

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Social responsibility of small businesses in a typical rural African setting: Some insights from a South African study**

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**This study examined the extent to which the concept of social responsibility has permeated the small business mind set of a typical rural African setting located in South African. In order to achieve the above purpose, five hypotheses focusing on social responsibility awareness, performance, focus, perceived benefits, and observable benefits were formulated and tested. The results reveal high levels of awareness and performance of socially responsible activities among the small businesses surveyed. The results further suggest that these businesses may be performing these socially responsible activities with expectations of certain benefits. The results confirm customer, employee, and community issues are important social responsibility activities for the small businesses surveyed. The study illuminates the practice of social responsibility among small businesses in the African context with particular focus on rural communities where these types of businesses are the only form of economic activity hence avenue for social transformation. Those interested in the BSR phenomenon will find it useful in research and policy formulation and implementation efforts. Small business owners will have reliable information to guide their BSR efforts. The study is limited to a small geographical area of one African country thus may raise questions about generalizability of results. However, with the known similarity in many African conditions particularly in rural areas where customs, beliefs, and socio-economic conditions have been found to be similar in many respects, the current study provides a basis for future research on a larger and multi-national scale.**

**Key words:** Business social responsibility (BSR), small business, community related activities, customer related activities, employee related activities.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Like most African countries, post-apartheid South Africa faces and has to deal with numerous socio-economic problems but notably very high rates of unemployment, rising socio economic inequality, and high levels of poverty in rural areas.

The Greater Taung Local Municipality where the research was conducted is a typical rural area situated within the southern part of the Bophirima District of the North West province of South Africa. The most recent socio economic statistics available on the Greater Taung Local Municipality office shows that: The area covers about 5649 km<sup>2</sup>, it has a population of 184482 with a density of 33 people per km<sup>2</sup>, the average household size is about 5 people, majority of the households earns

incomes below the national minimum wage; about 23% of the households earn no income at all; almost 62% earn less than R501.00 (about \$62) per month; the unemployment figure is at about 63%.

Except for Taung-Tusk hotel, which can be classified as big business in accordance with national standards, the rest of the businesses are small or micro in nature and dominated by small retailers. These small firms form the main source of economic activity in an area that is far removed from large commercial towns and characterised by poverty, high unemployment rate and low level of development. With this type of statistics, the Greater Taung Local Municipality can be described as a typical underdeveloped and impoverished rural area.

While South Africa battles with these types of social problems which are in fact not confined to but evidently more prevalent in rural areas small businesses have emerged as the main vehicle to use. In rural areas, due to sparse population, the existence of large enterprises cannot be justified hence the only viable means of economic activity in such areas is through small businesses (Botha and Visagie, 1998).

This statement gives an indication of the potential role of a dynamic small business sector in helping solve some of the many pressing socio economic problems of rural communities in African countries. Unfortunately, small businesses have been found to be limited in their ability to play any meaningful role as they hardly grow to create more jobs. This notwithstanding, experts believe that compared to larger organisations, small businesses can make more impact in their communities by voluntarily participating in social activities (Dzansi, 2004). This means that small businesses that operate in rural communities will be able to play bigger roles in uplifting the social and economic conditions of those rural communities in which they trade if they engage in socially responsible practices in the communities. In other words small businesses in rural communities must embrace the concept of business social responsibility (BSR) in order to have greater impact in the communities in which they do business.

It is important at this stage to point out that although social responsibility as a business concept has gained much acceptance, there are still many unresolved issues. For example, even the casual reader of BSR literature will notice lots of differences in the terminologies assigned to the concept. It is therefore, important to explain the author's position. The author breaks from popular practice and uses the more neutral term business social responsibility (BSR) to refer to the concept believing that, terminologies such as corporate social responsibility CSR; corporate social performance - CSP; corporate social investment – CSI; etc., all carry a somewhat “big business only” connotation; yet this may not be the case. In fact, the term BSR seems more appropriate because it accommodates smaller organisations as well more so when it is clear that smaller businesses now occupy centre stage in the general business/society relationship debate.

While conceptual uncertainty still exists, two other important BSR issues are however, no longer disputable. Firstly, the notion that companies owe duty to constituents other than owners is now a consensus. Secondly, it is now accepted that firms irrespective of size need to establish long-term relationship with their communities for their own good and that of the communities in which they operate - a kind of symbiotic relationship that simultaneously benefits businesses and their communities. Alexander (2002) aptly highlights the importance of this symbiotic relationship as follows: “Social responsibility offers a new alternative to the idea that economic and

social goals must always be in conflict. It offers an integrated approach to business in the modern world. It shows the way forward, to achieve economic, social and environmental benefits at the same time”

Thus, it is important that firms irrespective of size establish long-term relationships with their communities for their own good just as it could lead to better lives for the communities in which they operate. However, to establish mutual relationship to the extent that it is long lasting would require ethical behaviour over and above what the law stipulates. It is this kind of discretionary behaviour by business that is commonly referred to in the literature as corporate social responsibility (CSR) but which this author preferably calls business socially responsibility (BSR).

### **Defining business social responsibility**

There are numerous definitions for BSR in the literature with some of the notable ones being: “A business's obligation to seek socially beneficial results along with economically beneficial results in its policies, decisions and actions” (Kyambalesa, 1994).

“The continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large (World Business Council for Sustainable Development” (WBCSD), (2001).

