CHAPTER 4

CORPORATE PURPOSE FOR HUMANITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT: DEI LOGIC BY GLOBAL FUNDERS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Yuka Fujimoto
Future Cities Research Institute (FCRI), Malaysia

Joel Cheah Choe Wai
Fuze Ecoteer Outdoor Adventures Sdn Bhd, Malaysia

Vulnerable communities and developing countries require a societal-level DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) logic that extends beyond individual organizations. In our research on the extended producer responsibility (EPR) of multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in Malaysia, we observed significant global inequities in how developed countries engage with developing countries to address environmental challenges. MNCs in developing countries play a crucial intermediary role in bridging this gap. This chapter, along with our key contextual findings, highlights how a corporation (L'Occitane) and an environmental entrepreneur (Upcycle

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by Fuze Ecoteer) collaboratively address environmental and humanitarian needs through a recycling project. Our case study demonstrates how corporations can prioritize societal challenges, even at the expense of profit, guided by a corporate purpose that supports nature and humanity. By linking a systemic institutional perspective with DEI logic, we advocate for a shift in corporate behavior toward a more "societal" approach, moving away from purely profit-driven motives. This approach demonstrates a DEI logic that accelerates progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To this end, we recommend that global policymakers and corporate leaders adopt DEI logic in their funding and support, addressing the environmental challenges faced by the Global South.

DEI LOGIC FROM A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

Our study begins from the systems perspective of corporations that prioritize humanity and the environment over profit maximization to promote a better life for all stakeholders (Mitchell et al., 2016; Shrivastava, 1995). This approach encourages the establishment of resource-interdependent networks among key actors to mitigate societal and environmental degradation. Figure 4.1 illustrates how corporations can adopt a systems perspective to expand DEI efforts, anchored by the "leaving no one behind" principle, which views diversity as encompassing humanity and the environment in both developed and developing countries on an equal footing. This framework echoes the global principles established at the Rio de Janeiro Conference (1992), which advocate for preserving biological diversity and equitable resource-sharing across humanity. From this broad perspective on diversity, equity means that all marginalized communities and environmental concerns within global society are treated with fairness, ensuring that their lack of resources—whether due to birth or natural circumstances—is addressed by those with greater resources.

Globally, developing countries have fewer resources to tackle humanitarian and environmental challenges than developed countries. Therefore, we propose that inclusion involves the active participation of more resourceful global actors in decision-making and practices to address the humanity and environmental challenges faced by developing countries, as outlined by the United Nations' SDGs. These environmental challenges include SDG 6: Clean Water, SDG 14: Life Below Water, and SDG 15: Life on Land. The humanitarian challenges relate to SDG 1: No Poverty, SDG 5: Gender Equality, and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, which are often in the most critical condition in developing countries.

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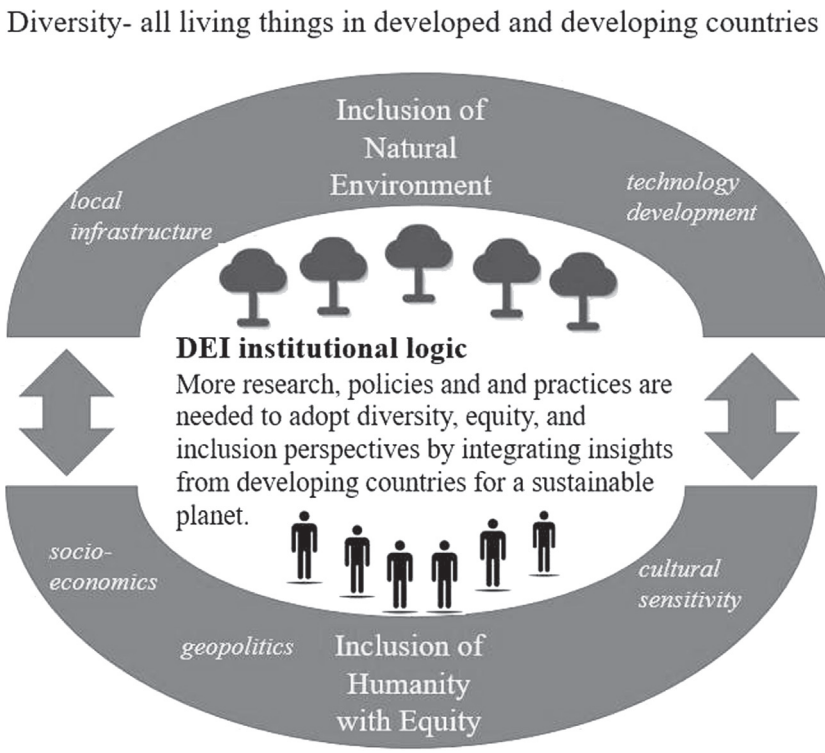

Figure 4.1 Diversity, equity and inclusion logic for sustainability development goals.

