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Introduction: The Intellectual Crisis of CSR

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Turbulent events in the world's financial, food and energy markets, global recession, as well as the urgency of climate change, growing inequality and persistent poverty, suggest that various features of globalization and economic liberalization are fundamentally flawed. They also starkly contradict the development scenarios of those who had been touting the virtues of self-regulating markets, minimalist states and the capacity of large firms to recast their role in society through 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR). An offshoot of the free market ideology that took hold in the 1980s, CSR matured within the context of the 'institutional turn'[2] of the 1990s, which had both an analytical and a constructivist or normative dimension. The former sought to better understand how institutions affect society and economic performance, as well as how large firms – as organizations – enjoy some autonomy from market forces to pursue their strategic interests. The constructivist dimension was concerned with filling governance gaps and fine-tuning institutions, in particular through so-called voluntary initiatives and 'private regulation', in an attempt to minimize certain perverse effects of economic liberalization that affected workers, communities, consumers and the environment. Such effects increasingly threatened the legitimacy of big business as well as the dominant ideology underpinning the rise of corporate power, namely neoliberalism. CSR, then, sought to address new challenges for business associated with risk, uncertainty and complexity. However, it did so in a way that was as much about sustaining core features of contemporary, corporate-led capitalism as improving corporations' social and environmental performance.

Mainstream perspectives on CSR held out the promise that corporate self-regulation and voluntary initiatives could be harnessed to address many social and environmental problems – where the state had failed, private enterprise and non-state actors could succeed. Although a variety of non-state actors, notably business associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and various company stakeholders, played a role in this new approach, in practice, it was large firms, in particular transnational

corporations (TNCs), that engaged more directly with the discourse and instruments of CSR. The literature on the topic suggests that, potentially at least, CSR has profound implications for developing countries. The scope for win–win possibilities or the so-called 'business case' – whereby CSR would translate into conventional pro-business benefits such as competitive advantage, profitability, productivity and market share – was thought to be considerable.[3] Economic actors should, and could, broaden their strategic focus beyond 'the bottom line' and be guided by a 'triple-bottom line' associated with financial, social and environmental performance (Elkington 1997). As a result, business could contribute to a pattern of 'inclusive development' where goals of social development and environmental protection are not dwarfed by those of economic growth and macroeconomic stabilization. Such reasoning characterized CSR as a focal component in the transformation of the traditional roles of the state and business in development. Indeed, big business was wooed by the international development community to engage with the global effort to reduce poverty through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and public–private partnerships (PPPs). The expectation was that companies and business associations would become developmental agents, often assuming functions typically associated with the state in relation to the provisioning of basic – or public – goods and services, standard setting and inspection.

Not only have tangible achievements paled in comparison to the promise but, in some respects, the mainstream CSR agenda[4] has also missed the mark in terms of the issues it has prioritized. A conception of the role of business in society that contrasted sharply with Milton Friedman's notion that 'the business of business is business' (albeit within a context of state regulation), CSR was typically defined in terms of greater responsiveness on the part of companies to societal and stakeholder concerns; integration of social and environmental considerations in business operations; voluntary initiatives that go beyond both philanthropy and standards embodied in law; and 'doing no harm'. Although the CSR agenda gradually broadened over time, taking on board more issues related to social, sustainable and rights-based development, major blind spots remained. The current financial crisis, its economic and social fall-out, and all that has been revealed of corporate practices that underpinned the crisis, provides clear evidence that critical issues were left off the mainstream agenda.[5] Not only did the CSR 'movement' pay scant attention to the financial sector,[6] it also displayed somewhat of a narrow focus on aspects of development related to particularly visible forms of environmental degradation, eco-efficiency, occupational health and safety in TNC affiliates and top-tier suppliers, child labour in the supply chain, and community assistance. Another major component of social development, namely rights, gradually came to figure more prominently in CSR discourse and standard-setting. In practice, however, concrete measures and progress to address both labour rights and the broader category of human rights were limited.

However, the major blind spot in both CSR discourse and practice is related to a third crucial dimension of social development, namely distributional justice and equity (Utting 2007). Just how gaping a hole this was on the CSR agenda has become strikingly clear in the context of the current financial crisis where issues of executive pay, dividends to shareholders and tax avoidance/evasion, as well as the relationship between a debt-driven consumption model and the compression of real wages or inequities in the functional distribution of income loom large. Another dimension of distributional injustice, namely the gross inequities in the distribution of value within global commodity or supply chains, also partly explains a curious paradox – how three decades of economic globalization and growth of foreign direct investment (FDI) not only resulted in chronic North–South imbalances but also failed to make a significant dent in poverty levels, with malnutrition actually increasing in many countries. Furthermore, while CSR purported to address certain governance gaps and imbalances between corporate rights and responsibilities that characterized globalization and liberalization, in some contexts it served to reinforce distributional inequities by fostering a certain anti-state bias in the regulatory domain, while enhancing the power and authority of TNCs in global supply chains and global governance.

How did this situation come about? Why did an approach with so much promise achieve so little? And why did so much of the burgeoning literature on CSR fail to take stock of such failings? These are the central questions addressed in this volume. In this introduction we distill insights from the various chapters and some other writings in an attempt to understand what went wrong and what might be done to correct the outcomes. We suggest that what was at fault was not simply a number of strategic and operational limitations but indeed the intellectual project surrounding CSR itself. We focus on four analytical and empirical limitations that point to an intellectual crisis of CSR. These concern the fact that CSR thinking is largely ahistorical, empirically weak, theoretically thin and politically naïve. Each of the chapters that follows this introduction deals with some combination of these aspects.

