

**MAPPING THE LINK BETWEEN CORPORATE SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE
AYUBIA NATIONAL PARK KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA PAKISTAN**

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Abstract. *The notion of corporate social responsibility and sustainable development has recently gained increased attention in the business and management literature. There has been a growing realization that businesses may contribute to sustainable development by adopting socially responsible practices into their core operations. However, very few studies have explored the relationship between corporate social responsibility and sustainable development in the context of the national park, and thus, it lacks empirical validity. To bridge this knowledge-gap, the current study endeavors to explore the prevailing perceptions of CSR and the relationship between CSR and sustainable development by capitalizing on Carroll's (1991) model and Sustainability theory in the context of Ayubia National Park Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews from key stakeholders including wildlife management, the local community, and tourists. The data was then analyzed through capitalizing on thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The findings revealed that the very conceptualization of CSR is relatively at the infant level within the context of this park. The respondents highlighted the importance of economic and legal responsibilities whereas the ethical and philanthropic responsibilities were ignored. However, concerning sustainability, most of the respondents mentioned that CSR is indeed a significant tool that may lead to the sustainable development of this park. The study provides important managerial as well as practical implications for future endeavors.*

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1. Introduction

National parks are areas that are established to preserve astounding biodiversity across the world. National Park Management is not only limited to preservation strategies but it also takes account of other widespread management activities such as land protection, natural resource management, cultural management, education, and tourism management. These management activities are dealt with according to the need of each park's challenges and problems which they face. However, the establishment and national parks management are of no exception to controversy, and that the management needs to be resilient while handling and managing both primary and secondary stakeholders' priorities and comprehend political procedures. Nevertheless, there are policies and actions which can be taken to ensure the preservation and improvement of national parks systems to achieve sustainable development of the national parks.

Sustainable development is nevertheless an important construct in the context of national parks (Mihanyara, Rahmanb & Aminudinc, 2016). Over the past two decades, sustainable development has been understood narrowly thereby taking into account only economic and environmental concerns whereby discounting the social concerns. However, in the late 2000s, the relationship between sustainable development and corporate social responsibility surfaced. Literature suggests that very few studies have been conducted exploring the link between sustainable development and corporate social responsibility in general and particularly in the context of national parks (Behringer & Szegedi, 2016; Mihanyar, Rahman & Aminudin, 2016). It is, therefore, sustainability principles (economic, environmental, and social sustainability), and demand for deployment of socially responsible practices has recently gained momentum in national parks.

To bridge this gap, the current study focuses on exploring the link between *Corporate Social Responsibility* and *Sustainable Development* and how CSR contributes to sustaining the development of national parks. To answer this question, the researchers have formulated three sub-objectives for the current study: (1) to analyze the current state of CSR in Ayubia National Park (2) to explore the perceptions and role of key stakeholders (management, community, and tourists) in attaining sustainable development through CSR in Ayubia National Park (3) to highlight the theoretical and practical implications about the role of CSR in the sustainable development of Ayubia National Park, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

2. Literature Review

The application of sustainable development (SD) has received increased attention both regionally as well as globally. Many of the national governments widely accepted SD principles in management and policy development at the *World Summit on Sustainable Development* in 2002 (United Nations Organization, 2002). For instance, the UK and New Zealand both have adopted a structured approach in the establishment of SD commission While many of the other national and regional governments capitalize on sustainability principles in order to reframe policies and business regulations (Jackson, 2009; Martin & Verbeek, 2006). The primary sustainability principle in the majority of the countries has been resource planning whereas the secondary public service includes management of natural systems i.e. rivers, marine, and national parks (Frame, Gordon, & Mortimer, 2010; Mitchell, Wooliscroft & Higham, 2010). So far, the sustainability application has been remained a challenge for the business sector because of its complexity and discrepancy on economic, social, and environmental performance indicators (Global Reporting Initiative, 2011).

2.1 Corporate social responsibility and sustainable development

In order to achieve sustainable development, one may pose a question that what necessary actions or tools might need which lead to the overall development of the national parks? In this regard, it is argued that corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an essential tool for attaining sustainable development particularly in developing countries (Binder et al., 2007; Simionescu, 2015). According to Akdoğu (2017), CSR discourse has emerged in theoretical literature as a reaction to sustainable development (Sethi, Shah & Jan, 2018). It has been argued that organizations can contribute to sustainable development by promoting social responsibility. Thus, the adoption of CSR initiatives has a significant impact on sustainable development as core business strategies.

The notion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has recently gained increased intention across the world. CSR concept has many interpretations, however, in the current study, CSR refers to, 'economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time (Carroll, 1979, 1991). In most of the developed countries, the very concept of CSR has now been strategically planned in order to take advantage of all levels of society, thereby it has grown from entrepreneurial initiatives to state policy. CSR permits businesses to respond quickly to the surfacing needs of the society regardless of environmental, economic, or social issues. In this view, the government stands as a secondary beneficiary since successful businesses that are primarily engaged in socially responsible activities have

lessened the burden of government in terms of solving problems of society at various levels. This suggests that the very concept provides benefits not only to the stakeholders but also facilitate the government in pursuing their actions for society. Besides this, it also facilitates businesses to create a positive image in the market eventually lead to improving overall productivity. Despite all benefits that the very concept may bring, it urges harmonized actions from other stakeholders in order to attain sustainable results. However, developing a CSR strategy for national parks may create win-win opportunities for all interest groups, and will benefit society in resolving essential social, environmental, and economic concerns (Center for Economic and Social Development, 2013).