We advocate that this DEI lens requires knowledge exchange and resource transfer from developed to developing countries (SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals) by fostering more equal decision-making power to address the global gland challenges that are more salience in less influential and less resourced developing countries. To foster humanity and environmental improvement in developing countries, more-resourced members from developed countries can support the less-resourced members even at monetary expense. This perspective aligns with DEI researchers on the principles of equal power sharing leveling fields and resource exchange by working together (cf., Hebl & King, 2024; Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998; Nishii, 2013; Roberson, 2006). Dominant DEI research in the management discipline has primarily focused on workplace DEI phenomena in developed countries. Only recently have more studies adopted a global lens to address global inequalities. The notion of inclusion has traditionally focused on embracing unique individualities, such as identities, ideas, skills, and knowledge; however, it also needs to encompass and address the unique needs and challenges of individuals within specific national contexts from a global

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perspective (c.f., Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998; Randel & Alexandra, 2024; Shore et al., 2011). This ensures that those with fewer resources in developing countries, for example, can have an equal influence in decision-making on a global playing field, determining decisions that affect their welfare and the welfare of the natural environment in which they live. In particular, we resonate with internationalization of DEI perspective of how MNCs share resources and power with those with underrepresented groups based on moral and power sharing ground for societal change at the global level (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023). This societal DEI perspective confronts the conventional institutional logic focused on economic development by reconfiguring the logic through the lens of DEI across the global value chain. Institutional logic is referred to as a coherent set of assumptions and practices that guide individuals and organizations with principles and expectations to interpret social reality (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Rather than viewing institutional logics as separate entities—such as corporations, markets/consumers, bureaucracies, families, and communities (Thornton et al., 2012)—we propose DEI as a unifying logic that guides behaviors in creating a more inclusive and equitable global society between developed and developing countries, considering the resource challenges faced by the latter. This approach addresses the inequality in how resource-rich actors tackle environmental challenges in developing countries and provides epistemological guidance on how MNCs and funders from developed countries can collaborate with local actors to foster planetary sustainability (cf. Alvehus & Hallonsten, 2022; Hampel et al., 2017).

With this perspective in mind, Figure 4.1 presents a DEI logic that advocates for inclusive partnerships between key actors from developed and developing countries. It aims to address societal grand challenges related to the equitable inclusion of both exploited natural environments and humanity in developing countries by the economic development of MNCs from developed nations. Environmental inclusion requires key actors (e.g., funding bodies and MNCs) from developed countries, as well as local actors (e.g., local governments, environmental scientists/entrepreneurs, and recycling companies) in developing countries to improve the local geographical infrastructure to protect their natural environment. For example, developing countries need a society-wide infrastructural redesign to improve the total waste management system, focusing on how to reduce environmental pollution from the way waste is segregated, collected, transported, and recycled for reuse. Inclusion of local actors from developing countries in MNCs' decision-making processes involves considering their lack of socioeconomic resources and technological know-how to mitigate local environmental pollution, as well as understanding different cultural norms to effectively transfer knowledge and new skills. The framework also emphasizes the importance of geopolitical diversity, establishing an equitable foundation created by developed countries to help developing countries

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enhance their resources to address environmental issues, considering how much developed countries extract resources from developing nations for their own economic benefit. Overall, we advocate for significantly more business policies, practices, and research from a DEI logic to unpack the complexities of environmental and human inclusion at the intersection of developed and developing countries, facilitated by the more resourceful actors from developed nations. To showcase one example, our case study based on the institutional work lens explores the purposive actions taken by managers from L'Occitane and a local environmental entrepreneur (Upcycle by Fuze Ecoteer) in Malaysia to transform institutional logic from an profit centric logic to a humanity and environment-centric logic (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) from a DEI lens.

This qualitative study first reports on macro-global issues that require a more inclusive decision-making process from developed countries to address waste pollution and poverty in developing countries. Second, as institutional partners, we demonstrate how L'Occitane and Upcycle by Fuze Ecoteer implement inclusive societal practices to address both environmental and humanity needs in Malaysia. Notably, over 75% of the plastic waste found in the oceans is estimated to have originated from the emerging economies of the Global South due to inadequate waste management at the societal level (Meijer et al., 2021). In this context, we report findings that have global implications for reducing ocean waste.

