from the case study METAGAV, we understand that the role that institutions play in encouraging CSR practices can be both formal and informal, and reflects cultural values. This collaborative role required at the intersection of institutional constraints, stakeholders, and local firms to work towards the development of a unique environment.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Algeria, METAGAV, cultural values, stakeholders.

JEL Classification: Q01 Sustainable Development

Introduction

In the global business environment, there is a growing interest in understanding the conditions in which the strategies and practices of corporate social responsibility (CSR) emerge. In this vein, researchers have shown that institutions play a key role in shaping CSR behaviors and the responsibilities of enterprises. This view highlights that CSR practices emerge and are driven by the interplay between companies' strategic sensitivity to global standards and local demands and socio-economic environments. To conduct such a study, we have chosen Algeria as a research field. Interest in CSR has become explicit today in Algeria and can be justified by the country's changing context. In addition, as the starting point for our work, we may add that in a given context, the higher the firms' degree of dependence on local stakeholders, the more firms have adopted a stakeholder philosophy or strategy. The study also showed that the more significant the dependence on local stakeholders, the more firms focused on legitimating activities, which emphasizes local expectations.

Our article is organized as follows. Section II presents the motivation for the research before Section III provides an outline of the journey in the institutional perspective of CSR and the cross-border institutions in which CSR is embedded. Section IV assesses the importance of the research issues when it comes to the relevance of the CSR discussion in the current business context, particularly concerning emerging countries. It outlines the importance of the interplay between local institutions and CSR strategies. Last but not least, the recent increase in attention for sustainable business development on a global level makes the Algerian case crucial, especially when taking into account the environmental characteristics, particularly by sweeping the country's institutional legacy, which is difficult.

2. The Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has brought ample attention from different perspectives. Although no consensual definition of CSR has been derived to date, organizational, social, and contextual shifts further contextualize it. It is comprehensive in that numerous definitions only reflect a partial aspect of its pluralistic aspects. CSR's evolving definitions and social trends reflect its fluctuation. Prior to World War II, the concept of CSR was mainly discussed in the context of philanthropy. After the war, the primary way of defining CSR changed to a focus on business accepting greater care obligations. By the 1960s, discussions expanded into acknowledging the broader societal impacts companies have

in a capitalist system. In the 1960s and 1970s, the stakeholder paradigm began to replace the social obligation approach. Businesses began to analyze the influence of multiple stakeholders such as investors, customers, suppliers, union workers, and the communities in which the corporation performs its business. CSR was characterized in the 1970s and 1980s by a more international and interdisciplinary focus. It was characterized as the simultaneous pursuit of financial interests and social benefits. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the most significant change was the worldwide spread of CSR. Environmental and ethical considerations are thus more influential than ever and can alter a company's market position at any time. In the 21st century, the growth in social expectations and corporate responsibilities appeared to encourage the assumption of responsibilities that surpassed legal limits. All companies are positioned within a particular legal framework, and their managerial options are impacted by a web of institutions in which the state is present in its various forms, concomitantly with other non-state institutions or intermediaries prevalent in all societies. CSR is therefore strongly influenced by the values and customs of a particular society. Decisions by CEOs about the inclusion of social responsibility will therefore be directly related to the social involvements of their companies. Companies that work in countries with stronger policies of CSR may track this pattern by adopting high levels of CSR strategies. In contrast, companies operating in countries with lower levels of CSR activity may have lower levels of CSR activity. The prevalence and substance of CSR approaches can therefore differ according to the country's institutions.

2.1. Definition and Evolution

At its core, the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) aims to reconcile business with development paradigms. The concept of CSR is considered confusing, as it is associated with a wide range of interpretations. The first is about the moral duty of businesses as corporations, which holds that businesses merely donate to a greater market society for services. Perhaps, CSR may be viewed as an adjusted and newly mandated position of authoritarian capitalism, in which the company's leadership voluntarily participates in the implementation of public policy. In this process, business leaders are sometimes fulfilling the role previously reserved for the government, such as schools, firefighters, and charity. In addition, corporate social responsibility as business discretion and as a useful collection is composed of five variations. It exists in order to the extent of its potential to protect society from business capitalism.