Analytical and empirical gaps

A quarter of a century has passed since the publication of *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*, the book by R. Edward Freeman (1984) that was instrumental in catapulting 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR) into the field of management studies. And nearly two decades have passed since preparations for the United Nations Earth Summit drew global corporations into the international sustainable development agenda. In the aftermath of these ideational and institutional developments, expectations about the role of the private sector, TNCs in particular, in development have changed

considerably. Numerous international organizations, governments, NGOs and business associations are urging big business to play a more proactive role in social and sustainable development via a range of voluntary initiatives intended to improve their social and environmental performance. Corporations are actively participating in private regulatory initiatives that both set standards and oversee their application. Furthermore, they are increasingly engaged in PPPs or so-called 'bottom of the pyramid' (BOP) business models that supply goods and services to low-income groups or consumers or engage them as producers in supply chains.

As a result, CSR discourse has become ubiquitous. Indeed, a movement of considerable ideological and political weight, involving a broad coalition of social actors and institutions, has emerged (Bendell 2004; Utting 2008a, 2005a). The upshot has been a significant expansion of the CSR agenda. But what does all this imply for the central issue addressed in this volume, namely how to craft development models that are more inclusive?[7] The global reach of CSR discourse and practice has generated a vast literature that attempts to assess the potential and limits of CSR and identify the so-called drivers underpinning contemporary business–state and business–society relations. Much of the literature is characterized by a fairly myopic take on the dynamics of institutional change and somewhat polarized positions on the status and future of CSR. This has resulted in an exciting debate surrounding the question of whether big business helps or hinders the task of promoting inclusive development via CSR, PPPs and private regulation, but the analytical foundations on which the debate is grounded are somewhat shaky. Both academic and activist inquiry often suffers from disciplinary compartmentalization, ideological turf battles and relatively simplistic or uni-modal institutional solutions for dealing with the social and environmental downside to corporate globalization. The analysis of what works, what does not and what needs to change is often constrained by the tendency to ignore key conceptual, historical, empirical, political and institutional dimensions.

The early literature on CSR often situated itself in one of two camps. One highlighted the potential of CSR, drew heavily on 'best practice' examples to suggest that the transition from 'business-as-usual' to 'corporate citizenship' was feasible or well underway, and assumed that 'learning by doing', awareness of win–win possibilities, stakeholder dialogue and admonitions from 'the court of public opinion' were key to replication and scaling-up. Power asymmetries, structural constraints, the role of the state, and inter-group conflict and bargaining were downplayed if not altogether ignored in such explanations.[8] Business then was part of the solution. If it was not quite there yet, the potential was considerable once certain institutional fine-tuning took place (Zadek 2001).

Another camp tended to dismiss CSR as 'greenwash' or window-dressing aimed at diverting public attention, countering threats of regulation and

legitimizing what was fundamentally 'business-as-usual'. Such perspectives tended to emphasize the structural conditions of contemporary capitalism that posed fundamental obstacles to voluntaristic approaches.[9] This critical literature played a key role in interrogating and demystifying CSR discourse, pointing out the limits of corporate self-regulation, keeping the spotlight on the perverse effects of corporate capitalism and neoliberalism, and focusing attention on the need for alternative regulatory approaches and patterns of consumption and production (Kitazawa 2007; International Forum on Globalization 2002). It also informed activist campaigns that kept the pressure on big business to improve its social, environmental and human rights performance.

However, the 'greenwash' perspective suffered from three major problems. First, by dismissing CSR reforms as 'business-as-usual' it seemed to downplay the possibility that institutional reform (that was progressive from the perspective of social development) could develop from activism and contestation. Second, it failed to grasp the mix of institutional and political conditions that historically rendered capitalism, or particular sectors or industries, more palatable under certain models of development. These conditions had to do with so-called varieties of capitalism, business preferences, path dependency, the nature of the state and its regulatory and welfare orientation, the interplay and complementarity of 'voluntary' and 'legalistic' regulation, the correlation of social forces, the role of struggle, participatory forms of governance and social pacts involving non-state actors (Hall and Soskice 2001; Evans 2005b). Third, attention to the goal of regulating corporations by hook or by crook could crowd out consideration of certain trade-offs and unexpected consequences for enterprises and workers in developing countries. Furthermore, regulation in and of itself would not necessarily address certain key issues of concern to 'the global justice movement' to do with unequal power relations and the nature of the economy (Newell 2008).

While much of the literature is still associated with one or other of these camps, there is greater recognition of the need for a more nuanced, empirically and theoretically grounded understanding of the contemporary role of corporations in governance and development and the potential and limits of CSR.[10] More in-depth inquiries into the impacts of specific CSR initiatives and developing country experiences are emerging.[11] And increasing attention is now being focused on a more comprehensive notion of 'corporate accountability', which implies moving beyond ad hoc voluntary initiatives, top-down 'do-gooding' and very selective forms of stakeholder engagement. Instead, this approach emphasizes the need for mechanisms that oblige corporations to answer to various stakeholders, allow victims of corporate bad practice to channel grievances and seek redress, and entail consequences for companies that do not comply with agreed standards (Bendell 2004; Newell 2002). Such mechanisms often involve more meaningful forms of participation, reconnecting CSR and public policy or law, and finding ways

in which voluntary and legalistic approaches can be mutually reinforcing (McBarnet et al. 2007; Utting 2008b, 2005b). It also means resurrecting the role of the state as a key actor in regulatory governance and questioning the implicit or explicit anti-state bias that has infused mainstream thinking about CSR.

This volume deals with these issues. It does so by addressing what we believe are four fundamental limitations of the mainstream literature, some of which are also shared by more critical perspectives:

- ignoring the lessons of history that shed light on why and how business contributed to inclusive development at different times, in different countries;
- emphasizing empirical approaches that thrive on anecdotal evidence and the analysis of how CSR affects business, with limited systemic understanding of corporate responses and development impacts;
- disregarding certain theoretical perspectives that help to illuminate the potential and limits of CSR; and
- failing to grasp the complexity of institutional settings and power relations that drive progressive reform and deepen CSR.