STARTING WITH CORPORATE PURPOSE AND SUSTAINABILITY MANAGERS

World natural resources often concentrate "too much power in the hands of a few, while disenfranchising the many" (Tourish, 2024, p. 387). Now more than ever, the world needs corporate repurposing to restore the world's natural environment (George et al., 2023). Amid pressing societal grand challenges on humanity and the environment, business research, policies, and practices urgently need a revamp of corporate purposing.

This shift is from neoliberal corporations and profit-focused business leaders to duty-based, inclusive leaders whose personas are centered on caring for humanity and the environment at the forefront of the corporate agenda (Fujimoto et al., 2024; George et al., 2023). The World Economic Forum (2023) has advocated this transition for corporations to be catalysts for societal change. In addition to the corporate repurposing framework, impactful research on the "just right" role of the sustainability manager has identified that it reaches its optimal potential when he or she has the discretion to collaborate with internal and external stakeholders by introducing structural overlays to co-create a sustainable future (Sandhu & Kulik, 2018). Over the past two years, the first author, funded by the Sumitomo Foundation, has interviewed sustainability-related managers of MNCs, as well as

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entrepreneurs and/or consultants from environmental science backgrounds in Malaysia, identifying the role of MNCs' extended producer responsibility. In collaboration with an environmental entrepreneur for this study, we first report alarming discontent shared by local informants regarding contextual inequity between developed and developing countries in tackling SDGs or environmental, social, and governance. Secondly, we report one exemplary case from the collaboration between L'Occitane and Upcycle.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Waste management issues, globally faced, are dynamic across different regions and stages of countries' development. They are challenging even for local councils, let alone on a national level. Although previous data have shown that countries such as Malaysia have been reported to be one of the biggest contributors to ocean-bound plastic, our informants strongly contested such claims. Notably, World Wildlife Fund (2020) urged a stronger extended producer responsibility scheme (i.e., the responsibility of corporations that manufacture products) to counteract such misinformation that was taken out of context. The World Economic Forum (2023) similarly asserted that MNCs have an enormous responsibility for cleaning up the environment and simultaneously ensuring societal justice for the massive plastic consumption and waste generated by their products in all countries. In this context, we report key findings that promotes DEI logic for addressing SDGs based on input from local informants in Malaysia.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research is perfect for obtaining an emic view of phenomena, helping to overcome the conventional view with its inadequate coverage by mainstream social scientific approaches, often based on a Western cultural lens (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). From a large qualitative study on MNCs' extended producer responsibility, we have selected key findings that provide an emic view of how inclusion and exclusion have been reported by key informants ($N = 6$) who are well-informed and function at a high level of decision-making in government and corporate policies. These informants are advisors to governments and corporations, and include environmental scientists, the local recycling association leader, and independent board members of MNCs and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). We interviewed them independently at locations most convenient for them, including two cafés, one residence, and two sessions via Zoom.

Data collection and analysis were conducted iteratively (Locke et al., 2022). We emphasized local perspectives by focusing on the experiences of those

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actively addressing waste issues in Malaysia and incorporating their viewpoints on how corporations have responded to waste management in their specific contexts. Our approach involved iterative thematic coding, alternating between identifying broad themes and examining finer details, with particular attention to how informants described addressing waste issues and who was responsible. For this book chapter, we have extracted powerful quotes that are directly relevant to establishing the need for a DEI logic by MNCs and funders from developed countries (Patton, 2002).

The findings begin with global concerns about inequity between developing and developed countries. Within this context, we provide a snapshot of an exemplary local collaboration between L'Occitane and Upcycle to address humanity and environmental issues in Malaysia. By presenting these key findings as global and local cases to broaden the DEI scope for SDGs, we argue that the DEI societal logic for SDGs is critical in accelerating collective efforts to address humanitarian and environmental challenges in developing countries. In these regions, environmental damage is more acutely felt and visible, with global implications.