2.2 Theoretical underpinnings: Sustainability theory

Sustainability theory is an attempt to incorporate economic and social responses to environmental concerns (Brundtland, 1987; Zhai & Chang, 2019), to balance economic growth environmental equilibrium, and social progress (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Gössling, Hall, & Weaver, 2009; Mihanyar, Rahman & Aminudin, 2015). In the current study, the notion of sustainability refers to the need to engage in activities that meet the societal needs and are economically viable, environmentally bearable, and socially equitable (Porter & van der Lind, 1995). Economic sustainability is the first pillar that refers to the efficient utilization of resources with potentially less undesirable environmental and social impacts from their usage. In this view, the economic pillar considers individual needs in favor of material welfare i.e. employment (Dwyer & Spurr, 2010). Environmental sustainability is the second pillar refers to the state that sustains the superior quality of nonrenewable resources, clean water, and fresh air which are nevertheless important prerequisites for the survival of human beings and also other species (Hawken, 2010; Sutton, 2004). The last pillar is social sustainability refers to sustain human well-being, cultural heritage, education, and empowerment of people in the host destination (Swarbrooke, 1999). Among many social concerns (say environmental concerns), poverty reduction has always remained amongst the primary concerns of social sustainability to be addressed (Redclift, 1994).

2.3 Context of the study: Ayubia National Park

National parks have always been imperative to Pakistan managed through authorized administrators or other effective means in order to conserve nature and biodiversity. National parks in Pakistan have primarily been established for the purpose of conserving wildlife which is administered by provincial wildlife departments. In Pakistan, there are approx. 23 national parks have been established almost in all provinces of Pakistan. However, the very first national park namely Lal Suhanra was officially accredited in the Bahawalpur Punjab in

1972. The current government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is working for the development of these national parks through different programs. In this view, the current research study on Ayubia National Park is one of the components of the KP government project "Development and Management of National Parks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa".

Ayubia National Park (shortened as Ayubia) is a protected area of 3,312 hectares (8,184 acres) located in Abbottabad District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, northern Pakistan. It was declared a national park in 1984. Ayubia was named after the late Muhammad Ayub Khan (1958–1969), second President of Pakistan. The area supports temperate coniferous forest and temperate broadleaf and mixed forest eco-region habitats, with an average elevation of 8,000 feet (2,400 m) above sea level. The park holds 104 species of plants. The main floral species are Cedrus (deodara), Blue Pine, Yew, Silver Fir, Horse Chestnut, and Oak. Around 21 plants here belonging to 19 families are known for their medicinal properties.

Most of the protected areas and national parks are adopting the sustainable development processes but until now it is way too far to be perceived pragmatically in these areas. Sustainable national parks development implies that if national park management succeeds in making proper decisions (e.g. conservation of biodiversity, tourism management, green practices) it will bring about sustainable growth which eventually leads to the sustainable development of national parks. In other words, sustainable national park development requires not only the conservation of natural resources and biodiversity but also seeks engagement in socially responsible practices and the quality of visitors' experience (Holden, 2009; Victoria, 2009). Such inherent linkages between the very constructs of CSR and sustainable development need research inquiries and management attention

3. Methodology of the Study

The current study is qualitative and a case study approach has been employed. The qualitative study facilitates researchers to look deeper into the subject matter by recording behaviors, attitudes, and feelings. Besides this, it also helps in encouraging respondents to explain their views and opinions in great detail which nevertheless facilitates researchers to get a hold of information that has not been initially considered (Saunders et al., 2009). Parallel to this view, the current study seeks to get information or insights on the subject matter of CSR and sustainable development of National Parks which has rarely been explored particularly in the context of Pakistani national parks.

In order to address the research objectives of the current study, the data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. A total of twenty-five (25) in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders including the management, local and business community, and tourists of Ayubia National Park Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The normal length of each interview was approximately 60-80 minutes. Following the methodological principle of qualitative research, the researchers stopped interviewing when a point reached at which the data was saturated (Yin, 2009). Saturation is a point when no new theme or new information emerges during the interview process (Saunders et al., 2009). Below mentioned table 1 below shows the breakdown of the interviewees however identities of the sampled respondents are disguised for ethical and confidentiality reasons.