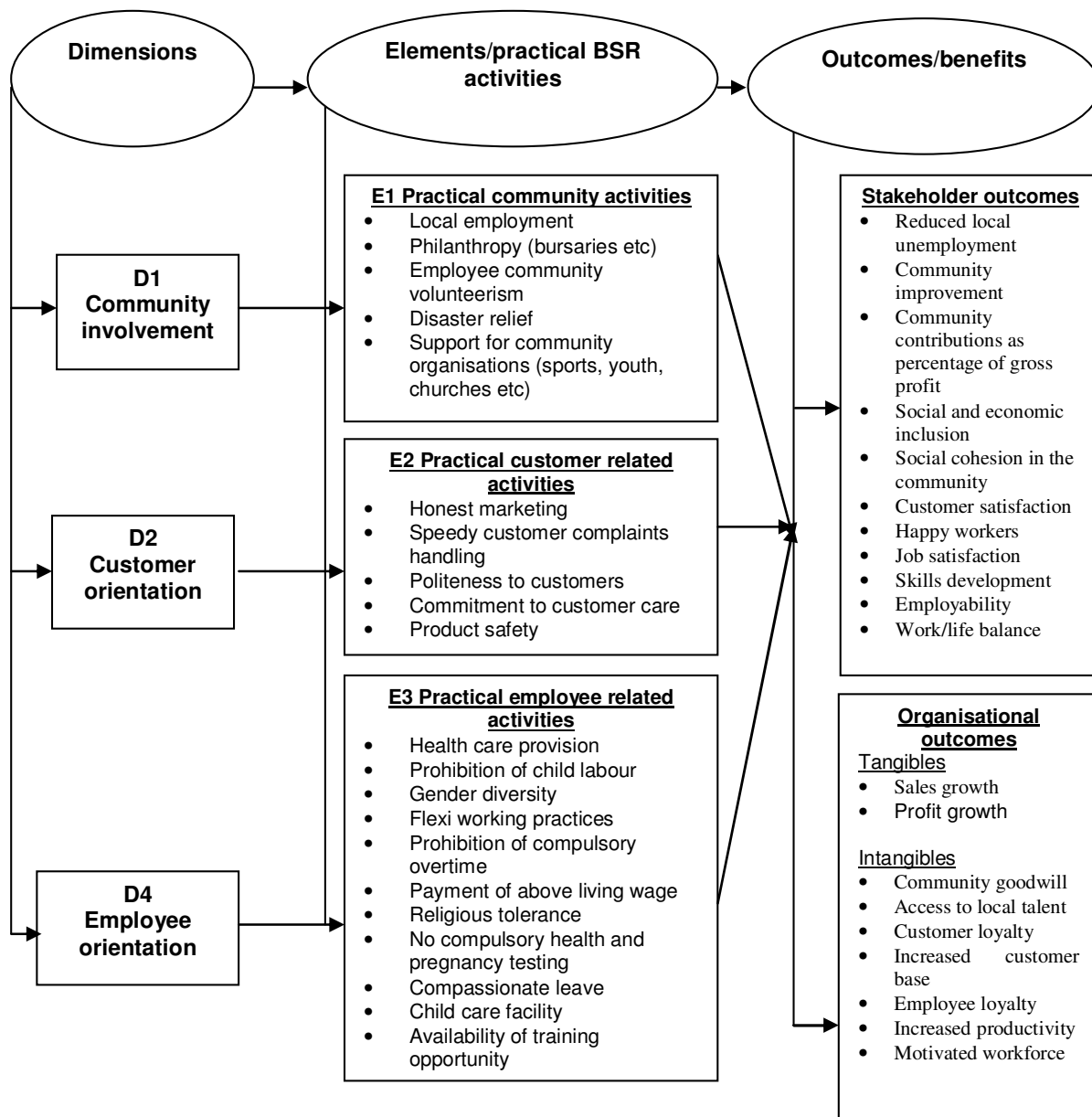
“A company's commitment to operate in economically and environmentally sustainable manner while recognising the interest of its stakeholders. Stakeholders include investors, customers, employees, business partners, local communities, the environment, and society at large” (Peyton, 2003).

“A concept which encourages organisations to consider the interest of society by taking responsibility for the impact of its activities on customers, employees, shareholders, communities and environment in all aspects of its operations” (Centre of Strategic Research and Development of Georgia, 2007).

“A firm's commitment to operating a business in an economically sustainable manner while at the same time recognising the interests of its other stakeholders (customers, employees, business partners, local communities, society at large) over and above what the law prescribes” (Dzansi and Pretorius, 2009).

Examination of the above definitions shows no major differences and indicates a consensus that, in pursuing owners' interest, owners or their agents must not forget the needs of other stakeholders of the business because these people are capable of impacting negatively on the bottom-line of the business. For the purpose of this study, Dzansi and Pretorius, (2009) definition above was adopted.

Adoption of this definition made it possible to utilise the



**Figure 1.** Components of the SMME-BSR framework.  
Source: Dzansi (2009)

accompanying Dzansi and Pretorius' (2009) framework (Figure 1) for measuring BSR in smaller business for the empirical research.

### Why does BSR matter so much for small businesses that operate in rural areas of Africa?

Kapp (1978), in his book 'the social costs of business enterprise' highlighted the failure of businesses to take responsibility for their negative actions in society. Kapp (1978) pointed out that the social costs of businesses are

usually not sufficiently accounted for by businesses but are usually shifted to and often borne by communities. Kapp (1978) admits that economic progress has been accelerated through business enterprises but argues that more often than not, it is society alone and not business that pays the price for this progress in the form of societal costs such as air and water pollution, disease, and other negative externalities. Baker (2004) adds that businesses do most damage to the poor by ignoring them and their needs altogether. Thus, it is only morally right for businesses to contribute more towards socio-economic upliftment of communities in which they trade.

Although BSR has largely been discussed in the context of big enterprises, it is now becoming clearer that the concept is very relevant to small businesses particularly in economically depressed areas of African countries where the critical role of small businesses in social transformation is becoming more and more indisputable. In fact, for smaller businesses doing business in rural areas of Africa, there seems to be very compelling reasons for being socially responsible. For instance, Visser (2007) makes the point that in rural areas of South Africa where social crises are most felt small businesses remain the main vehicle to use. This belief is largely due to the fact that in rural areas, due to sparse population, the existence of large enterprises cannot be justified hence the only viable means of meaningful economic activity is through small businesses.

It is quite true that the normal role of small business has always been job creation. It is also true that research has shown that small businesses located in rural areas of Africa are unable to fulfil this role. In spite of this limitation, Dzansi and Pretorius (2009) argued that small businesses can still play a key role in rural areas of Africa by becoming socially responsible.

### **Increasing small businesses' involvement in BSR**

Small businesses wherever they are will have to institutionalise BSR to fully fulfil their role in society. The Canadian Co-operative Association (2003) highlights that: "In the near future, BSR will become main-stream within business and not just an add-on". For small businesses, it simply means that they too will have to integrate BSR into their core business practices.