THE GLOBAL NEXUS OF DEI AND SDGS

We discovered discontent among key actors regarding views of inequitable global value chains. They shared similar struggles related to the inequitable perspectives of global key decision-makers. One informant mentioned that while there are a lot of funds available, the problem is that many of these funds have very high requirements, which are based on the perspectives of developed countries rather than those of developing countries. The informant mentioned:

> For example, if Malaysia were to start a new development for waste management, we would definitely lack the modern infrastructure and the culture of recycling, so we would actually need a huge investment. However, the WWF doesn't have funds, the local government doesn't have funds, and the federal government of Malaysia doesn't have funds either. Therefore, we have to rely on bigger economies like Japan or China, and, based on geopolitics, America, as a lot of these funds coming in, especially with that very high glass ceiling, are essentially prohibitive. If Malaysia wants access to a very high-level fund, we would need to aim for something like a 70% waste reduction by 2050 or a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions. But the reality is that, as Malaysians, it is quite difficult for us to achieve this because we lack the proper infrastructure; therefore, we are naturally rejected from accessing this fund. What we are trying to say is that we need a more inclusive framework that focuses more on equity, understanding, and empathy, because every single region has very different geopolitical, socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental differences, and faces unique challenges.

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So, the argument supports the DEI logic. DEI logic by global funders provides a stepping stone for developing countries to enhance their resources and level the playing field with developed countries, thereby addressing their pressing environmental challenges. A notable piece of information shared by another informant concerned the "many circles of responsibilities" between developed and developing countries regarding waste management at the global level. The representative from the plastic recycling company shared the disappointing decision made by Compagnie Maritime d'Affrètement (CMA) (the world's third-largest container shipping line and MNC) on the recent ban of plastic scrap trans-boundary movements from Europe to overseas.

> The world is facing a significant issue of imbalance. I explained that the circular economy isn't just one loop—it's made up of many interconnected loops. Why? There's a loop for responsibility, another for costs, and so on. For example, everyone praises CMA, saying, "Your ESG practices are excellent; you're contributing to environmental protection," and so forth. But Europe has an excess of plastic waste, while factories in Southeast Asia are shutting down due to lack of supply. Right now, our voice is small. It's not just a national or individual issue; it's international and regional too. Countries need to harmonize their standards because trade crosses borders.

Another local informant well experienced with MNC practices said:

> I find that this is totally unfair. You know and you have been practicing this [in their home countries] for 20 years. And when you come to Malaysia, why are you not bringing the same practice here? So, for humanity, for the climate, for the environment, your business practices have to be the same all over the world. [XYZ] makes 5 billion USD in revenue in Malaysia and is only spending less than 1% of it on CSR activities in Malaysia. Every corporation is the same! Can you imagine? It is totally unacceptable.

Furthermore, one of the informants (environmental entrepreneur) has emphasized the role of corporations in Malaysia:

> Corporates and MNCs may find it challenging to pursue sustainable pathways due to the lack of infrastructure in developing countries. They may have the war chest too but often lack the knowledge or ability to identify the right collaborators to deal with the complexity of endemic domestic issues. NGOs, conservationists, and social enterprises find it difficult to tackle sustainable gaps within developing countries and regions due to the lack of government funding; in comparison to some multinational corporates. But it is also about corporate culture in the end, if the focus is still on shareholder priority, money will perpetually be funnelled away from R&D, QC, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and focused only on revenue growth, which leads to short term revenue inflation. This will impact MNCs across long-term, and the cascading effects of it can be seen already in cases like Boeing and Red Lobster.

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The entrepreneurs with backgrounds in environmental science education emphasized the need for equity, advocating for environmental scientists to have the same platform as corporate decision-makers to promote more environmentally centric decisions for sustainable development. One of the environmental entrepreneurs summarized this collective sentiment:

> We are the bridge between science and corporations. What we are trying to do now is provide scientists and social entrepreneurs with a platform in high-level workshops and conferences. I have attended many events on topics like the blue economy, climate change, and smart cities, yet not a single one invited a professor or expert in the field to speak. Instead, they only invite CEOs, who often comment on the high costs or lack of funds to support these projects. At 32 years old, I find myself being one of the only ones with a conservation or science backgrounds, and would have to fight for hope and innovation rather than the doom and gloom which is usually promoted at this workshop. It's frustrating to be the one of the only people in the room with the knowledge of how to move forward, but no one takes you seriously initially due to my age and as a social enterprise in a room full of directors, CEOs and VIPs which majority do not have backgrounds or have the knowledge on moving forward. Secondly, have any of those individuals actually invited us to speak and explain what climate change is, what the problems are, and what the solutions could be? As a scientist, as I've said, we collect the data and have the solutions; we are just waiting for someone to approach us. What I have realized is that it's hard to find a CEO who actually listens and tries to understand.