Learning from history

The first limitation relates to the ahistorical nature of much of the literature. If history is alluded to, the starting point is often the reality or perception of inefficient and corrupt government, or 'state failure', as well as the notion that globalization renders past forms of regulation and governance ineffective. From this perspective, traditional approaches to business regulation are seen as fundamentally flawed. So-called 'command and control' regulation is considered a blunt instrument that stifles innovation. Numerous labour and environmental laws exist but are rarely enforced. At the international level, governments are often unable to agree on 'hard' regulatory instruments as, for example, in the case of the United Nations (UN) Code of Conduct for TNCs some two decades ago.[12]

Missing from these accounts is the body of empirical evidence describing the circumstances that shaped the role of business in social development during different time periods. It is important to situate CSR on a historical trajectory in order to reveal the conditions, strategies and contexts that were conducive to socially responsible business in the past; to consider which elements are relevant to today's circumstances; and to determine whether they are being considered in current strategies to promote CSR. The perspective provided by several of the chapters in this volume (see, in particular, Colin Crouch, Paddy Ireland and Renginee Pillay, and Ndangwa Noyoo), as well as a forthcoming companion volume,[13] reveal the complex set of economic, political and institutional conditions, or governance

arrangements, required to ensure the sustainable contribution of business to social development. Examples of these include:

- relatively strong states with a developmental vision and welfare orientation;
- social pacts whereby business, the state (and in some contexts, labour groups) engaged in extensive national-level dialogue and negotiation concerning how to reach national social and economic objectives;
- labour movements and/or other social groups that acted as countervailing social forces;
- corporate elites that were 'socially embedded' through their relations with local communities; and
- the rise of 'managerialism' in the early decades of the twentieth century, which not only provided a certain autonomy from shareholder interests but cultivated a degree of responsiveness to societal concerns in contexts where there was a strong ethos about corporations acting in the public good.

In such contexts the notion of what constituted socially responsible business was generally quite different to contemporary CSR. Paying taxes, generating employment, employing workers for the long term, upholding labour rights and giving back to the community through philanthropy were routine expectations. The mix and relative weight of elements, however, could vary substantially under different 'varieties of capitalism' and policy regimes. This analysis suggests that the drivers of contemporary CSR, in particular those associated with reputation and risk management, and various forms of interaction with NGOs, differ from, and seem considerably weaker than, those underpinning business activities and strategies associated with inclusive development in the past.

The contrasts provided by historical analysis highlight how the changing context of state–market relations and the configuration of social forces are key to understanding the substance and trajectory of CSR. While the Freemanesque language of 'stakeholder responsiveness', 'stakeholder dialogue' and 'stakeholder capitalism' is commonly spoken, the concept of shareholder primacy, incentives for senior management and appropriate signalling of the market have dominated capitalist logic over the past quarter century (Boyer 2005). This period has also witnessed major changes in the configuration of social and institutional forces. We see the rise of finance and retail capital, and the so-called structural power of business, the decline of organized labour and certain institutions of mainstream democracy, the weakening of corporatist social pacts, the rolling back of certain state regulatory functions and capacities, and the rise of the business-friendly or FDI-friendly competition state (Reich 2007; Stiglitz 2004). A key change has been the restructuring of

industrial production and the integration of suppliers and distributors, from both the North and South, into global value chains (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1994). Dominated by TNCs that control production, marketing and research and development (R&D), the nature, local embeddedness and developmental impact of such chains varies considerably.[14]

Empirical analysis

The second limitation addressed in this volume relates to the gap between CSR discourse and reality, that is, the failure to measure and evaluate real progress in CSR performance and its impacts on small enterprises, people and the environment in developing countries. The corporate social performance (CSP) – corporate financial performance (CFP) literature in the management discipline, for example, defines CSP quite narrowly and only in the developed country context.[15] Moreover, it focuses upon the financial outcomes of CSP for the firm with little consideration of the social consequences. In this volume we are particularly concerned with the limited attention to outcomes and impacts associated with inclusive development. Several chapters (see contributions by Michael Blowfield; Rob van Tulder; Ruth Findlay-Brooks, Wayne Visser and Thurstan Wright; Doris Fuchs and Agni Kalfagianni; and Catia Gregoratti) address these aspects. They show that:

- the CSR agenda has been promoted with a considerable rhetorical zeal that emphasizes stated objectives or intentions as opposed to concrete evidence of performance and impacts; far more attention has been paid to assessing what CSR does for business and the 'bottom line' than for people and the environment;
- the level of engagement of the world's largest 100 corporations with CSR and issues of poverty reduction varies considerably, and is more 'inactive' or 'reactive' than 'active' or 'proactive', although such engagement varies to some extent according to different industries and regional 'varieties of capitalism'; and
- the objectives of certain types of PPPs and private standard-setting initiatives are often not realized in practice, the distribution of benefits may be heavily skewed towards more powerful stakeholders, and PPPs often fare poorly in relation to participation and accountability.

Theoretical perspectives

The third limitation of mainstream writing is its inability to adequately assess its potential and limits of CSR from a developmental perspective because it is conceptually shallow. Considerable attention has been paid to management and organizational theory, as well as some strands of governance theory, in explaining why the modern-day corporation – in contexts of

globalization and liberalization – should, and does, engage with CSR.[16] Moreover, Polanyian analysis has enriched our understanding of the political economy of CSR. Particularly important in this regard are analyses that draw on Polanyi's concepts of embeddedness and the 'double movement' in order to show both why CSR is necessary in a normative sense, as well as its political and economic underpinnings. This notion of 'embedded liberalism' (Ruggie 1982) accepts the reality of economic globalization and liberalization but insists on the need for institutions that can mitigate perverse social effects. In the words of the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Business and Human Rights, John Ruggie, what is needed is 'principled pragmatism' (United Nations 2006). While this approach has advanced our understanding of the role of CSR, it runs the risk of associating almost any institutional reform or 'thickening' with progressivity. As several chapters in this volume point out, different agendas or logics are at play in the field of CSR, often with quite different implications from the perspective of inclusive development. The particular role of institutions, therefore, is to some extent up for grabs or shaped by contestation. Furthermore, what matters is not simply institution building or reform per se but the mix and relative weights of different institutions associated with the state, the market, the firm, civil society and communities.

