

Institutional pressures and accountability processes in pursuit of sustainable development goals: Insights from Ghanaian indigenous oil companies

Lexis Alexander Tetteh¹  | Cletus Agyenim-Boateng² | Samuel Nana Yaw Simpson²

¹Department of Accounting, Faculty of Accounting and Finance, University of Professional Studies, Accra, Ghana

²Department of Accounting, Business School, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana

Correspondence

Lexis Alexander Tetteh, Department of Accounting, Faculty of Accounting and Finance, University of Professional Studies, Accra, Ghana.

Email: tetteh.lexis@upsamail.edu.gh

Abstract

This paper aims at exploring the institutional pressures and accountability processes in pursuit of sustainable development goals (SDGs) in indigenous oil companies in Ghana. Applying a qualitative research strategy, semi-structured interviews with 20 company managers and other industry stakeholders were used to collect in-depth and rich empirical data. In pursuit of the SDG agenda, the indigenous oil companies appear to be sensitive to both internal and external stakeholder pressure. However, the coercive pressures from regulators did not always result in the companies implementing actual change. Instead, coercive pressures from non-governmental actors have taken on the role of 'regulator' of organisational practices. Also, internal forces of change were mainly the foreign partner's audit pressure and management commitment to enhance company reputation. Beyond the institutional pressures to incorporate SDGs into business practices, the finding adds fresh perspectives to the three logical steps of SDG accountability processes used by the companies to track their contribution to SDG implementation and reporting, namely: data collection, SDG performance measurement, and communication of SDG outcomes. Finally, the study discovers that the companies are making little progress towards the achievement of the SDGs because of financial limitations, rigid organisational environments that prevent change, and a lack of a standardised institutional framework. The findings suggest that in order for an organisation to gain legitimacy, its SDG agenda must incorporate the concerns of non-governmental actors and local communities into its corporate decision-making. Failure to meet the needs of these essential stakeholders may jeopardise the legitimacy of organisation which will threaten its survival.

KEYWORDS

accountability, institutional pressures, non-governmental actors, SDGs, sustainable development

1 | INTRODUCTION

The United Nations member states reached an agreement in 2015 to adopt the new 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which succeeded the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs are overarching goals with targets that all countries, as part of their

contribution to the Agenda 2030, need to achieve. According to the suggestions made by the Global Reporting Initiative (2016), the primary reasons for adopting the SDGs are to combat inequality, find solutions to poverty, and ensure inclusive development for all.

The adoption of SDG in 2015 had sparked public and private institutional adjustments. These reforms affect corporate transparency,

especially on sustainable development (Erin et al., 2022; Martínez-Ferrero & García-Meca, 2020). The adoption underlined nations' worries about developing the environment in a way that is good for all people. In recent years, the oil and gas (O&G) industry has been called to also consider its involvement in broader ecological concerns (Narimissa et al., 2020).

Despite being a driving force behind global economic growth, the O&G industry is known for endangering the environment, destroying habitats, and having a negative impact on the livelihood of communities near operation sites of these companies. A growing interest in sustainability issues of these companies has been sparked by their disruption of environment and the realisation that petroleum is a non-renewable energy source (George et al., 2016). For instance, a study conducted by Verdantix (2014) discovered that O&G companies are investing more money in sustainability-related activities like environmental restoration and industrial energy management. However, such expenditures, according to Lozanova (2014), do not represent a concerted effort to embrace sustainability because the practices do not address broader ecological concerns, indicating a clear lack of accountability in pursuit of such reforms. Further, in recent years, O&G companies have been criticised for allegedly engaging in 'green washing' in their corporate reports and marketing efforts (George et al., 2016), and their sustainability practices and policies have been questioned. For instance, these companies promote the advantages of new energy sources while concealing the hidden trade-off by drilling for oil in unexplored areas and destroying natural habitats and biodiversity (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020).

Other studies, however, have found that some of the corporate entities in the O&G industry are demonstrating their commitment to sustainable development in their business development strategies by involving all stakeholders in the value creation process (see, e.g., Ite, 2018; Mojarad et al., 2018; Gerged & Almontaser, 2021). Consequently, the recent pressure from stakeholders to incorporate sustainable development into national agendas and business strategies, as well as the academic debate about the necessity of transforming our planet by leaving no one behind, have sparked an interest in studying SDG implementation and reporting (García-Meca & Ferrero, 2021). In order to substantiate this assertion, Caiado et al. (2018), Mio et al. (2020), and Bennich et al. (2020) reviewed scholarly articles and offered proof of a lack of comprehensive information on how organisations interact with the SDGs.