But is the moral high ground reasoning as espoused by Kapp (1978) and the like going to encourage or compel smaller businesses to engage in activities that are evidently going to deplete their already limited resources? In answer, it is quite reasonable to suggest that the institutionalisation of BSR by businesses will be much easier to achieve if it is motivated by what benefits can be derived from engaging in it especially if small businesses with their constrained resources are to buy into it.

In other words, there has to be economic justification for smaller businesses to commit their scarce resources to it. In fact, Epstein and Roy (2003) are convinced that only by making the business case for BSR will businesses particularly the smaller ones be motivated to truly integrate BSR into their business strategies.

Fortunately, there seems to be some support for the idea that by working strategically with BSR, small businesses can enhance their own competitiveness (Danish Commerce and Companies Agency, 2008).

In fact, there are indications that there is economic justification for a business (including small businesses) to engage in socially responsible programs.

However, arguments and evidence regarding the economic justification for BSR engagement is mixed.

### **BSR: The economic justification debate**

On the one hand, some writers on the subject starting with Friedman (1970) unequivocally condemn BSR believing that engaging in it actually depletes shareholder wealth. Some empirical studies seem to support this stand. For example, Diltz (1995); Sauer (1997); Kneader et al. (2001); and Bauer et al. (2003) could not find any relationship between the two variables in their studies. From this stand, it is often argued that if a business performs BSR, it does so only because it is the right thing to do and not because of any direct economic gains.

On the other hand, others (including the author) are convinced that BSR can be economically beneficial to businesses. A central argument for this study is that small businesses can indeed invest part of their income, other resources, and times in alleviating the societal problems plaguing rural communities yet not compromise their ultimate goal of wealth maximisation for owners. The literature search revealed eight frequently cited economic benefits for companies that engage in BSR. These include, enhanced reputation, reduced risk, increased productivity, employee satisfaction, access to capital, employee learning, the opportunity to charge premium prices, and of course better financial performance.

Some empirical studies seem to support the positive impact of BSR on business economic performance. Orlitzky et al. (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of several studies that examined the relationship between BSR and firm performance and concluded that it pays to be socially responsible. Wingard (2001) also found a positive correlation between environmental responsibility and the performance of South African listed companies; that is, the higher the environmental responsibility of a company is, the higher is the financial performance of that company. Although these studies have largely focused on big companies, they show that a business can behave in a socially responsible manner and still add to shareholder wealth. Thus, while there is a very strong economic motivation for engaging in BSR, this does not necessarily apply to small businesses. Therefore, there is need to explore this missing link for smaller organisations.

### **Importance of the current study**

Involving small businesses in Africa particularly those in the rural areas in social responsibility programmes will require making small businesses to buy into the idea of BSR. This will require empirical research to provide guidance in terms of BSR what is going on, working, and not working, focus of those doing it, specific activities for smaller businesses, and most importantly BSR performance/firm performance relationship. This guidance is still lacking mainly because of dearth of focused research.

In addition, the current study is important for the following

reasons. Firstly, small businesses are generally known to be different in many ways from larger organizations. This means that BSR agenda for small businesses may not be the same as those for larger businesses. Secondly, BSR is not the same everywhere across the globe (Visser, 2007). Thus, for example the BSR agenda of small businesses in Africa might not be the same as those of the developed world where much work has been done. Thirdly, while it is true that BSR conferences and awards are increasingly mushrooming in African countries around the world and some aspects of BSR are indeed “migrating from the West to the rest” as Mehra (2006) puts it, “it does not necessarily mean that the BSR concept in its entirety is alien to Africa. Neither does it mean some kind of Western ‘colonisation’ of the BSR concept in Africa”. Rather, based on Dzansi and Pretorius (2009) views about the role of the African value system “UBUNTU” in BSR, it is reasonable to say that the motivation for BSR and the BSR focus of small businesses in African country like South Africa would naturally differ from those of other countries. Phillips (2006) provides compelling reasons in support of this argument. In the words of Phillips (2006), “Africa’s collective approach to problem-solving and the impact of the extended-family system, reinforced by the strong ‘village’ community mentality and philosophy, are all indicative of an inherently socially responsible people”. Thus according to Phillips (2006), Africans have long been socially responsible with their own approach to social responsibility.

Social responsibility can then be seen as a concept that derives from the African value system. Phillips (2006) actually believes that the Western exported form of social responsibility unlike the African conceptualisation is all about responding to the social needs of stakeholders than it being part of their value system. In other words, Western conceptualisation of BSR is not in sync with what the African value system determines to be important social responsibility activities of business. No wonder, Phillips (2006) asked: What is important for Africa? To what extent are CSR practices influenced by the local context? In short, all that Phillips (2006) appears to be saying is that the African way of thinking about BSR is values driven whereas the Western one is not.

Another importance of this study is that, appropriate policies to foster BSR in small businesses may never materialize in Africa unless empirical research that provides scientific information for policy makers is intensified. Moreover, the situation where Africa lags behind other regions of the world in terms of research into BSR in small businesses or does not pay much attention to small businesses related BSR research leads to a situation where Africa will ever remain a dumping ground for unsuitable BSR policies and procedures designed for the developed world.

Finally but not the least, as Hopkins (no date) observed, BSR differs from country to country and cultures affect how consumers expect businesses to behave.

The interpretation of BSR therefore differs from country to country. Therefore, as Visser (2007) points out, understanding small business/BSR interface in other regions or countries of the world may not provide an understanding of the phenomenon in the South African rural contexts.

### **Conceptualising BSR for measurement in small businesses**

From the literature, BSR appears to be directed at stakeholders and characterised by activities in three ways. (1) it consists of voluntary activities that go beyond legal and contractual requirement – for example, paying above minimum wage; (2) activities are performed to benefit employees and other business relevant groups (stakeholders) such as customers and local community – for example providing day care service for employees’ children; and (3) the activities are regular rather than sporadic – in other words, activities are more part of business strategy than being ad hoc.

According to Laczniak and Murphy (1993), a firm’s stakeholders can be classified as primary or secondary. These authors refer to those groups or people who have the capacity to influence or are affected by the business but who are not essential to the survival of the business as secondary stakeholders. On the other hand, primary stakeholders of a business refer to those without whose full cooperation, a business will not continue for a reasonable period of time. Dzansi and Pretorius (2009) believe owners, customers, employees, and local communities are the most influential primary stakeholders of small businesses. This study is based on the framework illustrated in Figure 1 and focused on activities directed at employees, customers, and the immediate communities of the participating businesses.