Also important is the nature of the structural changes that are occurring as well as institutional path dependence. Both establish important boundaries as to what is possible in terms of CSR and why certain firms, industries and societies may be more or less amenable to CSR reforms. Several chapters examine such contexts drawing on certain variants of governance theory, varieties of capitalism analysis, neo-Gramscian and neo-Foucauldian perspectives, as well as French regulation theory (see in particular, Colin Crouch; Ngai-Ling Sum; Doris Fuchs and Agni Kalfagianni; James Van Alstine; and Florence Palpacuer).

This analysis reveals a number of important limitations of contemporary approaches associated with 'voluntarism' and private regulation, and provides pointers to regulatory frameworks and modes of governance potentially more conducive to inclusive development. Two key conceptual themes running through the volume relate to *power* and *institutional complementarity*. The former highlights:

- the need to factor in the changing nature of the state in contexts of globalization, state–market relations and societal and elite perceptions of the role of the state, in order to understand why regulatory authority is delegated to, or assumed by, non-state actors;
- the importance of power relations between different social actors and stakeholders, and their role in framing the CSR agenda, as well as how costs and benefits of CSR are negotiated and distributed among stakeholders and within value chains;

- the various ways 'corporate power' manifests itself – structurally, instrumentally and discursively (Fuchs 2005);
- how the potential to improve labour standards through CSR confronts contradictory processes associated with changes in systems of industrial organization and regulation linked to both labour market flexibilization and new technologies that facilitate cost-cutting and corporate control of value chains;
- whether aspects of economic governance associated with 'corporate hierarchy', that is, the relative autonomy from competitive pressures that large corporations enjoy, can provide certain spaces for top-down CSR and voluntary corporate action;
- the extent to which CSR serves an important legitimizing role for corporate elites and that it is exercised not only through co-optation and 'window dressing' but also through their exercising moral, intellectual and cultural leadership;
- how the broadening and deepening of CSR depends crucially on 'counter-hegemonic' struggles, 'countervailing' (state and civil society) forces, and changes in the configuration of social forces; and
- that the depth and sustainability of contestation and 'pressure from below' may be limited due to fragmentation, resource constraints, co-optation and the dynamics of issue management and policy influence.

The analysis of institutional complementarity in this volume, which draws in particular on neo-Gramscian and 'the regulation approach',[17] sheds considerable light on the potential and limits of CSR. From the perspective of inclusive development, institutional complementarity manifests itself in different guises and has very different implications. At a systemic level, CSR – or what Ngai-Ling Sum refers to as 'the new ethicalism' – can be viewed as a response on the part of elites to craft a 'social fix' and 'institutionalized compromise' or regulatory regime more conducive to the long-term reproduction or 'sustainability' of capitalist relations. In this regard it reinforces an approach to development centred on economic liberalization that could not be secured solely on the basis of legal and regulatory changes associated with free trade, deregulation, intellectual property rights and so forth – or what has been called 'new constitutionalism' (Gill 2008). At the micro-level of the firm or supply chain a dual dynamic may also occur with large retail corporations exerting unjustifiable pressures on suppliers to lower costs and margins, and increase the intensity of labour, while simultaneously engaging in some aspects of CSR for reasons of legitimacy. However, institutional complementarity is also evident in various hybrid forms of regulation that combine elements of both voluntary and legalistic regulation in ways that can deepen CSR policy and practice from the perspective of inclusive development (Utting 2008b).

The politics of corporate accountability

The fourth limitation relates to analysis of institutional change that is politically naïve or expedient. In a context where perspectives on appropriate forms of business regulation remain fairly polarized between those who are critical of state regulation and favour voluntary initiatives, and those who are sceptical of the latter and call for binding regulation, several chapters point to the need to move beyond this dichotomy (see, in particular, Colin Crouch; Paddy Ireland and Renginee Pillay; Ndangwa Noyoo; Catia Gregoratti; James Van Alstine; and Florence Palpacuer). They consider how different types of institutions and actors – private, civil and state – operating at multiple scales – locally, nationally, regionally and internationally – interact and cohere in ways that generate regulatory frameworks more conducive to inclusive development. Shifting the focus beyond 'voluntarism', important elements of a different approach are examined and proposed; one that reconnects CSR and public policy, voluntary initiatives and law, contestation and policy change, 'participation' in project design, and 'old' and 'new' social movements. The concept of corporate accountability, referred to above, emerges as an alternative to mainstream CSR, which often disregards such aspects.[18]

To understand, then, the political underpinnings of institutional reform, in general, and of a transition from CSR to corporate accountability, in particular, attention is focused on actual or potential shifts in the correlation of social and institutional forces, the changing nature of activism and the strengthening of countervailing centres of power associated with the state and civil society.[19] Inter-group bargaining and the reality of conflict between different interests remain important in agendas of progressive institutional change (Mouffe 2005). However, such modes of contestation and governance are frequently deemed to be ineffective and passé – instead partnership and dialogue are portrayed as contemporary, more desirable alternatives (SustainAbility 2003; Tesner 2000). Although they may play a constructive role, partnership and dialogue are not panaceas. Their effectiveness depends upon specific conditions that control for power asymmetries, respect core precepts and institutions of democracy, promote genuine participation, and guard against the risk of transferring regulatory authority to unaccountable actors.