The force that contributed to the dynamism of this interpretation of CSR varied according to changes in public pressure. CSR began to attract academic attention during the 1960s, after the publication of a report on corporate social responsibility. A reflection on environmental issues in the form of CSR and sustainable production and consumption took off with a significant report in 1987. In addition, social interest further intensified following global demonstrations against the launch of ministerial meetings in Seattle in 1999. When it comes to sustainable concerns, CSR is based on humanitarian concepts, human rights, and solidarity. The concern for corporate social responsibility emerged in 2001 following several organizational crises. These failures came from leadership and management. The public scandal that leads to bankruptcy results in the loss of confidence and credibility among shareholders, investors, subscribers, and other stakeholders. It is particularly helpful to consider CSR as a dynamic field under stressed forces that push society to be more concerned about CSR and corporate sustainability on the international global scene.

3. Theoretical Framework

One of the most compelling aspects of the field of CSR and the motivations that underpin broader theoretical discussions is the practice of introducing a theoretical framework dedicated to shedding light on these issues. Through a variety of theories, the content seeks to explain why corporate actors engage in social action when they are expected to be profitable. Based on this overarching framework, CSR models have become one of the most studied in the field of strategic management, institutionalism, economics, and business. In this sense, for example, by understanding the theory of trade and resource dependence, companies seek to maintain a social license to operate by creating vital relationships with society, thereby minimizing political or regulatory pressure. Other CSR models, such as ethical frameworks, also contribute to the expansion of the institutional influence model, since a corporation carries out ethical 'giving back' by providing support and resources to society.

While all these models contributed to CSR's distinction, it was claimed that all these frameworks took their theoretical foundation from two fundamentally different paradigms: economic rationality and management. However, attention to institutional theory in terms of CSR has received extensive deliberation. An exclusive focus on institutional influence in terms of corporate behavior is important because of current institutional characteristics in Algeria, which are an interpretative context for conducting and understanding CSR practices.

3.1. Institutional Theory

Institutional theory is one of the main theories used to interpret CSR practices, particularly as it is practiced in Algeria. Institutional theory is concerned with the complex ways that institutions create expectations and norms that shape the behavior of actors. In this sense, for example, it is the institution that is legitimate and authorizes the state to exercise sovereign authority.

Institutional theory identifies two core concepts with normative elements as they shape organizational behavior. The notion of "legitimacy" is about valued elements within institutions. If organizations are to maintain "reputation, status, relationships of power and resonance," they must make their values congruent with and supportive of these institutional elements. The "cycle of legitimacy and practice" refers to the fact that the actions and behaviors of organizations and their constituencies serve to reinforce the system of commonly held beliefs and values. This is especially relevant when it comes to the influence of societal structures. One way, among many identified, is for society to create organizations that promote or act upon social norms such as codes of ethics. This link can then be extended to Corporate Social Responsibility as organizations begin to purchase insurance and align with the standards of an ethical investment index.

4. Institutions in Algeria

Algeria is a country with a complex institutional landscape and culture that has both direct and indirect impacts on the ways that corporations address their wider social and environmental responsibilities. This wide institutional landscape includes governmental institutions such as the Algerian Constitution, relevant public codes or legislation, and the Conseil National Économique et Social. Moreover, within Algerian society are many civil society organizations working inside the nation-state and in partnership with other non-governmental organizations abroad. Other relevant institutions include the private sector and specific organizations working for business and industry. It is important to emphasize that these organizations, state and non-state, engage in determining the way that business is encouraged, regulated, and expected to contribute to society.

Our concept of institutions is holistic and includes the axes of norms and values, and formal rules and assigned powers. We believe that both formal and informal institutions are able to create formal and informal constraints and drive corporate strategies that are (more or less) congruent with them. Although Algeria has a dynamic and wide institutional landscape, we propose that actors in the country face difficulties as well as possibilities.

Algeria's institutions are complex and segmented. This is due to political, historical, economic, and geographical factors that operate differently across the country and in time. This complexity is at times seemingly incoherent and contradictory, and factors influencing it can have direct and obvious impacts as well as roundabout and disguised consequences for the ways that resources are mobilized in the country and its relations beyond its borders.

4.1. Overview of Algerian Institutions

Institutions related to legitimacy and the making of rules. Legitimacy Institutions can be defined as social networks, traditions, and power authorities contributing to the establishment and transfer of norms and giving structure to a society. Three main institutions illustrate the basis of state power and organization that guide the process of the establishment and development of companies: legitimacy, the appropriation of resources and rights, and the globalization era. These can be divided into five principal levels: state, supply, demand, NGOs, and transnational companies. State-based institutions The state can be split into the legal framework and the influence of government and trade union practices on business. The different legal and regulatory frameworks regulating investment and business organization are based on the Algerian legal tradition inspired by Roman and, above all, Islamic law, and a limited number of principles borrowed from the French legal system. The two main types of companies' statutes are the EURL and the SPA. The General Investment Law, modified in 2009 but without changes to its policy, replaces the main directives adopted during the political bourgeoisie for the national economy. The acquisition of a majority shareholding or full ownership of companies by a foreign party is not generally avoided. However, since the rules imposed by the Foreign Exchange Office are complex, any transfer of funds between Algeria and the outside can be difficult to address.