To surmise, although the concept covers a wide spectrum of business and society relationship, essentially, BSR seems to mean that businesses integrate social concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with business relevant groups on a voluntary basis. In certain instances, environmental issues are classified under BSR. However, from the triple bottom line perspective, environmental issues form a separate leg of sustainable business practice. Therefore, the conceptualisation of BSR for measurement in this study does not include environmental issues. In any case, as Dzansi and Pretorius (2009) point out, environmentalism is not likely to be a major issue for smaller organisations for various reasons.

### **Problem statement**

The problem is that, although the concept of BSR has been around South Africa for some time now with the country playing a leading role in research into the

phenomenon compared to the rest of Africa, most of the empirical research literature seems to centre on large businesses (Dzansi and Pretorius, 2009). Furthermore, whilst a lot has been done on smaller organisations in the West, to date, only scant empirical evidence of what, how, and the extent to which small businesses in South Africa are faring in the social responsibility agenda can be found. This would suggest that BSR is not taken seriously by small businesses in this part of the world and more so in the rural communities. In fact, the topic as it relates to smaller types of businesses in South Africa remains less researched. This limits the understanding of the phenomenon in respect to South African small businesses. Thus one cannot for example tell with any level of certainty what the level of BSR awareness, performance, and preferred practices of South African small businesses are. The question therefore remains: Is the concept taken seriously at all by small businesses in this part of the world?

Besides, BSR may not be the same everywhere across the globe. Rather, it differs from country to country (Visser, 2007); the interpretation of BSR therefore, naturally differs from country to country (Hopkins, no date); and customs and beliefs dictate what activities businesses are likely to engage in (Visser, 2007). Thus even in Africa, small business BSR may differ depending on size of business, country, and context (rural or urban). Consequently, there is need to conduct empirical research in these areas.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research questions and hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the concept of BSR has permeated the small business mind set of a typical rural South African setting.

Five specific research questions guided the study namely: (1) Are small businesses in the research locale aware of the concept BSR and its elements? (2) Do these small businesses perform certain selected BSR activities (customer, community, and employee related activities) to the extent that they can be classified as being socially responsible? (3) Do these small businesses regard performing BSR as beneficial to their businesses? (4) What are the main BSR activities for the businesses surveyed? (5) Are there observable benefits for these small businesses for BSR performance? Research question 4 was inferred directly from responses. However, in order to answer research questions 1, 2, 3, and 5, four hypotheses were formulated and tested respectively.

Contrary to the widely held view that small businesses hardly engage in BSR activities for various reasons, a related study by the Centre for Social Markets (2003) in the UK found that within South Asian small businesses in the UK, most of the firms not only saw BSR as an important business issue but a large majority of them actually engage in BSR activities. These and other findings of the above study greatly shaped the research questions and corresponding hypotheses tested in this study.

The widespread recognition and evidence of BSR practice reported in the UK study is an implicit indication of high level of awareness among the small businesses previously mentioned. It

will therefore, be interesting to determine how the South African small businesses fare in their level of awareness of BSR. Based on this information, the first two hypotheses tested which correspond to the first two research questions respectively were:

H<sub>1</sub>: the small businesses surveyed are not aware of the concept BSR and its elements.

H<sub>1a</sub>: the small businesses surveyed are aware of the concept BSR and its elements.

The instrument included questions/statements for respondents to indicate whether or not they are aware of the concept BSR and its elements.

H<sub>2</sub>: the small businesses surveyed do not perform selected BSR activities to the extent that they can be classified as being socially responsible.

H<sub>2a</sub>: the small businesses surveyed perform selected BSR activities to the extent that they can be classified as being socially responsible.

Respondents were required to indicate whether or not their businesses respond to certain employee, customer, and community issues.

According to the Centre for Social Markets (2003) study mentioned earlier, while there was acceptance that good BSR practice could lead to benefits for the organisation, this was not a significant factor that made the organisations engage in it. It would therefore be interesting to find out South African small businesses perception about benefits of BSR performance. Therefore, the third hypothesis tested which corresponds to research question three was:

H<sub>3</sub>: the small businesses surveyed do not perceive BSR as beneficial to their business.

H<sub>3a</sub>: the small businesses surveyed perceive BSR as beneficial to their business.

The questionnaire for this study required respondents to indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with certain business benefits of engaging in BSR.

Research question four: "What are the main BSR activities for the businesses surveyed?" did not require a hypothesis. Instead, it was inferred from the results of the data analysis.

Research indicates that if done properly, BSR in any organisation could among others produce improved financial performance. This improved financial performance is attributed to high employee morale, lower employee turnover, increased employee productivity, customer loyalty, etc.

Therefore, the fourth hypothesis which corresponds to research question five was:

H<sub>4</sub>: There are no observable benefits for small businesses based on BSR performance.

H<sub>4a</sub>: There are observable benefits for small businesses based on BSR performance.

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which sales and profit have grown over the last three or more years.

### Participants

The population investigated was small businesses in the Greater Taung Local Municipality. For the purpose of this study, small businesses are defined according to the national norm in South Africa as prescribed by the amended small business Act 102 of

1996. The study covered only micro and small businesses that employ between one to fifty (50) full-time workers in addition to the owner/manager as none of the businesses qualified to be classified as medium enterprise. The actual population size was difficult to determine because of the informal nature of most of the businesses and the fact that no reliable database exist. Given the high birth and attrition rate in the South African small business sector, it was always going to be difficult to obtain a reliable existing sample frame for the study. It needs to be pointed out however that the lack of reliable sample frame in small business research is not new. Instead, Curran and Blackburn (2001) have highlighted this problem as a serious handicap for all small business researchers. To address this problem training was provided to entrepreneurship students at the Vuselela Technical Training College, Taung Campus and these were used to compile a sample frame from which a simple random sample of 350 small businesses were selected.

### Data collection

Face-to-face interviews were held with owner/managers where in most cases respondents had to indicate on a standard five-point Likert-scale, the degree to which they agree or disagree with an issue. Dzansi's Small Enterprise Social Responsibility Inventory (2004) was used. The Small Enterprise Social Responsibility Inventory has been tested for validity and with Cronbach Alphas well above 0.70 found to be a valid instrument for measuring BSR in small businesses (Dzansi and Pretorius, 2009).