An important starting point in understanding the politics of corporate accountability is the recognition that as corporations assume both a more overt presence in the public domain and take on functions hitherto associated with the state, their role as political actors is augmented and they become legitimate targets of contestation. In addition to conventional roles associated with lobbying and political financing, the politicization of the corporation manifests itself in other ways, for example, taking on state functions of basic service provisioning, standard setting, monitoring and inspection (Crane et al. 2008). Rightly or wrongly, some civil society actors and local communities perceive global corporations as highly implicated in

global injustice. Such connections derive, for example, from the so-called 'race to the bottom' or the ability of corporations to relocate to take advantage of de-regulation; their structural power and threats of capital flight and capital 'strikes'; their dominant role in global value chains associated with sub-standard working conditions and threats to small enterprises, livelihoods and the environment; the 'unfair' distribution of value within value chains; and various ways in which global corporations, or the business associations to which they belong, aid and abet the spread of neoliberal policies and associated externalities detrimental to the social and environmental conditions in developing countries (Utting 2008a).

In several chapters particular attention is paid to the role of new forms of activism, participation, networks and alliances. 'Multi-scalar' governance and regulation emerge as a key element of institutional and political arrangements and contexts conducive to taming corporate capitalism in contexts of globalization. In some countries and industries there are signs that a certain 'thickening' of the institutional environment is taking place that combines softer and harder regulation and politics in ways conducive to ratcheting up CSR and corporate social and environmental performance. In the context of globalization, and the current global crises, this process, however, remains incipient and, as Palpacuer points out (Chapter 11), the sustainability of institutional initiatives and modes of contestation that have, or could potentially result in, 'progressive' outcomes is also in doubt.

Chapter outlines

The 11 chapters that follow this introduction all address some combination of the historical, empirical, conceptual, political and institutional gaps referred to above.

In Chapter 1, Colin Crouch critiques the simplistic 'state versus market' dichotomy that infuses much of the literature and develops an analytical framework for understanding changing modes of governance associated with CSR. These modes comprise a political dimension, consisting of government and law; an economic dimension, consisting of markets and 'corporate hierarchy'; and a social or associative dimension, consisting of civil society, networks and the community. He demonstrates how specific modes, notably those associated with markets and a particular strand of law that reinforces the rights of global corporations and investors, have become ascendant during the neoliberal era. At the same time, however, global oligopolistic corporations enjoy some autonomy from competitive pressures and freedom of action to engage in CSR. A range of social pressures and relations, associated with civil society activism and community-based networks and governance, also influence how firms will respond. Whether CSR is, or becomes, a meaningful institutional response from the perspective of inclusive development depends to a large extent on the nature of such pressures and relations, as well

as political governance. Variations in the relative roles of political, economic and associative governance explain differences in the content and trajectory of the CSR agenda by firm, industry and society. At present, however, TNCs and global capitalist elites are often 'disembedded' from local societal networks and relatively unfettered by political governance. For this reason contemporary CSR often resembles a modern equivalent of *noblesse oblige* where the social obligations of elites are largely defined and implemented by the elites themselves.

Drawing on theoretical perspectives that derive from Gramsci and Foucault, in Chapter 2 Ngai-Ling Sum provides a novel conceptual analysis that facilitates the understanding of how the contemporary CSR agenda relates to, and reinforces, a particular pattern of capitalist development and industrial restructuring. She examines the implications of CSR for power relations within global value chains and how CSR and other mechanisms enable global corporations to reinforce their control over suppliers. Building from a neo-Gramscian approach, especially Stephen Gill's concept of 'new constitutionalism', she examines the ways in which international agreements under the World Trade Organization (WTO) 'unlock' countries for international trade and investment. Focusing on the rise and role of Wal-Mart in China, the chapter reveals how Wal-Mart has entered joint-venture partnerships with state-owned investment trusts and global financial companies in order to establish local economic governance regimes that serve to consolidate Wal-Mart's sourcing and retailing activities. This growing 'Wal-Martization' trend indicates the shift in power from manufacturers to retailers (and financiers) and indicates how the corporation has been able to impose 'everyday low prices' and wages on its suppliers, local competitors and workers. This form of 'trickle-down economics' has prompted the formation of Wal-Mart monitoring groups that investigate and report its uneven distributive impact in the transnational arenas. The idea of 'CSR-ization' is introduced to describe how CSR is implemented at the factory level and constitutes an important component of 'new ethicalism' – an ethico-managerial strategy that serves to supplement the juridico-political focus of 'new constitutionalism' and thereby reinforce global capitalism. By situating CSR in the context of structural change and ongoing struggles by civil society actors, important elements of a 'cultural political economy' approach to the study of CSR emerge.

Paddy Ireland and Renginee Pillay (Chapter 3) adopt a historical lens to assess the potential of CSR as an instrument of economic and social development. Ideas about the social responsibilities of corporations, they argue, are far from new and can be traced back at least as far as the 1920s and 1930s when the idea of the 'socially responsible corporation' began to emerge. The chapter examines the context in which these earlier and more substantive ideas about the social responsibilities of corporations developed and how this context has changed. The authors highlight two crucial differences in today's structural and institutional context that seriously constrain CSR: shareholder

primacy and legal arrangements associated with new constitutionalism. The chapter goes on to examine the prospects for pushing beyond contemporary 'ameliorative CSR' towards 'transformative CSR' that can enhance the contribution of corporations to inclusive development. Key in this regard are legal and regulatory reforms associated with the corporate accountability movement.

The relevance of both history and the role of the state are also emphasized by Ndangwa Noyoo who examines in Chapter 4 the historical evolution of CSR in Zambia. He identifies the contributions and limitations of CSR during the colonial, post-independence, neoliberal and post-structural adjustment periods. During previous eras, CSR was linked to public policy. During the colonial era, mining companies were expected to substitute for the European welfare state, providing welfare benefits for the white settler population to the exclusion of the local population. In the post-independence period, a nationalized mining industry was urged by the state to expand significantly its CSR activities not only to African employees but also beyond the enterprise to the community. During the contemporary era, CSR tends to consist of ad hoc initiatives, largely disconnected from public policy and development strategy. The chapter concludes by arguing that a stronger regulatory framework is needed to improve the social and environmental performance of companies, and that CSR needs to be linked to the government's social development agenda. The author argues that the community development approach, which seeks to empower local communities and enhance people's capabilities, could provide a framework for benchmarking, monitoring and evaluating CSR.