For instance, existing academic and policy researches have focused on the role of global and national governance in attaining the SDGs (McKeon, 2017), with contributions on national projects (see Abhayawansa et al., 2021; Michel, 2016; Tetteh et al., 2023). Some studies have also identified how government accountability systems are crucial to the national implementation of the SDGs (Abhayawansa et al., 2021; Lauwo et al., 2022; Michel, 2016). However, empirical study on corporate business integration and reporting of SDG activities and their contribution to attaining the SDGs has just recently appeared in accounting literature (Erin et al., 2022; García-Meca & Ferrero, 2021; Ite, 2018; Lu et al., 2021).

Furthermore, existing research suggests that incorporating SDGs into business operational models and disclosing the practices in corporate reports is inadequate (Erin et al., 2022; Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2022; Ite, 2018; Mojarad et al., 2018; PwC, 2019). Likewise, various interest groups, such as civil society organisations (CSOs), regulators, international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and environmentalists have all advocated for corporate organisations to identify major SDG targets, integrate them into their business models, and report on their success and challenges (Bebbington & Unerman, 2018; Erin et al., 2022).

Also, Erin et al. (2022) and Heras-Saizarbitoria et al. (2022) have advocated for paying attention to the institutional and stakeholders' pressures that inspire corporate entities to commit to SDGs implementation and reporting. To respond to the calls from Erin et al. (2022) and Heras-Saizarbitoria et al. (2022), this paper employs qualitative technique to unravel the viewpoints of the major stakeholders. Therefore, this paper explores the institutional and stakeholders' pressures that drive O&G firms to commit to SDG implementation and reporting and the accountability processes put in place to track the efforts of companies to attaining the SDGs. The paper focuses on Indigenous Oil Companies (IOCs) in Ghana. The study's theoretical lens combines the Institutional Theory and Stakeholder Theory.

Companies' actions and inactions towards SDG implementation and reporting cannot be fully explained through the three mechanisms of coercive pressures, mimetic processes, and normative pressures (Eriksson & Lundberg, 2022; Herold, 2018). The role of different institutional contexts (or institutional complexity) in determining how companies respond to institutional pressures for SDG practises and reporting necessitates an understanding of the stakeholders who exert pressure on the IOCs to comply with generally accepted SDG practices and whose interests the management of the IOCs tends to serve. These relationship dynamics represent not only a daily battle between the management of the company and stakeholders outside the company, but also a field of struggles between actors within the organisational field that connect industry-level pressures and firm-level actions. Thus, our understanding of what influences the IOCs management choice of SDG practises, as well as the extent to which these practises are implemented and reported is accordingly expanded by the linking of stakeholder theory and institutional theory in this study.

The IOCs were selected as the preferred research setting because Mojarad et al. (2018) report that most local oil corporations fail to implement the SDGs. While a number of multinational O&G companies may have adopted integrated thinking as a strategy to connect their business models to the economic, social, and environmental priorities of their stakeholders in order to create long-term value for all those affected by their operations (Arena, Azzone, Ratti, Urban, & Vecchi, 2023), local oil companies are typically not subject to the same practices and reporting requirements. Furthermore, while both multinational and local O&G companies face regulated financial reporting pressure, their voluntary environmental, social, and governance practices differ due weak enforcement of national regulations in

developing (Suleman & Zaato, 2021) or a lack of pressures from salient stakeholders.

In addition, little is known about the precise enabling and constraining factors of these local oil companies' SDG implementation, as well as the accountability mechanisms put in place to track the progress being made towards achieving the SDGs. However, for multinational oil companies, there is a wealth of research available (see, e.g., Abdalla & Siti Nabiha, 2015; Amodu, 2020; Abdul, 2020; Arena et al., 2023).