## RESULTS

### Demographic data

Of the targeted 350 owners/managers, 314 availed themselves for the face-to-face interview thus yielding a response rate of 89.7%. Incorrect entries were treated as missing items (Table 1 for number of missing items) and consequently ignored in calculations.

The data in Table 1 shows that ownership/management of the small businesses is evenly distributed between both sexes. In the context of promoting gender equity in South Africa, this should be regarded as good news for policy makers who have been trying to bring women into mainstream economic activity. With about 73%, retail trading dominates the small business environment (Table 1). This is not surprising given that retail trade appears to be the easiest form of self-employment. From Table 1, about 50% of the owner managers belong to the age group 31 - 45 years. Table 1 reveals that a large majority - over 70% of the owner/managers have good education (at least matric). Training providers may be most delighted with this statistics since they may not have too much difficulty in providing further training to owner/managers given their existing educational levels. According to Table 1, more than 75% of the businesses are over five years old. The data in Table 1 indicates that Black South Africans dominate the small business environment in the Greater Taung Local Municipality with close to 50% of the market share. Given that that the Greater Taung Local Municipality is a predominantly black community,

the result is not surprising. This is encouraging because it is indication that many of the black inhabitants are taking to self-employment. Majority of the small businesses surveyed reported reasonable growth in both sales and gross profit. Table 1 show that (over 70%) of the small businesses had increasing sales and profit growth.

The sales and profit growth points to a thriving business environment in the Greater Taung Local Municipality that should encourage others to take to self-employment as a career option. Based on the demographic data in Table 1, the Greater Taung Local Municipality small business environment appears to be made up of micro, very small, and small businesses with no evidence of medium enterprises participating in the survey. This may mean that small businesses fail to grow to medium size businesses. According to Table 1, the greatest proportion (34.39%) of the businesses contributed about 3 – 4% of their annual gross profit towards BSR related activities whilst a reasonable proportion (21.34%) said they contributed 10% of gross profit to BSR. Unfortunately there was no way of verifying these claims without raising the ire of respondents. Consequently, their words were taken for it. If indeed these claims are true, one can only say that the small businesses in the Greater Taung Local Municipality are really doing their bit in terms of BSR.

### Inferential statistics

However, useful descriptive analysis may be, a researcher's primary interest goes beyond mere description of samples.

Inferential analysis allows a researcher to draw conclusions about the population based on data obtained from samples (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 2002; Collis and Hussey, 2003).

Based on the distribution of the descriptive statistics obtained for this study that showed normality, parametric analytic techniques were used to perform the inferential analysis. These included factor analysis, item analysis, Multiway analysis of variance (Multiway ANOVA), and discriminant analysis. The following results were obtained from the inferential analysis.

The first research question was: are small businesses in the research locale aware of the concept of BSR and its elements? Answering this question required the testing of the hypotheses:

$H_1$ : the small businesses surveyed are not aware of the concept BSR and it elements

$H_{1a}$ : the small businesses surveyed are aware of the concept BSR and it elements.

The scale mean of 3.9753 for BSR awareness which is above the median value of 3 on a five point scale (Table 2) indicates that small businesses in the Greater Taung Local Municipality are aware of BSR and its elements.

**Table 1.** Demographic data.

Variable	Characteristic/description	Frequency (n)	Percentage
Gender of owner/manager	Male	169	55.05
	Female	138	44.95
	Total (7 missing)	307	100
Business by type	Hospitality	42	13.38
	Transport	22	7.00
	Retail	230	73.25
	Other (mining, health, commercial farming)	20	6.37
	Total	314	100
Owner/Manager's age (years)	19 – 30	77	25.00
	31 – 45	146	47.40
	≥46	85	27.60
	Total (6 missing)	308	100
Owner/manager's level of education	No formal education	13	4.14
	Primary (up to grade 6)	50	15.92
	Secondary (up to grade 9)	29	9.24
	Matric (up to grade 12)	85	27.07
	Post matric (diploma, degree, certificate etc)	90	28.66
	Post graduate	47	14.97
Total	314	100	
Age of business (years)	≤5	76	24.20
	6 – 10	108	34.40
	11 – 20	81	25.79
	≥21	49	15.61
	Total	314	100
Race/ethnicity of owner/manager	Afrikaner	67	21.34
	English	56	17.83
	Black	147	46.81
	Other (Chinese, Indian, Portuguese, other Asian)	44	14.02
	Total	314	100
Sales growth (%) reported for the past 3 to 5 years	Decreasing	27	8.60
	No change (0)	55	17.52
	Increasing (1-10)	73	23.25
	Increasing (11-20)	91	28.98
	Increasing (≥21)	68	21.65
	Total	314	100
Gross profit growth (%) reported for past 3 – 5 years	Decreasing	25	7.96
	No change (0)	63	20.07
	Increasing (1-10)	70	22.29
	Increasing (11-20)	95	30.25
	Increasing (≥21)	61	19.43
Total	314	100	
Number of employees besides owner/manager	1-5	157	50.00
	6-10	108	34.39
	11-26	49	15.61
	Total	314	100



Table 1. Contd.

	1-2	68	21.66
Annual BSR expenditure (%) reported	3-4	108	34.39
	5-6	71	22.61
	7-10	67	21.34
	Total	314	100

Table 2. Item analysis.

Statistic	Expected benefit	Community benefit	Realised benefit	BSR awareness/ attitude/performance	Employee practices	
Number of items	6	9	4	6	4	
VP (%)	7.4400 (24.8)	3.5883 (11.96)	1.6988 (5.66)	1.5542 (5.18)	1.8763 (6.26)	
Mean	3.8312	3.7880	3.6903	3.9753	4.4443	
Variance	0.67074	0.12213	0.43393	0.59104	0.41502	
Standard deviation	0.81899	0.34947	0.65873	0.76875	0.64422	
Cronbach alpha	0.9600	0.6969	0.8741	0.7506	0.8680	
Eigenvalue	8.40832	3.92554	2.47653	2.03830	1.68441	
Squared multiple correlation	0.966	0.823	0.925	0.904	0.894	
Canonical correlation	0.9918	0.9631	0.9480	0.9184	0.8824	
Significance of the mean deviation from midpoint value of 3	F P	17.62 <0.0001*	5.64 <0.0001*	18.63 <0.0001*	18.40 <0.0001*	9.79 <0.0001*

\* = Significant at 1% level of significant.