Chapter 5 by Michael Blowfield addresses both conceptual and empirical flaws in CSR thinking, specifically the analysis of how business relates to poverty and poverty reduction. He lays out a conceptual framework that facilitates a more nuanced understanding of whether business can be expected to go beyond its conventional economic roles to become a more active agent of inclusive development, the role of CSR in this process, and how companies might be held to account for their development outcomes. The starting point is to uncover the very different ways that business relates to poverty – as a 'cause', 'victim' and 'solution'. A framework that explains how business relates to poverty and under what conditions it chooses to act as a development agent could provide a more solid base both for measuring progress and impacts and for holding companies to account. The experience of CSR and business as a development agent suggests that development ends can best be served when there is genuine collaboration whereby various actors pursue shared or complementary poverty objectives. But such collaboration needs to move beyond the current notion and reality of 'partnerships'. It may involve, for example, different ways of connecting business with local needs and capabilities, voluntary initiatives and mandatory regulation, and, as in the case of social entrepreneurship, social and commercial objectives. It

would also require dealing with asymmetrical power relations that distort the distribution of costs and benefits, as well as holding companies accountable for development outcomes. So-called countervailing forces, including government and civil society agents, appear to have had more success in getting companies to commit to development objectives than in holding them to account for delivery and outcomes. Without such accountability, randomness and unpredictability are likely to characterize CSR, 'leaving open the possibility that for all of the justification for business to be a development agent, it will remain a development maverick'.

In Chapter 6, Rob van Tulder assesses efforts in recent years to engage big business in poverty reduction and to forge an 'entrepreneurial way' out of the poverty trap through such means as PPPs, issue management, microcredits, supply chain management, the BOP and new business models. He examines how the issue of poverty alleviation by corporations has developed over time and the very different responses and levels of engagement adopted by the world's 100 largest corporations. Such variations suggest significant limits to what could be considered a 'sustainable corporate story' involving a proactive strategic and operational response. Responses are found to vary by regional varieties of capitalism from which the firm originates and types of industry. The chapter also assesses whether current forms of engagement of big business with the contemporary international poverty reduction agenda provide grounds for optimism or pessimism. While rather narrow approaches to poverty reduction are found to prevail, the experience of some European firms suggests the possibility of more meaningful partnerships, broader approaches to the BOP and novel business models. This partly reflects different regulatory frameworks with which corporations in different countries and regions must interact but also implies sectoral dynamics. Indeed, van Tulder suggests that NGOs and international organizations involved in promoting CSR may be better advised to adopt a sectoral approach, rather than one that targets individual corporations. The dynamics of issue management raises questions for the future, in particular, the fact that the degree of urgency surrounding issues such as poverty reduction tends to fluctuate not because of any significant change in the objective reality but because the issue may be crowded out in the public (mediatized) arena by other issues (for example, climate change), or because, rightly or wrongly, signs of incipient progress in dealing with the issue emerge. This cautions against an excessive reliance on firms and self-regulation, or faith in best practice examples, to address poverty, and an enhanced role for governments, new combinations of self- and mandatory regulation, as well as partnerships and transparency-increasing measures and benchmarks.

The next two chapters examine the potential and limits of PPPs, which are increasingly seen as a key component of global governance conducive to inclusive development. Many governments, international agencies, corporations and NGOs view them as an effective way to deal with complex

development problems that cannot be resolved through interventions by single actors and institutions. Chapter 7, by Ruth Findlay-Brooks, Wayne Visser and Thurstan Wright, draws on several years of research on partnerships conducted at the University of Cambridge Programme for Sustainable Leadership (CPSL). Exploring the experiences of partnership practitioners, along with current thinking on the topic, the analysis suggests that partnerships are not a straightforward option. Some see them as merely a short-term response to rapid global change. There can also be issues of accountability and power imbalance, when unelected businesses and NGOs have influence in states where governments are either weak or failing. Even where they are the best solution, there can be real obstacles in both the development and management of partnerships, which are too easily ignored. The authors of this chapter conclude that, if partnerships are to bring about structural change and long-term development impacts, they need to be firmly tied into genuinely inclusive consultation processes, operate within accountability frameworks, be properly supported and evaluated, and, where appropriate, lead ultimately to policy change.

Chapter 8 by Catia Gregoratti reflects on the contribution of PPPs involving business and the United Nations. It provides an empirical and conceptual assessment of one of the largest UN programmes, the Growing Sustainable Business (GSB) Initiative, promoted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The chapter first sketches a framework for understanding the political economy of partnerships for development, and then assesses the GSB programme. Drawing on extensive empirical research conducted in Eastern Africa, the chapter examines the participatory nature of the programme, its degree of inclusiveness and other development outcomes. In contrast to the programme's stated objectives, GSB structures are found to be elitist and top-down, resulting in limited developmental outcomes. Key actors involved in designing projects have a narrow economic understanding of development. The outcome is 'a form of technocratic governance that remains largely silent about equity aspects of development'. A key point to emerge from the analysis is not only the gap between objectives and performance, but the crucial need to interrogate the political nature of partnerships, the power relations involved, and the possibility that partnerships act as a vehicle for replacing government as a provider of public goods and services. Various policy implications emerge from this assessment: more meaningful participation of intended beneficiaries in project design and implementation, public reporting and monitoring, and aligning commercial interests and project design with national development plans.