Finally, the most recent research on the subject matter used a quantitative approach to execute the study (see Erin et al., 2022). However, research based on mathematical robotism do not give the respondents the opportunity to explain the rationale behind their practices and why certain aspects of SDG integration and reporting were taken for granted. Thus, the level of interest currently observed, coupled with the calls from International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) for SDG implementation (IFAC, 2017) and the International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC) for integrated thinking and reporting to create long-term value for all stakeholders (Adams et al., 2020; Bernardi & Stark, 2018), present a superb opportunity to investigate the implementation and reporting of SDGs in IOCs to respond to these calls and to also offer a novel contribution in the context of IOCs' contribution to the realisation of the SDGs by addressing the following research questions:

RQ1. What factors primarily influence the IOCs' commitment to SDGs implementation?

RQ2. Which stakeholders are perceived by the managements of the IOCs to be exerting the most pressure on the IOCs to commit to SDG practices, and how do the IOCs respond to such pressures?

RQ3. What accountability processes are used to track an IOC's progress on contributing to the SDGs?

RQ4. What obstacles prevent IOCs from implementing and reporting SDG activities?

Answers to these questions provide researchers and policymakers with a better understanding of the actual motivations that drive organisations to engage in SDG practices that enable them to predict organisations' behaviour with regard to SDG implementation and reporting (Abhayawansa et al., 2021; Erin et al., 2022; Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2022). Furthermore, identifying the most salient stakeholders in a company's commitment to the SDGs, as well as the processes for tracking that commitment, would help researchers, policymakers, managers, and other stakeholder groups develop strategies that will effectively incentivise firms to commit to the SDG agenda (Lauwo et al., 2022). Also, answers to the research questions adds to the accounting literature in the field of sustainability accounting, as well as how SDG issues are integrated into corporate entities' business models and sustainability reports. Finally, this study shows how stakeholder theory can be used in conjunction with institutional theory to identify and investigate the respective roles of stakeholders and actors, as well as their level of influence in the pursuit of SDG practices and reporting.

In order to address these research questions, this study adopted the exploratory qualitative approach by employing the interpretivist paradigm to extend our knowledge in SDG implementation and reporting of IOCs in Ghana. More importantly, this study is a response to the calls for more engagement in SDG issues through qualitative lens (Abdalla & Siti-Nabiha, 2015; Erin et al., 2022; Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2022; Ismael & Zakaria, 2019).

This study was conducted in Ghana because, since 2016, all of the country's presidents have served as co-chairs of SDG Advocates as a result of institutional and regulatory reforms they implemented (Acheampong et al., 2019; Tetteh et al., 2023). In addition, Ghana performed best among 34 African countries in reaching SDGs according to a poll (Coulibaly et al., 2018). Further, as part of localising the SDGs, Ghana prepares an SDG Budget Baseline Report. This report includes frameworks to align national budget priorities with SDG goals. The SDGs Budget Report provides metrics that the government and its partners can use to measure progress on the various goals versus investments made over the years (Ghana's 2022 Voluntary National Review Process).

The rest of the paper is organised as follows: Section 2 sets out the literature review. Section 3 presents the methodology. Section 4 and 5, respectively, present and discuss the findings. The conclusions, contributions and directions for future research are discussed in Section 6.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Institutional and stakeholder pressures to engage in and report on SDG practices

Many researches, especially the positivists have studied the factors that contribute to strong commitment to social and environmental practices by companies (Erin et al., 2022; García-Meca & Ferrero, 2021). According to these studies, companies engage in sustainable development practices for many reasons. Some of which are maintaining legitimacy pressure (by adhering to rules, norms, and values), meeting stakeholder expectations, boosting competitiveness and long-term revenues, and encouraging ecological responsibility. These motivations for sustainable development practices dominate the literature because the organisations care about their social responsibilities and values and meeting stakeholder expectations (Deegan & Islam, 2014). The next three subsections will discuss how the interconnections between institutional theory, stakeholder theory and regulatory frameworks informed the development of our conceptual framework for the study.

2.1.1 | Institutional theory

Localisation of global reforms has been explained in the existing literature using Institutional Theory. According to Chen and Roberts (2010), the theory is ideal for exploring a common business practice



used by similar organisations. This study uses this theory to examine the institutional pressures that drive local oil companies in Ghana to integrate SDGs into their business models, as well as the accountability processes used to track the progress of companies on contributing to the SDG realisation.

