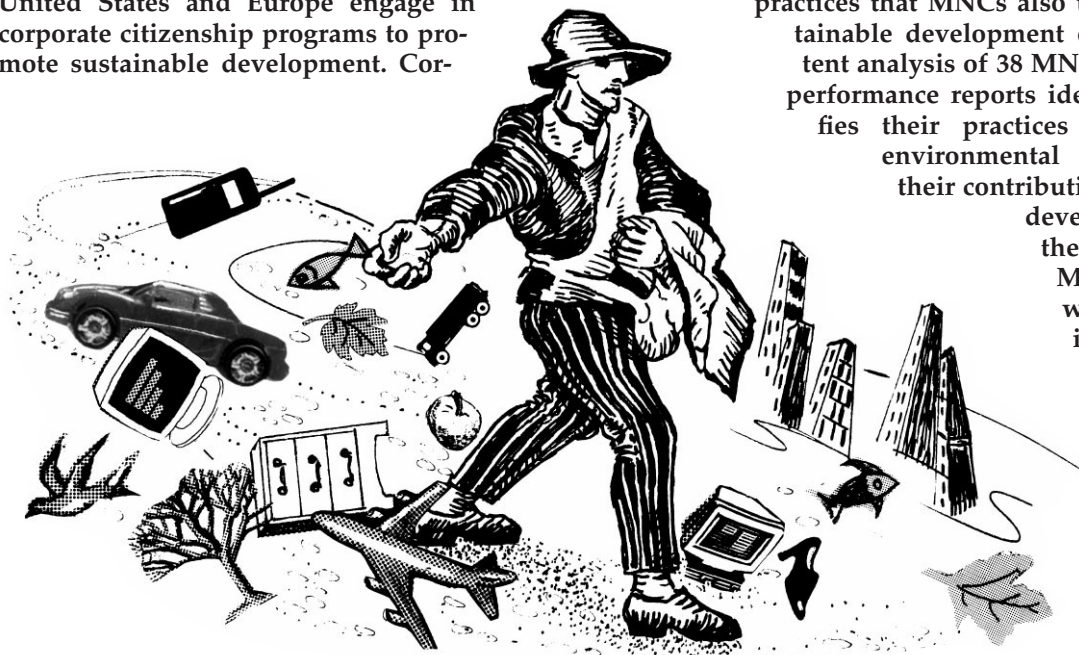


Environmental Citizenship in Multinational Corporations: Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development

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Over the past decade the concept of sustainable development has expanded to include the simultaneous consideration of economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity in business planning and decision-making. Many multinational enterprises based in the United States and Europe engage in corporate citizenship programs to promote sustainable development. Cor-

porate citizenship programs are often defined narrowly, however, as philanthropy or external relationships with stakeholders to address social problems. As important as these activities are, they do not adequately define the broad range of substantive internal environmental management practices that MNCs also use to pursue sustainable development objectives. A content analysis of 38 MNCs' environmental performance reports identifies and classifies their practices in the field of environmental citizenship and their contributions to sustainable development, assesses the means by which MNCs collaborate with stakeholders in solving environmental problems, and examines the factors that contribute to the success of corporate environmental citizen-



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Sustainable development — a concept that has been widely adopted by international organizations, national and local governments, and businesses — calls for people and organizations to pursue their current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (WCED, 1987). Over the past decade the concept of sustainability has expanded to include the simultaneous consideration of economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity in business planning and decision-making (Schmidheiny, 1992). Many multinational corporations are creating voluntary environmental programs, often under the label of 'corporate citizenship,' that directly address public concerns about the potential environmental impacts of their plants, facilities, and operations and that actively involve stakeholders in improving local economic, environmental, and social conditions through cooperation and partnership. Corporate citizenship is especially important in communities around the world where environmental conditions are hazardous and where regulatory protection may not be effective.

In the past, environmental disagreements between corporations and environmental interest groups were addressed through long, drawn-out adversarial conflicts in the news media, open-ended lengthy administrative processes in government agencies, or costly litigation. (Piasecki and Asmus, 1990). But understanding better how and why corporations adopt environmental citizenship programs, and the types of actions they pursue, can help environmental interest groups, governments, and businesses work more effectively toward achieving sustainable development goals. Emerging corporate citizenship practices offer new and more effective ways of solving and preventing environmental problems through collaboration and partnerships that benefit both businesses and the communities in which they operate.

Corporate citizenship programs are often defined narrowly as philanthropy or external relationships with stakeholders to address social problems (Miller, 1998). Corporate environmental citizenship activities often include providing incentives for employees to work with community groups on natural resource conservation and protection projects and making donations and gifts for environmental programs. Some companies assess the quality of local environmental conditions and local environmental sustainability and carrying capacity, contribute to environmental infrastructure development or improvement, sponsor education and training programs for teachers on environmental issues, fund community-initiated environmental initiatives, and create formal stakeholder relationships with environmental interest groups, non-profit organizations, and local governments to prevent or solve crucial environmental problems.

As important as these external activities are, they do not adequately or sufficiently define the broad range of substantive environmental management practices that MNCs use to mitigate or eliminate environmental hazards or improve community environmental conditions. Indeed, these external relationships may be far less important for sustainable development than the voluntary internal management practices that corporations adopt to prevent pollution at its source. Much of what companies do within their plants or facilities directly impacts environmental conditions in the localities in which they operate. The adoption and expansion of internal proactive environmental management practices are important forms of corporate citizenship that contribute to sustainable development. Yet, relatively little information has been systematically gathered on the types, characteristics, scope, and impacts of environmental management practices in the context of corporate citizenship and sustainable development.

This article explores the concept of corporate environmental citizenship in a broader context, identifies and classifies the practices of multinational corporations in the field of environmental citizenship and their contributions to sustainable development, assesses the means by which MNCs collaborate with stakeholders in solving environmental problems, and examines the factors that contribute to the success of corporate environmental citizenship for sustainable development. Information was drawn from a content analysis of a sample of MNC environmental performance reports and from secondary sources on the effectiveness of corporate environmental citizenship programs.

Many MNCs now publish their environmental performance reports both in hard copy and on the Internet. From a content analysis of the environmental performance reports of 38 multinational corporations (see Table 1) we sought information about four questions: (1) are MNCs linking their environmental citizenship programs to concepts and principles of sustainable development? (2) how are corporations pursuing environmental citizenship? (3) how do corporate environmental citizenship and social responsibility activities contribute to sustainable development?, and (4) what factors contribute to the success of environmental citizenship practices in MNCs?

This review of corporate environmental performance reports was not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive, or to measure quantitatively environmental citizenship activities. Rather the review sought to illustrate the diversity and scope of MNCs' citizenship programs related to sustainable development. We chose 38 companies from the more than 200 listed on the environmental reporting web site of the Center for Environmental Informatics in England to obtain a sample of MNCs with more than \$1 billion in sales across industries and size groups.

This sample of companies is significant in the sense

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