5. Corporate Social Responsibility in Algeria

The growing relevance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices worldwide has begun to encourage research into the efforts and strategies of corporations and industrial groups to confront the social and environmental challenges in their respective countries of operation proactively. Algeria differs from its neighboring countries in North America in the multitude of proactive CSR initiatives carried out by corporations and their corporate leaders. In recent years, national interest in questions of CSR has served as the impetus for legislation and regulation regarding corporate activity.

There is an increasing international interest in understanding what drives corporations to engage in social responsibility in general and in developing

countries in particular. Evidence from various surveys shows that the adoption of the CSR concept is currently a reality for these countries. Drawing on a qualitative approach that consisted of an empirical content analysis of social and environmental reports produced by Algerian corporations and using complementary data and documentary sources, primary and secondary indices, the following pages present an analysis of the current first-image CSR situation in Algeria and contribute, in a heretofore unknown empirical way, to the debate over the role of the state and institutions in the practice and accountability of social responsibility.

5.1. Current Landscape

In recent years, CSR, as a connotation of economic activity, has appeared in Algeria, even if it remains confined to a relatively intimate arena that does not go beyond the small circle of human resources and public relations managers. A few companies have initiated certain CSR initiatives in Algeria, including environmental programs, training, local hiring, assistance to youth, orphans, and random financial contributions to social causes. This raises several questions. Are these initiatives linked to the real societal issues and challenges that Algeria is currently facing or pondering? Apparently not. This means that these CSR initiatives respond rather to a global framework defined by international headquarters rather than to local needs and expectations. Have CSR and ethics programs and codes of conduct succeeded in improving the image of oil companies and the service sectors that are confronted with the public and civil society?

In Algeria, as in several developing countries, CSR is a strategic option based on the views and perceptions of company leaders. More than half of the respondents believe that it is a voluntary decision weighted by the company to evaluate and take into account the level of the extra-financial approach in matters. Faced with this concern, the majority of Algerian companies are looking to integrate and even federate their CSR approach around their development strategy. The two most cited motivations are the strengthening of partnerships and the support of the development strategy by developing CSR management and monitoring systems. The impact of the institutional context on CSR for Algerian society in general and multinationals in particular is considerable. In recent years, therefore, the Algerian state has undertaken to reform the business world through more restrictive regulations that impose increased transparency and the adoption of specific practices imposed on private companies. These reforms have already affected and continue to influence corporate behavior in many ways.

The legal framework is beginning to take shape, which means that companies are under increasing pressure to adapt their practices.

6. The Relationship Between Institutions and Corporate Social Responsibility in Algeria

In Algeria, institutions, market regulations, and cultural norms shape corporate behaviors. Social responsibility of firms is related to their relationship with the society in which they operate. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be seen as a commitment to behave ethically and to contribute to economic development in order to improve the quality of life of the workforce, their families, society, and the community at large. There is a fundamental relationship between institutions and social responsibility. Institutions lay down the rules and guidelines, including CSR standards to be used in decision-making and in shaping the economic, social, and environmental performance of businesses. Policies, norms, values, and beliefs of institutions powerfully affect the CSR of companies at macro (country level), meso (industry level), and micro (firm level) levels. Rules and practices are influenced by different institutional factors, including legal systems, ways of understanding what is right and wrong behavior, state and administrative practices, cultures, and values and support systems given to company law or policy by other societal actors.

It is commonly agreed that compliance in business is largely the result of formal and informal institutional constraints. The compliance level of Algerian listed firms is driven by two groups of factors: (i) Direct (Discretionary Activities – Corporate Social Responsibility programs) and (ii) Indirect factors such as firm size, reputation, profitability, and leverage. Thus, publicly owned firms in Algeria undertake CSR programs to satisfy stakeholders, as they want their business to be accredited. Indeed, because of the public listing of these firms, they are subject to monitoring tools and frequent assessments by bureaucracy and citizens. Therefore, they tend to make use of legal institutions in reference to state enforcement tools and shared norms of appropriateness or affectedness. However, the results suggest that in the case of Algeria, there is a very poor use of informal institutions, including the voluntary codes of conduct that function as social contracts among firms and other stakeholders. It therefore appears that firms in Algeria have been driven “more by the stick than the carrot.” The focus on existing institutional mechanisms is not too widespread so far, but a number of corporate governance studies have tested whether more support for CSR by sector-based institutions can be related to a positive corporate performance profile.