Fundamentally, Institutional Theory looks into how external pressures can lead businesses to adopt particular organisational practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). According to institutional scholars, the institutions that surround a company have a significant impact on how it behaves. These institutions include the cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative structure that give social behaviour stability and a collective meaning (Scott, 2013). In other words, Institutional Theory is founded on the notion that social interactions and institutional pressures have an impact on how organisational actions or practices are developed (North, 1990). This study makes the case that once a social fact is institutionalised, it gives businesses actionable templates that lead to unified or homogeneous responses and thus more likely to be accepted. For instance, companies adopt SDG logic in response to external pressures to participate in and report on SDG information. When a company implements and communicates SDG practices to relevant stakeholders, the SDG logic becomes part of the organisation's meaning system.

The primary justification for adopting the logic and incorporating it into the business model and reporting is to gain or maintain legitimacy (Erin et al., 2022). According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), the adoption of logic or institutional practices is accomplished through three main isomorphic mechanisms: coercive pressures, mimetic processes, and normative pressures.

The first type is coercive isomorphism. This occurs when local oil companies follow formal and informal influences from regulatory authorities or those perceived to be powerful/salient stakeholders (Scott, 2013). Governmental pressure is an example of coercive isomorphism. Governments are typically legitimate and powerful stakeholders with the ability to exert influence through legislation, regulation, and policies (Erin & Asiriwa, 2019; North, 1990).

The second type is mimetic isomorphism. It happens when local oil companies are unsure what to do and end up mimicking successful industry players (Sancha et al., 2015). The third type is normative isomorphism. Normative isomorphism is defined as pressures from social institutions such as business associations, NGOs, CSOs, or the media. These organisations raise public awareness in many countries and industries around the world (Anderies et al., 2013). All these three isomorphic pressures explain how institutional pressures affect organisational behaviours and structures (Erin & Asiriwa, 2019; Scott, 2013).

In terms of SDG localisation, the Institutional Theory has been used to explain accountability for SDGs research (Abdalla & Siti Nabiha, 2015; Erin et al., 2022). Therefore, the importance of this theory in achieving the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development cannot be overemphasised. For instance, IFAC (2017) is of the view that regulatory institutions and stakeholders perceived to be powerful are primary drivers that can tackle SDG challenges within corporate organisations. In attempt to address the institutional pressures from various stakeholders within the surrounding environment, Oliver (1991) also holds similar view that the corporate entity responds to

the most powerful stakeholders to address institutional pressures. The SDGs and other social and environmental issues are addressed by organisations primarily in the pursuit of legitimacy, according to Institutional Theory (Boiral et al., 2017). This claim is valid, particularly when organisations adopt practices that are seen as rational and righteous by their stakeholders in an effort to gain their support and legitimacy. Adoption of SDGs increases the operation of organisations on social licence (Diaz-Sarachaga, 2021). This implies that when the legitimacy of an organisation is threatened, its management takes defensive measures to limit the harm by responding to powerful stakeholders. This shows that organisational responses to SDG practices and reporting will differ based on institutional pressures and priorities of managers for stakeholder claims.

The legitimacy and survival of the Ghanaian O&G industry are also threatened by institutional pressure. For instance, CSOs, especially social and environmental NGOs with strong stakeholder presence in the country, have always scrutinised and pressured the oil firms. They frequently exert pressure on them to be socially and environmentally responsible in accordance with SDG targets. This strengthens the argument that NGOs have symbolic legitimacy and power as a result of their reputation in society and the trust they have earned by promoting the common good (Deegan & Islam, 2014).

On various levels, Institutional Theory has limitations (North, 1990). More recent Institutional Theory studies acknowledge that the emphasis has shifted away from dynamics that encourage conformity in organisational behaviour and towards dynamics that promote heterogeneity, variation, and change. However, Institutional Theory is unable to offer a theoretical basis for categorising stakeholders and their level of influence and this makes it difficult to explain the roles of actors with competing interests (Herold, 2018; Kostova et al., 2008). In view of this difficulty, Stakeholder Theory must be incorporated into Institutional Theory to categorise actors or stakeholders who are salient in advancing the SDG agenda in the industry in order to examine the influences on IOCs to engage in and report on SDG practices. An overview of Stakeholder Theory and the traits used to classify stakeholders is given in the following section.