Therefore, the null hypothesis  $H_1$  could not be supported. The alternate hypothesis  $H_{1a}$ : The surveyed rural small businesses are aware of the concept BSR and its elements, are therefore, accepted. However, being aware does not necessarily mean that the business performs BSR.

The second research question was do these small businesses perform certain selected BSR activities (customer, community, and employee related activities) to the extent that they can be classified as being socially responsible? Answering this question required the testing of the hypotheses:

$H_2$ : the surveyed rural small businesses do not perform selected BSR activities to the extent that they can be classified as being socially responsible.

$H_{2a}$ : the surveyed rural small businesses perform selected BSR activities to the extent that they can be classified as being socially responsible.

Respondents were required to indicate whether or not their businesses respond to certain employee, customer, and community issues.

The average scale mean of 4.1122 for BSR performance (Community/customer practice is

3.7880 and employee practice is 4.4443) (Table 2) compared to the midpoint value of 3 indicates that small businesses in the GTLM perform these BSR activities. Given this result, the null hypothesis  $H_2$  is not supported. The alternate hypothesis  $H_{2a}$ : the surveyed rural small businesses perform selected BSR activities to the extent that they can be classified as being socially responsible was therefore, accepted.

The third research question investigated was: Do these small businesses regard performing BSR as beneficial to their businesses? In order to answer this question the following hypotheses

answering this question the following hypotheses were tested:

H<sub>3</sub>: the surveyed rural small businesses do not perceive BSR as beneficial to their business.

H<sub>3a</sub>: the surveyed rural small businesses perceive BSR as beneficial to their business.

The scale mean of 3.8312 for expected or perceived benefits is greater than the median value 3 (Table 2). The higher scale mean for expected/perceived benefits 3.8312 compared to the median value of 3 means the null hypothesis H<sub>3</sub> is not supported. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis H<sub>3a</sub>: the surveyed rural small businesses perceive BSR as beneficial to their business was accepted. This indicates that the respondents regard their company's BSR activities as beneficial to their business. This finding is consistent with the high BSR awareness and performance reported earlier. The finding suggests that small businesses may be performing BSR with the expectation of benefits. It is also consistent with the findings of the Centre for Social Markets (2003) study in the UK which showed that within South Asian small businesses in the UK most of the firms saw BSR as an important business issue. This is a very important finding in the South African context. It shows that the motivation already exists (even if for selfish interest as some may suggest) for small businesses to engage in BSR activities. Thus, convincing small businesses to intensify their efforts should not be too difficult a task.

As said earlier, research question four: What are the main BSR activities for the businesses surveyed did not require a hypothesis as it could be inferred directly from the data. Item analysis showed scale mean scores that were higher than the midpoints for the factors community, customer and employee related BSR activities (Table 2). The empirical results therefore support the suggestion that small business BSR focus is likely to be community, customer or employee related since they form their most important trading partners. With mean score of 4.4 for employee issues against mean score of 3.8 for customer and community issues (Table 2) the result suggests that the small businesses surveyed might be more concerned with employee issues.

That small businesses showed higher performance in employee related activities than customer/community related activities may be explained by the fact that often most of the employees are close relatives of owner/managers hence they feel more obliged towards their wellbeing.

The reported means for the current study that are significantly higher than the midpoint values for Community/customer practices and employee relations is consistent with the views of Byrd et al. (1994); Peyton (2003); Longenecker et al. (2000); and Kyambalesa (1994) who all identified consumerism, community activities, and employee relations as the main BSR activities

small businesses are likely to engage in.

Research question five for the study was: are there observable benefits for these small businesses for BSR performance? To answer this question, the following hypotheses were tested:

H<sub>4</sub>: There are no observable benefits for that engage in BSR activities.

H<sub>4a</sub>: There are observable benefits for small businesses that engage in BSR activities.

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which sales and profit have grown over the last three or more years. A certain pattern seems discernible with regard to gross profit growth and Awareness/ attitude/performance. Table 3 indicates that reported gross profit growth differed significantly according to and BSR awareness/performance. There seems to be some positive relationship between awareness/attitude/ performance and reported gross profit growth with those reporting higher means for awareness/attitude also reporting higher gross profit growth of  $\geq 21\%$  (Table 4). Similarly, respondents who reported the highest mean for the factor community/customer practices (3.99) also reported the highest sales growth  $\geq 21\%$  (Table 4). Whether these relationships are causative were not investigated. The scale mean of 3.6903 that is significantly higher than the midpoint value of 3 (Table 4) for realised benefits shows that small businesses reported improvements in their business performance. Whether these improved performances can be attributed to their BSR performance is however, questionable. The high levels of awareness and performance reported in Table 2 and the conclusion arrived at on Hypothesis 2 however indicate a positive link (no matter how weak) between BSR performance and business performance. On the basis of this evidence, the null hypothesis H<sub>4</sub> was not supported. Consequently, the alternate hypothesis: H<sub>4a</sub>: There are observable benefits for small businesses that engage in BSR activities were accepted. This link if true is consistent with the study of Besser et al. (1999) who found that there is a positive relationship between an entrepreneurs service to the community and business success.

In view of the debate in the literature regarding the economic benefits for small businesses that engage in BSR, and the observation of Cochran and Wood (1984) in Rieck and Hall (1998) that "If a positive relationship can be shown to exist, between financial performance and BSR actions then management might be encouraged to pursue such activities with increased vigour..." this may as well be the most important finding of this study. It in fact provides a further empirical support to normative assertions that small businesses can indeed engage in BSR and still improve shareholder wealth.

## DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier, the main aim of this study was to

**Table 3.** Multiway ANOVA for “BSR awareness/performance” (Factor 4).

Independent variable	BSR awareness/performance				
	Df	Sum of squares	Mean squares	F	P
Type of business (v33)	3	0.60271680	0.20090560	0.91	0.4359
Gender of owner/manager (v34)	1	0.03256643	0.03256643	0.15	0.7010
Age of owner/manager (v35)	2	0.90429676	0.45214838	2.05	0.1306
Educational level of owner/manager (v36)	5	6.45107705	1.29021541	5.85	<.0001
Business Age (v37)	3	1.21769298	0.40589766	1.84	0.1399
Ethnicity of owner/manager (v38)	3	25.03988938	8.34662979	37.87	<.0001
Sales growth (v39)	4	1.09650952	0.27412738	1.24	0.2927
Gross profit growth (40)	4	1.40300197	0.85075049	3.86	0.0046
Number of employees (41)	2	1.72477770	0.86238885	3.91	0.0211
Annual BSR expenditure (42)	3	4.40649332	1.46876444	6.66	0.0002
Total	30	42.87902191	-----	-----	-----

**Table 4.** Comparison of means for gross profit growth to show strength of difference.

Variable		Decreasing	No change	Increasing 1-10%	Increasing 11-20%	Increasing $\geq$ 21%
Expected/perceived benefits	Mean	2.83 <sup>c</sup>	3.18 <sup>c</sup>	3.65 <sup>b</sup>	4.31 <sup>a</sup>	4.39 <sup>a</sup>
	SD	0.91	0.40	0.65	0.66	0.49
Community/customer practices	Mean	3.68 <sup>b</sup>	3.78 <sup>b</sup>	3.73 <sup>b</sup>	3.74 <sup>b</sup>	3.99 <sup>a</sup>
	SD	0.33	0.29	0.33	0.36	0.34
Realised benefits	Mean	2.71 <sup>d</sup>	3.11 <sup>c</sup>	3.76 <sup>b</sup>	3.99 <sup>a</sup>	4.14 <sup>a</sup>
	SD	0.57	0.29	0.53	0.49	0.48
BSR awareness/performance	Mean	3.26 <sup>c</sup>	4.19 <sup>a</sup>	3.73 <sup>b</sup>	4.02 <sup>a</sup>	4.25 <sup>a</sup>
	SD	0.95	0.81	0.71	0.70	0.52
Employee practices	Mean	3.72 <sup>b</sup>	4.46 <sup>a</sup>	4.47 <sup>a</sup>	4.57 <sup>a</sup>	4.50 <sup>a</sup>
	SD	0.87	0.72	0.61	0.47	0.55

All means (horizontal) with different alphabetic indicators comply with a Tukey at  $p < 0.01$ .

determine the extent to which the concept of BSR has permeated the small business mind-set in the Greater Taung Local Municipality, a typical South African rural setting. To form an opinion, five research questions were posed. These questions were transformed into four testable hypotheses and based on the evidence obtained through the empirical study the following final conclusions are reached.

1. Are small businesses in the research locale aware of the concept BSR and its elements? In order to answer this question the hypothesis “small businesses in the Greater Taung Local Municipality are not aware of the concept BSR and its elements” was tested. The empirical evidence did not support the acceptance of this hypothesis. Therefore, the conclusion was reached that small businesses in the research locale are aware of the concept BSR and its elements.

2. Do these small businesses engage in selected BSR activities to the extent that they can be described as being socially responsible? In order to answer this question the hypothesis “the surveyed rural small businesses do not perform BSR activities to the extent that they can be described as being socially responsible” was tested. The empirical evidence did not support the acceptance of this hypothesis. Therefore, the conclusion was reached that, the small businesses surveyed engage in BSR activities to the extent that they can be described as being socially responsible.

3. Do the small businesses surveyed regard BSR as beneficial to their businesses? In order to answer this question the hypothesis “the small businesses surveyed do not perceive BSR as beneficial to their business” was tested. The empirical evidence did not support the acceptance of this hypothesis. Therefore, the conclusion was reached that the small businesses perceive BSR as

beneficial to their business.

4. What are the main BSR activities for the businesses surveyed? Item analysis showed scale mean scores that were higher than the midpoints for community, customer and employee related BSR activities (Table 2). The empirical results therefore, seem to support the suggestion that small business BSR focus is likely to be community, customer or employee related since they form their most important trading partners. With mean score of 4.4 for employee issues against mean score of 3.8 for customer and community issues (Table 2) the result suggests that small businesses in the Greater Taung Local Municipality might be more concerned with employee issues.

5. Are there any observable positive outcomes for those small businesses that practice BSR? In order to answer this question the hypothesis "There are no observable benefits for small businesses that engage in BSR activities" was tested. The empirical evidence although somewhat weak, did not support the acceptance of this hypothesis. Therefore, the conclusion was reached that there are observable benefits for small businesses that engage in BSR activities.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, it is finally concluded that the concept of BSR has to 'some extent' permeated the small business mind set the typical rural South African setting. However, much work needs to be done to bring the level of awareness and performance to internationally acceptable level.

## Conclusion

Firstly, with a scale mean of 3.9753 that is higher than the median value 3, the surveyed small businesses seem aware of the concept BSR. This finding is consistent with the results obtained in the Centre for Social Markets (2003) study that found widespread BSR practices within the South Asian small businesses. Although it may appear a bit presumptuous, given this is only one study conducted on a small scale, it nevertheless indicates that small businesses in the developing countries are after all not lagging behind their Western counterparts in terms of awareness of BSR.

Secondly, the results show that the surveyed rural small businesses engage in some BSR activities. In view of the Centre for Social Markets (2003) finding in the UK, which showed a similar trend, it is not farfetched to reiterate that BSR is no longer a preserved territory of big business.

Thirdly, it is not surprising that consumerism, community activities, and employee relations were confirmed as important BSR activities for small businesses in the Greater Taung Local Municipality. This finding is consistent with those of Byrd et al. (1994); Kyambalesa (1994);

Longenecker et al. (2000); and Peyton (2003) who also identified consumerism, community activities, and employee relation. This gives an indication that perhaps, these three activities must be some of the (if not the most) important BSR focus of small businesses. Thus, it shows that any study on small business BSR should take these factors into consideration.

Finally, the BSR expenditure of small businesses in the region is very encouraging. According to Table 1, all the businesses surveyed spent part of their earnings on BSR. The fact that some could spend as much as 10% of their gross profit (Table 1) is a clear indication that small businesses in the region take BSR seriously. Of course, one must bear in mind that these are self-reported figures that might be exaggerated.

