

Proactive Business Approaches in Human Rights: The Implications of Corporate Social Responsibility

Authors : Fatemeh Jalalvand

Abstract : The critical human rights problems such as extreme poverty, hunger, inequalities and gender discrimination need to be addressed by powerful and influential actors in the world. In today's globalization, corporations have become one of the potent agents in the society. They are capable of generating economic growth, reducing poverty, and increasing the well-being of individuals, thereby contributing to the betterment of a broad spectrum of human rights. However, the discussion on how business can contribute to human rights has primarily focused on not violating them (reactive approach) rather than improving the conditions and solving the problems of human rights (proactive approach). In particular, the role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in bringing proactivity of business in human rights has gained less attention. This paper develops a conceptual framework to examine the role of different categories of CSR, including discretionary, ethical, legal, instrumental and political CSR in encouraging the proactive contribution of corporations to the betterment of human rights. The five propositions, related to the conceptual framework, outline the relationships between five categories of CSR and proactivity of corporations in human rights. The findings indicate that discretionary CSR with voluntary nature might not be able to motivate any contribution of business in human rights. Moreover, ethical CSR and legal CSR might lead to reactive strategies of business toward human rights. Meanwhile, the economic incentives behind the notion of instrumental CSR could result in partial proactive engagement of corporations in human rights. Finally, the internal motives as profit and power besides the external duties might lead to the highest level of proactivity of corporations in human rights under the context of political CSR. The model developed offers a map for business to adopt proactive human rights strategies more systematically maintaining key profit-drivers like power and profit. In sum, instrumental and political categories of CSR might lead corporations to improve the conditions of human rights proactively.

Keywords : CSR, human rights, proactive approach, reactive approach

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