In Chapter 9, Doris Fuchs and Agni Kalfagianni examine the role of CSR and private regulation in the governance of the global food system, which has important implications for the question of social development and sustainability. They seek to better understand how business actors, and specifically TNCs, impact social aspects of sustainable development in

developing countries through the creation of private institutions of food governance. The analysis involves a power-theoretic approach: actors draw power from structural and material as well as ideational and normative sources. Their power is, therefore, structural, instrumental and discursive. The authors consider both the social impacts of private food governance and the democratic implications of private governance institutions. They examine both input-oriented arguments for procedural democracy and output-oriented arguments, that is, whether private institutions contribute to, or constrain, the creation of the conditions necessary for social protection and reducing inequality in the long term. Moreover, they discuss the concept of deliberative democracy as an alternative approach for the legitimation of food governance beyond state regulation. Through this analysis Fuchs and Kalfagianni show that large retailers have acquired rule-setting power as a result of their material position within the global economy and their control of networks and resources. This power is reinforced by their lobbying activities, in particular those concerned with the content of food standards. Their greater political legitimacy reflects their discursive power, which feeds off notions or perceptions of their alleged expertise and efficiency vis-à-vis public actors. Despite considerable limitations in terms of the issues addressed and the crowding-out effects on smaller producers, the social implications of private food governance have received little attention. The fact that power imbalances and other factors constrain the level and effectiveness of 'participation' in both design and evaluation of food standards points to serious concerns regarding input and output legitimacy.

In Chapter 10, James Van Alstine examines the complex ways in which actors, institutions and ideas intervene and interact to promote CSR. After presenting a theoretical framework that draws on concepts from institutional and organizational theory, the author examines the dynamics of change that has resulted in improvements in the performance of fuel oil refineries in South Africa related to the environment and public health. Particular attention is focused on the role of parent company influence, civil society contestation and governance structures. But to understand the dynamics of change it is essential to refer to 'multi-scalar' governance and activism, which involves actors, institutions, ideas and events operating at different levels. These include the host locality, host country, home country, and regional and international levels. It is found that in the post-apartheid context of democratic transition, new countervailing centres of civil society and state power have emerged to discipline business and promote social pacts and innovative multistakeholder initiatives (MSIs) conducive to inclusive development. A progression has occurred from discursive struggles to normative and, subsequently, regulative institutions as an internationally networked civil society has demanded accountability from both the private and public sectors, and government has begun to build capacity. Variations in the role of parent companies, influenced by different institutional, organizational and

activist contexts, can also be significant in shaping company performance at the local level.

In Chapter 11, Florence Palpacuer analyses the ways in which transnational networks of 'counterpowers' are contributing to the emergence of new forms of social dialogue in the global apparel industry. The globalization of the apparel industry grew at a rapid pace during the 1990s. Over the same decade, a number of activist organizations were established by various civil society movements in Europe and North America, with the aim of promoting developing countries' workers' rights by diffusing knowledge of abusive conditions and promoting solidarity in developed countries' markets, as well as by pressuring brands to take on greater responsibility vis-à-vis employment conditions at their overseas suppliers' factories. A number of MSIs, such as the Fair Labor Association (FLA) in the United States or the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) in the United Kingdom, were established on the principle of involving corporations, civil society movements and labour unions in their governance system. Building on the notion of corporate accountability and on recent advances in regulation theory, the chapter suggests the recent emergence of these institutions and innovative forms of social dialogue and interaction between transnational activist networks, involving both old and new counterpowers and global corporations can contribute to new modes of regulation in the global economy. What is less clear is whether conditions for an institutional stabilization of these forms of interaction exist. It is argued that from the perspective of regulation theory, such stabilization is a necessary condition for these institutional forms to contribute to effectively regulating the global economy.

Whither CSR?

The contemporary global crises referred to at the beginning of this chapter suggest a somewhat uncertain picture of the future of CSR. The weakening of finance capital and neoliberal orthodoxy; an opening for the state to reassert its role as a developmental and regulatory agent; and the legitimacy bestowed upon the global justice movement that may now claim 'I told you so', suggest the possibility of a shift in the configuration of social forces that may favour processes of institutional reform conducive to inclusive development. Indeed, global corporations that hitherto bought into voluntarism may themselves call for a level of clarity and new rules of the game that only regulation can provide. The current crisis and its regulatory fall-out appears to have undermined the strand of mainstream CSR that instrumentalized voluntarism as part of a political project to legitimize 'business-as-usual', justify minimalist states, and stabilize a variety of capitalism associated with gross inequalities.

How will all this affect CSR? Karl Polanyi's (1944) historical analysis of the diverse routes out of capitalist crisis – fascism, communism and New

Deal social democracy – provides a cautionary tale for projecting the future of state–business–society relations in times of crisis. The buzzwords of the current crisis – regulation and responsibility – appear to bode well for an alternative approach to mainstream CSR emphasized in this volume, namely corporate accountability. But much will hinge on the emergence and character of countervailing forces. The regulatory state may be reasserting itself but the role of social movements and citizenship remains less clear, as does the capacity of nation states to reach strong international agreements that are effective throughout the global economy.[20]

In the short term the financial crisis and its recessionary consequences could easily lead big business to batten down the hatches and refocus on the single – as opposed to the triple – bottom line. The imperative to reduce costs may also lead to even greater reliance on sub-contracting and labour flexibilization.[21] And the performance of Wal-Mart in the midst of the crisis suggests that the preferences of some consumers may shift from 'ethical' considerations to 'everyday low prices'. Furthermore, the framing of CSR or what constitutes socially responsible enterprise may change as trade unions and others shift their priorities from working conditions and labour rights to the terms of retrenchment, retraining and employment creation.