6.1. Key Factors Influencing the Relationship

The purpose of this study was to analyze the relationship between institutions and the adoption of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Algiers SMEs. This study introduces several key factors that condition the interplay between institutions and CSR. First, as the empty rhetoric and the panacea perspectives argue, the regulatory environment might pressure firms into adopting social and environmental practices. Second, scholars define the role of institutions more broadly and argue that economic prosperity and growth, as well as social behavior, are influenced by cultural values, which are permanent and are transmitted through generations. Against this background, the Islamic work ethic is identified as a determinant of CSR. Third, pressure exerted by stakeholders can push firms to adopt CSR. Hence, stakeholder pressures linked to the external environment of the country, such as weak legislative or social pressures, are introduced as antecedents of CSR.

In addition, the role of home pressure (the crucial role of social norms and morals shared by TNC management) and the significant role of home host country pressure (religious pressure and emotional bonds of the management) are stressed. Fourth, institutional credibility might influence the way companies perceive CSR. Hence, companies headquartered in countries with high-quality environments are more likely to adopt transparency and to be involved in CSR issues. Finally, the interaction effects between the institutional characteristics and the economic conditions are underlined. The institutional nature of economic development has an important effect, depending on whether CSR is primarily considered a philanthropic or a strategic activity. Hence, country-level private benefits of control and GDP level play an important role in determining the priority to be given to social responsibilities.

7. Case Studies

These case studies illustrate the diversity of approaches presented in Section 5. The practical experience of companies provides sound insights into best practices for CSR in Algeria. The case studies present the relationship between institutions and CSR in Algeria by exposing the views of a variety of managers. Based on the evidence from the case studies, it can be understood that the role that institutions play in encouraging CSR practices can be both formal and informal, and reflects cultural values. Case studies identify that there are different approaches to CSR and, depending on the company, these are not mutually exclusive of each other. For some companies, such as banks, there are market pressures to implement national

CSR practices and to keep in line with global trends. For multinationals, firms need to respond to a new Algerian context and restrictions.

The Algerian strategy regarding CSR is quite articulated and it targets the priority axes. The increment of the scope of law on CSR and tools in this field can enhance firm engagement in CSR management. It is therefore recommended for the authorities to incorporate the findings of this study in order to adapt and improve its tools respecting the national context. Case studies often provide unique and useful insights that complement theoretical models. Cases reflect an organizational reality that is not always present in hermeneutic or empirical studies. In addition, and specifically for this research, CSR is commonly executed at a company level, and as such can be highly subjective.

7.1. Company METAGAV: Implementing CSR in Alignment with Institutional Norms

As a result of a comparative-exploratory study, it was found that Company METAGAV has a significant societal commitment in Algeria. The main areas it has targeted are employee well-being, the environment, local economic development, and supporting the education and vocational training of Algerian youth. The case study analysis allows for a refined understanding of the company and its practice of corporate social responsibility and to understand the extent to which it follows and mirrors the expectations of various institutional players within its socio-political environment. The present analysis more specifically examines the development of CSR in Company A and links this to the institutions operating in Algeria and the mechanisms that adapt different international schemas about societal commitment to the local context. The findings also offer some perspectives regarding the influence of local institutions on implementing CSR policies.

With a particularly challenging environment in Algeria as a key element, Company METAGAV implemented specific social and societal responsibility actions. The company created a specific department to deal with all corporate social responsibility topics, integrating Human Resources, several communication, IT, and environmental departments. Several projects were deployed to simultaneously meet the main pillars of CSR: environment, social, economic, and ethical principles. This choice to use CSR as a 'corporate policy and ongoing concern' linked to the business objectives of Company A demonstrates, at one level, the company's interest in using this tool to improve its image and reputation within the Algerian context. It also facilitated and legitimized this position with respect to local

institutional players. The roll-out of such a comprehensive strategy also has the effect of underpinning Company A's ability to build stronger ties with some local stakeholders, which could support its investment and operations in Algeria.