Other informants also emphasized that MNCs prioritizing shareholder interests is a major roadblock to impactful and meaningful CSR projects, as it often contradicts equity principles. Unfortunately, in developing countries, MNCs and banks are often only organizations with financial capacity to drive sustainable projects that benefit vulnerable communities and protect the environment. Environmental entrepreneurs further mentioned:

> Vulnerable communities, particularly in developing countries, often struggle with new economic trends like AI, IoT, and sustainability due to limited access to education and technical skills. This leads to a multi-faceted poverty issue, as seen in Pulau Perhentian, where the community once thrived on ecotourism but was hit hard by COVID-19. While many Malaysians have adapted with remote skills, these isolated or rural communities have not. Moreover, with new initiatives like the blue economy, these communities might remain excluded from both discussions and economic benefits. Effective conservation efforts, however, require these communities to be engaged as stewards of their environments.

> I am always a huge advocate for environmental education to promote awareness and proper understanding. It should not seem like only the rich can

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practice sustainability. Just provide the facilities in every community so that people can actually practice living sustainably. If you expect people to separate waste at the source but don't provide them with sufficient bins and facilities, then there's really no point in expecting them to do that.

The aforementioned quotes underscore the significant need for a global DEI logic led by resourceful actors to ensure an equitable transfer of funds and knowledge between developed and developing countries, involving environmental entrepreneurs who can advocate for the marginalized natural environment. This effort includes establishing fair baselines that strengthen underdeveloped local infrastructure, socio-economic factors, and technological development, all with cultural sensitivity. In other words, resourceful decision-makers must be mindful of the interconnectedness and interdependence of economic, social, and environmental factors that span across both resourceful and resourceless actors to protect our planetary environment. This initiative must be spearheaded by resourceful players committed to DEI logic.

THE LOCAL NEXUS OF DEI AND SDGS

Given the global context of inequity in bridging the gap between the resources of developed and developing countries to address natural environmental problems in developing countries, we showcase how a corporation (L'Occitane) and an environmental entrepreneur (Upcycle by Fuze Ecoteer) collaboratively address environmental and humanitarian needs of a developing country through a recycling project in Malaysia. Fuze Ecoteer—a social enterprise that uses ecotourism as a tool to fund conservation projects—has addressed marine issues. The goal of Fuze Ecoteer has always been to develop environmental stewardship in local communities, which includes the Perhentian Eco Education Project tied to the local schools adopting the World Wildlife Fund Eco Club. Not only does it teach school kids about coral health, but it also educates them about turtle identification and rapid response teams, addressing marine emergencies (e.g., turtle stranding, ghost net removals) through the Perhentian Turtle Project and Perhentian Marine Research Station. Upcycle by Fuze Ecoteer was established in 2022 to address waste issues entering the Kayu Ara River through the Precious Plastic and river clean-up initiative, in collaboration with the PPR (i.e., Projek Perumahan Rakyat, meaning "People's Housing Project"—a government initiative to provide affordable housing to lower-income citizens to improve their living conditions).

The relationship between L'Occitane and the second author from Upcycle by Fuze Ecoteer began with a CSR inquiry for a river clean-up at PPR Lembah Subang, where 50 staff members collectively removed

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approximately 400 kg of trash from the river and participated in the Upcycled Precious Plastic workshop. This initial collaboration led to a partnership to manage L'Occitane's plastic waste collected monthly, amounting to approximately 5 tons from July to August 2024. The waste is repurposed through L'Occitane's "Little Big Things" program to create 3,000 recycled plastic medals for their "Vision Run" hosted in Penang in 2024. Managing plastic waste directly with L'Occitane has provided a win-win solution for both parties by addressing source separation issues, generating wealth, creating new job opportunities—expanding part-time positions from 2 to 10—for the Lembah Subang community, and providing transparent pathways to divert waste and carbon dioxide from landfills.

We showcase the partnership between L'Occitane and Upcycle as an example of exemplary DEI logic for humanity and the environment. This case specifically demonstrates how a corporation (L'Occitane), marginalized women from low-income communities, and Upcycle (environmental entrepreneurs) collaborate in various roles to tackle the waste problem in Malaysia. This project is noteworthy as it illustrates corporate purpose in action, emphasizing the inclusion of humanity and the environment in a developing country. It fosters the well-being of vulnerable communities while actively engaging in waste reduction. These communities play a crucial role in producing recycled products, thereby contributing to both their livelihoods and waste reduction. Upcycle effectively coordinates and manages these efforts.