While the trajectory of CSR remains uncertain, it is usually the case that crises provoke a search for alternatives that involves rethinking mainstream approaches and conventional wisdom. The intellectual crisis of CSR described in this chapter makes such a rethink all the more imperative. The chapters that follow provide key pointers as to how it might be addressed. To recap, this requires addressing four limitations of the mainstream CSR agenda and some critical perspectives, namely their propensity to be ahistorical, empirically weak, theoretically thin, as well as politically and institutionally naïve. More specifically, it is crucial to:

- learn from the history of state–business–society relations in contexts where embedded liberalism and developmentalism in particular countries and regions resulted in more inclusive patterns of structural change and socially responsible business;
- move beyond rhetoric and best practice illustrations to examine more systematically corporate responses and real developmental outcomes, as well as the distribution of costs and benefits among different stakeholders;
- draw more broadly on theoretical perspectives and concepts that shed light on what is possible in contexts of contemporary capitalism, and the potential, limits and drivers of institutional change; and
- understand power relations, the politics of institutional change, and the complex interactions of actors, institutions and ideas operating at multiple scales.

All of the above suggest profound limits to voluntarism as an approach to inclusive development. However, under certain institutional and political

economy conditions firms will, and do, act in a socially responsible manner. This volume identifies various historical and contemporary contexts where business relates to workers, communities and the environment in this way. There is, however, another dimension of socially responsible business that has not been examined in any depth. Both in this volume and in the CSR literature more generally, relatively little attention has been paid to the question of whether organized business interests support or undermine what the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) has called 'transformative social policy', that is, diverse aspects of state policy that impact social development and inclusive growth.[22] What are the social policy preferences of firms and business associations? Are they necessarily at odds with progressive aspects of social policy? How do governments and regulatory institutions respond and adapt to the increasing structural and lobbying power of business? These aspects are addressed in a companion volume to this book entitled *Business, Politics and Public Policy* (Marques and Utting forthcoming).

Notes

1. The preparation of this chapter benefited from comments from various participants at the symposium on The Responsible Corporation in a Global Economy, organized by the Warwick Business School and the Social Trends Institute, 21–2 March 2009. Special thanks go to Peter Newell and Colin Crouch for their feedback, as well as to Rebecca Buchholz and Karla Utting for comments and editorial assistance.
2. The term has been used by Peter Evans (2005a) to refer to the increasing attention within development theory and analysis to the role of organizations, culture, norms and perceptions.
3. Holliday et al. (2002); Porter and van der Linde (1995); Schmidheiny (1992).
4. While CSR discourse and practice are constantly evolving and vary in different institutional and societal contexts, much of the mainstream literature, which emphasizes the considerable advances already achieved in CSR or its inherent potential, tends to focus on a fairly standardized set of issues and instruments, which are referred to below. It is in this sense that we refer to 'a mainstream CSR agenda'.
5. The conditions that underpinned the current crises emerged over several decades. They included, for example, the rolling back of some of the state's regulatory functions, as well as industrial and social policy; the decline and neglect of small enterprises, infant industries, farmers and domestic agriculture; speculative financial activities; unsustainable consumption patterns, energy use and carbon emissions; and the political disempowerment of organized labour and some other subaltern groups.
6. Although several banks promoted 'ethical investment' funds and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) launched the Equator Principles related to project financing in 2003, it was not until 2006 that a comprehensive set of CSR guidelines and promotional instruments emerged in the shape and form of the Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI).

7. The term inclusive development is used here to refer to policy regimes, governance arrangements and patterns of growth and structural change that are conducive to social protection, equity, participation and environmental sustainability.
8. Hopkins (2003); Holliday et al. (2002); Porter and van der Linde (1995); SustainAbility (2003).
9. See, for example, Cutler (2008); Greer and Bruno (1996); Klein (2000); International Forum on Globalization (2002); Richter (2001); Rowell (1996).
10. See, for example, Blowfield and Murray (2008); Braithwaite and Drahos (2000); Crane et al. (2008); Eade and Sayer (2006); Gibbon (2008); Levy (2008); Newell and Frynas (2007); Rittberger and Nettesheim (2008); Utting and Zammit (2006); Zammit (2003).
11. Barrientos and Smith (2006); Bekefi (2006); Clay (2005); Fig (2007); Locke et al. (2007); O'Rourke (2003).
12. More recently, the United Nations Norms on the Responsibilities of TNCs and Other Business Enterprises with Regard to Human Rights experienced a similar fate.
13. José Carlos Marques and Peter Utting (eds), *Business, Politics and Public Policy* (Basingstoke: UNRISD/Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).
14. The degree to which these production chains are embedded in the local context is a major concern for developing countries. This may range from enclave operations like the mining corporations in Africa (UNCTAD 2005) and high-tech firms in India and Mexico (Gallagher and Zarsky 2008) to companies, like Unilever in Indonesia, that are more tightly integrated (upstream and downstream) into domestic market networks and social relations (Clay 2005).
15. This stream of research has also resulted in ambiguous conclusions regarding the relationship between CSP and CFP with some authors calling for a redirection of this research to broader social concerns. See Orlitzky et al. (2003); Margolis et al. (2007); and Margolis and Walsh (2003).
16. DiMaggio and Powell (1991); Keohane (2002); Porter and van der Linde (1995).
17. For a comprehensive analysis of this body of theory, see Jessop and Sum (2006).
18. Regarding the definition and analysis of corporate accountability from this perspective, see also Bendell (2004); Newell (2002); Utting (2008a, 2008b, 2007, 2005b).
19. See also Peter Evans (2005b).
20. The G-20 communiqué, *The Global Plan for Recovery and Reform* of 2 April 2009, suggests, however, some movement in this direction.
21. See Maquila Solidarity Network (2009).
22. UNRISD defines transformative social policy as state intervention that aims to improve social welfare, social institutions and social relations. It involves overarching concerns with redistribution, production, reproduction and protection, and works in tandem with economic policy in pursuit of national social and economic goals. An important feature of transformative social policy is also the establishment and enforcement of standards and regulations that shape the role of non-state actors and markets in social provisioning and protection.

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