## LIMITATIONS

No research is devoid of shortcomings. Nonetheless, shortcomings (if any) of the current study should not necessarily reduce its value. Rather, addressing them in future studies should add more value.

Firstly, although the identified BSR focus of the small businesses surveyed seem to suggest a strong focus on the human aspects of BSR, because these activities were the only ones tested, they can only be regarded as key BSR activities of the small businesses surveyed and not necessarily their primary BSR focus. There could as well be more activities that these small businesses engage in but which the study did not focus on. There is therefore, need to conduct research that includes other issues in order to determine more authentic primary BSR activities of small businesses.

Secondly, inferences drawn in this study are based on self-reported data that could not be verified. It is possible that some of the information might be exaggerated or not true. It is however, assumed that owner/managers were truthful in their responses.

Thirdly, the study was conducted in a small geographical area of a rural part of South Africa. Generalizability of the findings to the rest of rural South Africa and Africa for that matter might be questioned. Whilst acknowledging this inherent limitation, as stated elsewhere in this paper, most rural parts of Africa share many similarities including lack of big business, predominance of small to micro businesses, similarities in cultures, prevalence of unemployment, commonality of the UBUNTU value system. One is therefore, convinced that the results of the current study could be generalised to most rural areas of South Africa and possibly the rest of Africa.

Fourthly, the small business sector consists of small, medium, and micro enterprises. This study did not include any medium sized business. This situation arose because no business qualified to be classified as medium enterprise. The results may therefore not reflect the status quo of BSR in all types of small businesses.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study have helped clarify some pertinent issues related to BSR in small businesses in general and in rural African small business in particular.

Firstly, the findings of the current study indicate high levels of awareness of the concept BSR and its elements among the small businesses surveyed and moreover, these businesses do engage in BSR activities to the extent that they can be described as being socially responsible. Coupled with similar findings of the Centre for Social Markets (2003) study in the UK which also showed a wide spread awareness and practice of BSR in South Asian small businesses in the UK, it can be presumed that contrary to UNIDO's (2002) concern that small businesses might be having negative attitude towards BSR this may actually not be the case. Surely, the businesses surveyed would not have gone on from high levels awareness (a condition that is necessary to make an informed decision to perform or not perform BSR) to actually engage in it if they had negative attitudes towards the concept.

Secondly, the striking similarities in the findings of the current study and the 2003 UK study referred to above suggests that perhaps smaller businesses regardless of geographical location and setting (whether in Africa or Europe, rural or urban setting) have embraced the BSR concept. That is to say, unlike in the past, BSR is no longer a preserve of small businesses in the developed country context. In the same vein, one can conveniently presume that BSR is no longer a preserve of big business. What remains to be answered is given their widely acknowledged resource limitations, what are the primary motivations for small businesses engaging in BSR?

Thirdly, although this study did not set out to identify small business motivation for engaging in BSR, the findings indicate that the businesses believe their BSR activities are beneficial to their businesses. This finding is again similar to the findings of the 2003 UK study mentioned earlier. This similarity suggests that regardless of location, small businesses around the world consider BSR performance beneficial to the business. Furthermore, one can make the inference that small businesses wherever they may be, might be performing BSR with the expectation of business benefits. In other words, small businesses might be motivated to engage in BSR because of perceived benefits. The implication is that, if research can be done to confirm the business case, BSR performance of small businesses might be increased. This assumption is in tandem with the views of Cochran and Wood (1984) in Rieck and Hall (1998) who argue that "If a positive relationship can be shown to exist, between financial performance and BSR actions then management of businesses might be encouraged to pursue such activities with increased vigour..." This may as well be the most important finding of this study.

In this respect, the current study provides some useful insight. The findings of this study indicate that reported gross profit growth differed significantly according to and BSR awareness/performance. It also reveals some positive relationship between awareness/ attitude/ performance and reported gross profit growth with those reporting higher means for Awareness/attitude also reporting higher gross profit growth. Similarly, respondents who reported the highest mean for the factor community/customer practices also reported the highest sales growth. Whether these improved performances that significantly correspond to BSR awareness and performance is causative is however questionable. This study therefore provides support for Besser et al. (1999) who found that there is a positive relationship between an entrepreneurs service to the community and business success. The findings of this study and similar ones can therefore, make it easier to promote/advocate for BSR in small businesses.

As argued by Visser (2007) and Dzansi (2004), small businesses despite being limited in their ability to create jobs can nevertheless impact on socio economic development by being socially responsible. It was earlier acknowledged that small businesses in most rural parts of South Africa share many similarities including commonality of value systems. That being the case, it is quite safe to assume that the observed high level of BSR awareness and practice among the rural based small businesses surveyed is a common feature among most small businesses operating in other rural parts of South Africa - a situation that can be capitalised upon by both local and national government and NGOs in their effort to hasten socio economic development in the economically depressed rural areas of South Africa.

Some BSR commentators in South Africa have suggested that small business BSR effort is inadequate precisely due to lack of support especially from NGOs, large business and government. This observation may not be akin to South Africa only. Rather, it seems to be a common problem even identified in the developed country context. For example, according the Canadian business for social responsibility (2003), Canadian small businesses receive little support in their BSR efforts. This study is certainly not about and did not dwell on support of small business BSR effort or the lack of it and can therefore, not reasonably comment on it. However, it is quite clear from the findings in this study that the foundations of small business engagement in BSR have been laid by small businesses themselves. All that remains is for key role players including large business, government, and NGOs to take advantage of the reported existing high levels of BSR awareness and practice by providing increased moral, technical, and of course financial support to small businesses so that they can institutionalise their BSR endeavours hence increase their BSR performance. In that way, small businesses can have more impact on socio-economic development to the

extent that Dzansi (2004) and Visser (2007) believe they can.

Lastly but not the least, the findings confirm community, customer and employee related issues as key BSR active-ties for the small businesses. This finding is consistent those of Byrd et al. (1994); Kyambalesa (1994); Longenecker et al. (2000); and Peyton (2003) that identified the same activities as the main BSR focus small businesses are likely to engage in. The implication of the above for policy makers and small business owner managers is quite obvious. Firstly, the findings identify “affordable” BSR activities in the form of community, customer and employee related activities for small businesses new to BSR to engage in. In the same vein, policy makers, public and private BSR training providers and support agencies can focus their activities on these areas.

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