L'Occitane, certified as a B Corp and originally from France, brings a corporate culture of societal-wide sustainability to Malaysia. By openly declaring their respect for humanity and the environment in their shop windows, L'Occitane has established waste collection booths that accept even competitors' waste (i.e., used beauty and cosmetic products). This initiative creates pathways for proper recycling through Icycle, a local societal-wide recycling company, and Upcycle. By carefully selecting local recycling companies that align with their vision for societal-wide recycling, L'Occitane ensures store-wide recycling initiatives across all their shops. This project also addresses the fundamental needs of vulnerable communities by creating jobs, thereby aligning with their commitment to respecting humanity. This community project is located next to the Kayu Ara River, which flows into the Klang River—identified as the top contributor to ocean-bound plastic worldwide (Meijer et al., 2021). One of the many waste collection points is at PPR Lembah Subang, notorious for being the dirtiest PPR in Malaysia (Sahami, 2023). The PPR faces systemic issues, such as a lack of trash chutes and non-functioning lifts, leading to older residents throwing trash out of windows. To address these challenges, this project was established in 2022, aiming not only to tackle waste management through the precious plastic model but also to provide job opportunities for local communities in sustainability, fostering environmental stewardship within these PPRs.

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Despite the significant monetary investment, L'Occitane is committed to recycling used products into items like coasters and keychains, which are then sold to other corporations, such as major hotel chains, as corporate gifts.

Although the number of community members working on this project is only five full-time and ten part-time staff due to a lack of finances to upscale, this case provides an example of societal-level DEI logic that, with monetary funds and social outreach, has the potential for exponential growth in reducing human and environmental misery in society. Notably, L'Occitane, originating from a developed country, has reached out to address the needs of vulnerable communities and environmental conditions in a developing country. It promotes job creation for vulnerable communities, helping them step into the mainstream market through L'Occitane, and actively involves them in the inclusive decision-making process regarding the manufacturing process. For example, one of the women has been empowered to expand her stakeholder management skills, evolving from a humble restaurant cook. Upcycle supported and developed her business capacity, and she is now working on securing sales and assisting in managing CSR events and corporate workshops. We have also witnessed organic and holistic growth through an informal waste collection system, where children from the PPR community collect waste for cash. This income helps them meet fundamental educational needs, such as buying school books and shoes. This corporate inclusive environmental activity demonstrates the corporation's economic-social-environmental cycle of community development by addressing waste problems, aligning with the core purpose of the corporation for humanity and the environment (c.f., Fujimoto et al., 2022).

Key DEI logic in practice learned from this collaboration of L'Occitane and Upcycle are as follows:

- Similar goals for sustainable waste management at the societal level, not just for corporations but for society, addressing both humanity and the environment. The common purpose is to develop communities by bridging the equity gap through providing technical knowledge and job opportunities within sustainability for vulnerable communities, and at the same time, reducing waste that pollutes rivers and oceans.
- Interdependency and connectivity exist not only between corporations and communities but also with all ecosystems (i.e., environment, humanity, and economies), igniting mutual recognition of each other's needs.
- The MNC provides the necessary cash flow and waste materials, while environmental entrepreneurs or social enterprises (e.g., Upcycle) provides the local knowledge and means to include the environment and humanity as part of their business model.

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CONCLUSION

We have developed an evidence-based proposal for a DEI logic that can be applied by resourceful actors from developed countries. We believe that global policymakers and corporate leaders must adopt a DEI logic to effectively address planetary challenges. This approach should leverage the unique strengths of local conditions for economic development while prioritizing sustainable development by tackling the monetary resource scarcity in developing countries, thereby addressing their environmental pollution. To achieve this, it is crucial to confront and address global inequities, aiding in the planet's recovery from the root causes of climate change and human inequality—namely, profit-driven motives, the prioritization of shareholders, and the economic greed of actors in developed countries, which continue to harm the natural environment at an unprecedented pace (Posner, 2019)

Ultimately, we call on those with greater power and resources to embrace DEI logic, ensuring that developing countries have access to the necessary funds and knowledge to reduce environmental pollution. This requires establishing equitable baselines by improving local infrastructure and addressing power imbalances within the global geopolitical landscape. It involves providing technology and strengthening the socio-economic capacity of those committed to addressing environmental pollution, such as environmental entrepreneurs and scientists. The purpose is to reduce environmental harm, such as ocean pollution from waste originating in developing countries, and to strengthen the development of marginalized communities. Moreover, it is crucial to acknowledge the interconnectedness of economic, social, and environmental factors at the intersection of developed and developing countries to combat the degradation of both the natural environment and humanity on a global scale.

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