2.1.2 | Stakeholder theory

According to this theory, organisations must balance a variety of stakeholder expectations and interests that can affect or be affected by the actions of the organisation in addition to being accountable to investors and funders (Friedman & Miles, 2006; Simoni et al., 2020). Therefore, in order for an organisation to be legitimated by its stakeholders, those stakeholders must view the behaviour of the organisation as appropriate (Hrasky, 2011). The main claim of Stakeholder Theory is that the support of stakeholders is essential to the long-term survival of the company, and managing the needs, expectations, and competing interests of these stakeholders is a key responsibility of business management.

A business needs the support of its main stakeholders, including shareholders, employees, clients, and suppliers, in order to succeed,

according to Clarkson (1995). These stakeholders provide the infrastructure and legislative frameworks required for the operation of the business. The company does not view secondary stakeholders like the media and special interest groups as being crucial to its survival. Mitchell et al. (1997) developed a commonly used framework to define the salience relationships of stakeholders, which has since been widely utilised by both practitioners and researchers. They contend that stakeholder identification and salience are influenced by the stakeholder's possession of one or more of the following relationship attributes: (1) the stakeholder's power to influence the firm, (2) the legitimacy of the stakeholder's relationship with the firm, and (3) the urgency of the stakeholder's claim on the firm.

The power attribute manifests itself in numerous ways in real life. It can take the form of coercion, or so-called coercive power, which refers to the application of physical force, violence, or restraint. As opposed to normative power, which is based on symbolic resources. Utilitarian power is based on financial and material resources (Alves et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 1997).

Legitimacy, the second characteristic, pinpoints the stakeholder who requires the manager's attention; however, if this characteristic is emphasised in isolation from the power characteristic, the theory fails to convey its intended significance. Dong et al. (2014) point out that even though certain stakeholders' interactions may be accepted as legitimate, and this does not mean that they have any sway over the group as a whole. Legitimacy can also mean that a company's actions are acceptable and appropriate in relation to a set of rules, norms, principles, and definitions (Alves et al., 2014). This method may be used at various levels of analysis from an individual to a societal level (Adongo & Kim, 2018). However, this study only takes an organisational approach to the legitimacy attribute.

However, the dynamics of how interested parties interact do not only result from the recognition of power and legitimacy traits. The third characteristic, urgency, assumes that the relationships between these groups will change from a static to a dynamic form, and it suggests greater influence in these audiences' claims (Alves et al., 2014). The urgency attribute highlights the ability of stakeholders to define their level of sensibility, criticality, and pressure in order to apply pressure on company managers to pay attention to their claims (Mitchell et al., 1997; Şener et al., 2016). In addition to being socially constructed, the characteristics of power, legitimacy, and urgency that are generated in interactions between businesses and their interested parties are likely to vary and may be consciously and intentionally present in relationships between stakeholders and business management. The actions taken by the companies in regards to SDG implementation and reporting become tense and complicated as a result.

In emerging economies, there have been few studies on why corporations integrate and disclose their SDG practices, especially research that uses information from internal and external stakeholders (Abdalla & Siti Nabiha, 2015). Islam and Deegan (2008) found that multinational firms, Western consumers, NGOs, and the media encourage organisations to improve their sustainable development practices. Other scholars have also found an internal factor such as image/reputation building to influence how business organisations

execute and report on their sustainable development practices (Boiral et al., 2017; Erin et al., 2022; García-Meca & Ferrero, 2021; Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2022). Similarly, the study of Abdalla and Siti-Nabiha (2015) found senior management, foreign partner audit processes, and the companies' need to protect their reputation also exert internal pressure on companies.

Such reputational management practices are frequently linked to greenwashing (Boiral et al., 2017; Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2022). According to Bebbington and Unerman (2018), the SDGs could be used 'to camouflage business-as-usual by disguising it using SDG-related sustainability rhetoric' (p. 10). In fact, phrases like 'rainbow-washing' and 'SDG-washing' have been developed in the academic literature to describe the symbolic rather than actual commitment to the SDGs (e.g., Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2022; Mio et al., 2020).

Whatever the motivation or stakeholder influence for corporate organisations to engage in sustainable development practices and make disclosures of the key successes, the overarching rationale is to build or protect their reputation in order to generate more revenue. These various mechanisms to identify and categorise stakeholders can be viewed as a first step towards establishing a theoretical basis for investigating why the management of IOCs chooses different approaches to SDG implementation and reporting. This theory also helps to unearth which stakeholders are perceived by the managements of the IOCs to be exerting the most pressure on the IOCs to commit to SDG practices.