Moreover, this study discusses the strategies implemented at the local level as a result of the combined effects of the attitude of the institutional players themselves and the institutional pressures on businesses. These findings may be used as a case and lead to the following considerations: while CSR is often criticized and characterized as purely self-interested, it is worth noting that in Algeria, Company METAGAV has developed legitimate instruments to effectively contribute to the empowerment and economic, ecological, and social development of the country. Nonetheless, it was also shown that Company METAGAV only invested the necessary resources to ensure the success of this strategy, linking its actions in the field to the attainment of the company's objectives in Algeria to avoid antinomy in conduct. However, without questioning the motivation behind Company METAGAV's commitment, regular monitoring of the reality of Company A's actions would be needed to ensure that they are consistent with the framework of the principles developed in this multinational. The degree of renovation required of institutions for the trend to solidify would appear to dictate the content of future scenarios. With regard to this last point, three scenarios are presented and commented upon. The most optimistic tends to facilitate the coherence of corporate behaviors and institutional expectations. Some lessons of general interest are then put forward, showing the potential for a strategic and operational extension. Among these lessons, a company's contribution to its socio-economic environment may be larger when its main business projects plateau, as it must finance part of its actions.

8. Challenges and Opportunities

In Algeria, the existing institutional setting does not always encourage companies to adopt CSR practices. Companies face several barriers, some of which are legislative and welfare in nature. There is no clear regulatory framework that would encourage companies to be more proactive regarding CSR. There is also very little awareness of CSR practices and the benefits these could bring to companies, regardless of whether they are small and medium-sized enterprises or larger companies. The lack of incentives and the absence of sanctions could deter companies from declaring their CSR strategies officially, which would allow them to gain the trust of their stakeholders. Therefore, these companies would have virtually no interest in

pursuing these kinds of voluntary projects or communicating about them to the outside world.

Some informants mention, moreover, that companies would have no interest in showing their CSR activities, because it is very likely that they would then be asked to guarantee a certain level of day-to-day quality. In addition to the negative impacts mentioned earlier, a number of interviewees also highlighted the potential long-term opportunities that Algerian companies and the country might reap from involvement in more socially responsible activities. Some informants felt that the increasing awareness of CSR issues among various stakeholders might help trigger the emergence of several socio-economic activities. In addition, one informant suggested that regulatory changes might not, in themselves, be enough to encourage CSR practices. The more attractive a place Algeria became following regulatory changes, the more likely it would be that foreign enterprises would encourage their local suppliers to change their corporate citizenship. Some interviewees felt that collaborative efforts were necessary if the industry was going to implement social corporate policies that could benefit the majority of Algerian people. Not only would it be necessary for companies seeking to expand their CSR approach to join up with external agencies, it was paramount that the public sector should contribute to creating an environment conducive to revenue recycling, as public enterprises are among those that are averse to CSR activities.

9. Conclusion and Future Directions

Acknowledging the crucial role played by institutions in driving CSR practices in Algeria, this paper illustrated the complex relationships that exist between state institutions and corporate behavior in the context of the Algerian CSR milieu. It discussed the collaborative role required at the intersection of institutional constraints, stakeholders, and local firms to work towards the development of a unique environment. In this environment, firms are offered a place to cultivate adaptive CSR strategies, hence increasing their survivability in an unusually restrictive environment. Hence, it confirmed that institutions do indeed matter, as ongoing studies of institutional theories indicate. The study concluded by calling for future research to more closely analyze the mechanisms through which specific organizational stakeholders navigate and attempt to change the institutional environment or to promote adaptive services that are better suited to the current Algerian institutional landscape. To ensure the adequate implementation of CSR in Algeria, the conclusion of the study also proposed that academia, industry, and policymakers meaningfully

collaborate. Overall, this study illustrated how poorly aligned formal institutions and informal understandings in an Algerian context have created their unique, challenging, and contrasting drivers for Corporate Social Responsibility. Moreover, its conclusions indicated the necessity of collaborative work between stakeholders to foster a more aligned CSR regulatory framework in which both institutions and local businesses could thrive. Finally, the study proposed future research into the adaptive strategies used by businesses to survive when operating in a restrictive Algerian CSR environment. The paper concludes with some final thoughts on the future directions for research into the evolution of the new compromise that bridges institutional systems and formal regulations, together with those of CSR. It bears emphasis that the core proposal of this paper is at the intersection between institutions and CSR, and that this proposal is needed in a field whose importance is growing day by day.

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