Table 1: *Breakdown of the Interviewees*

#.	Sources	Number of Respondents
1.	Management of Wildlife	Four (04)
2.	Business Community	Seven (07)
3.	Local Community	Four (04)
4.	Tourists	Ten (10)
Total		Twenty-Five (25)

4. Major Findings of the Study

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed in full length. The interviews were then transferred to the NVivo 10 software for qualitative analysis of the interviews' texts. According to Sotiriadou et al. (2014), NVivo software is very useful for qualitative data analysis. It is therefore researchers utilized the NVivo 10 software for data organizing, coding, and analysis. The software facilitated researchers in identifying the major themes pertaining to the constructs of study i.e. Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development and also provided an in-depth understanding of the meanings of the main constructs. In addition to this, it also facilitated to dig out the main words or statements mentioned during the interviews by the respondents which nevertheless helped researchers to get the main essence of the study.

Using the software, the researcher utilized the thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study. However, the ensuing section deliberates about the key findings pertaining to the current research objectives. The researchers utilized Carroll's (1991) pyramid (four-part conceptualization including economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropy) and sustainability theory concept (economic, environmental, and social) in order to answer the key current research questions in the context of Ayubia National Park Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

✓ *Carroll's (1991) pyramid – Economic/Legal/Ethical/Philanthropy*

Most of the respondents highlighted the importance of economic and legal responsibilities of the CSR conceptualization. As mentioned by one of the local wildlife officers:

"We, the management, are striving hard to protect the wildlife in order to attract the tourists to earn a maximum share. We have been following strict rules and regulations in order to protect wildlife. For this reason, we have restricted the killing of the wildlife and also prohibited the cutting of the trees in order to preserve the natural environment and to make it attractive for the tourists"

Concerning the aforementioned statement, another officer reinstated the importance of economic responsibility as well the legal responsibility:

"The local community used to kill most of the leopards because they were experiencing difficulty in handling the leopards. Most of the leopards used to eat livestock of the local community so they used to give them poison. For this, we started penalizing those who used to kill the leopards. Besides this, we have made preservation committee which included not only the government high officials but also the people from the local community in order to educate them about the safeguard of the leopards and also made them aware about the importance of both the natural environment and the wildlife as these are the only source of income for us."

When probed about CSR conception from the local community, many of them corroborated somewhat similar stance but in negative connotation thereby expressed negative expressions about the wildlife management. They opined that the management is more into earning profits at the expense of the local community. They mentioned that they have made their life difficult since they were being enforced not to use the firewood and also restricted hunting of the animals particularly leopards. As mentioned by one:

"The management is more curious to earn revenue without helping and catering the basic needs of the community. On one end, we are being asked to care about the natural environment and wildlife and on the other end, we are not being provided with the alternatives. For instance, we cannot afford gas bills as we are living below the subsistence level and can hardly manage

our household's expenditures. Besides this, the government is also not very much supportive in either way."

This suggests that most of the respondents failed to fulfill their ethical responsibilities and that philanthropy was also falling at the least. None of the respondents mentioned ethical or philanthropic activities. However, it is also worth mentioning that most of the tourists were also ignorant about the CSR concept, and most of them equated it with economic responsibility. In this view, it is not surprised to say that the CSR concept is at the infant level in the context of Ayubia national park KP. Most of the respondents capitalize on fulfilling their social responsibilities in terms of economic responsibilities and legal responsibilities whereas philanthropy and ethical responsibilities fall at a low level.

✓ *CSR-linkage-sustainability*

In relation to CSR and sustainability, the findings reveal that majority of the respondents were positive about attaining sustainability through CSR. They opined that if the community, wildlife management, and tourists all together understand their social responsibilities toward the Ayubia national park in terms of economic, legal, and most importantly ethically then it would be of no dream to attain sustainability in near future. However, at the same time, the local community and tourists also admitted their meager knowledge about the novel concept of CSR so they believed that the related knowledge should be imparted by the wildlife management along with the help of academia experts through research projects or workshops. This would ultimately lead to attaining sustainability for the overall national park. As mentioned by one:

"To attain sustainability, we all should better understand our responsibilities toward the up-gradation of the national park. Nevertheless, presuming social responsibility in terms of ethically is most important but unfortunately, the ethical stance is weak and falls at the bottom level"

5. Discussion and Managerial Implications

However, as evident in the literature that sustainable development is crucial in the context of national parks which will lead the tourism industry to attain sustainable national parks (Mihanyara, Rahmanb & Aminudinc, 2016). In order to achieve this, wildlife management and the community both must agree on the same terms and conditions. The management must take into consideration the community stance while making strategies concerning the improvement of the Ayubia national park. As the local community is an important stakeholder and without them achieving sustainability in Ayubia National Park is impossible. Empirical pieces of evidence also revealed that most of the tourists

and residents were ignorant about their social responsibility concerning the national park. For this, management should better educate them and spread knowledge through organizing awareness programs, workshops, and conferences on the themes related to the importance of nature and wildlife. Besides this, most of the tourists were also ignorant about the area which included the domain of Ayubia national park. For this, management should better put the signboards on the track, and they may also put a short video illustrating the brief overview of the Ayubia national park and its significance. Besides this, most of the people are living below the subsistence level therefore management should better help them in getting the tar (wood) at a discounted price or help them to get the gas at reasonable prices so that they may live a better life which nevertheless would help the overall community to live up a decent life.

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