2.1.3 | Regulatory frameworks for legitimising SDG integration and reporting

Laws and regulations have also been found to drive companies to implement these practices more than anything else (Abdalla & Siti Nabiha, 2015; Unerman & Bennett, 2004). In developing countries such as Ghana with little institutional capacity and inadequate regulatory governance (Mzembe & Meaton, 2014; Suleman & Zaato, 2021), CSOs and NGOs take on 'regulatory' duties to urge business organisations to be accountable (Deegan & Islam, 2014). Companies in developed countries, on the other hand, may face different pressures to achieve the SDGs due to their level of economic growth, knowledge, culture, and technology (Hossain et al., 2012).

Companies may preserve stakeholder trust by being accountable and giving more information on how they address complaints (Ismaeel & Zakaria, 2019), through the use of framework such as Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), and International Integrated Reporting Framework (<IR>) (Erin et al., 2022). In order to ensure that a wider range of issues are reflected in a sustainability report of a company, the GRI framework was developed in consultation with numerous stakeholder groups from around the world. This makes the guidelines applicable to a large number of organisations, including small businesses, NGOs, large Multinational National Corporations, and public sector organisations. Many scholars believe the GRI is the most frequently used framework for reporting on SDG practices (see e.g., Erin et al., 2022; Heras-Saizarbitoria



et al., 2022; Ioannou & Serafeim, 2017). The new GRI framework published in 2018 aims to strengthen SDG integration and reporting by including environmental and social challenges (Adams, 2020).

The second framework considered in this study is the <IR> framework. The framework helps businesses improve their stewardship and accountability for six types of capital (financial, manufactured, intellectual, human, social and relationship, and natural) (IIRC, 2015). The reporting framework includes five steps. First, understanding the organisation's external sustainable development issue. Second, identifying the SDGs that impact the company's value. Third, incorporating into the design of a business model to adopted SDG targets. The fourth, cultivating integrated thinking as well as connectivity and governance. And finally, putting together a report that encompasses performs over the year (IIRC, 2015). While GRI offers a comprehensive set of indicators to assess how a business actions affect the Triple Bottom Line, <IR> framework focuses on the relationship between business strategy and the sustainability performance of the business with a particular emphasis on how the business creates long term value through the activities it undertakes.

The third framework identified in the literature is the PwC framework. This framework outlines a four-step procedure to strengthen SDG-related core value activities (Erin et al., 2022). The guidelines emphasise that the first step is for companies to admit that sustainable development is about more than corporate social responsibility (CSR) and that every aspect of the entity contributes to its success. Second, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and other key executives must be interested in executing the SDGs. Third, the entity must define Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to get things done and report progress (PwC, 2019).

All the discussed frameworks advise businesses to evaluate the SDGs to decide where they can have the biggest impact and then establish appropriate targets. It has been demonstrated that the frameworks that have been discussed above are significantly more effective in gaining acceptance from regulators, as well as popularity with CSOs, NGOs, or investors. In conclusion, it is clearly evident that the frameworks have made a contribution to the legitimization and integration of SDG as a practice. Surprisingly, despite the fact that the frameworks have been adopted by many developing countries, the impact on development has been minimal.

2.2 | Accountability processes for tracking SDG practices

Most academic and policy researches have focused on the role of global governance in achieving the SDGs (McKeon, 2017) and the contributions of governments to national SDG projects (see Abhayawansa et al., 2021; Nygård, 2017). Meanwhile little attention has been paid to business involvement in advancing the targets enshrined in the SDGs (see Abdalla & Siti Nabiha, 2015; Adams et al., 2018; Cole & Broadhurst, 2021; Erin et al., 2022; George et al., 2016). For a corporation to execute the SDGs in any jurisdiction,

accountability processes are crucial (Adams et al., 2018; Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2022).

Bottom-up approach proponents as advocated by George et al. (2016) required that businesses adopt KPIs that address the impact or consequence of their activities when incorporating the SDGs into their business processes. However, Abdalla and Siti Nabiha (2015) discovered that some of the SDGs are difficult to achieve due to a lack of appropriate data. To overcome this challenge, George et al. (2016) draw the conclusion that all organisational functional areas must gather SDG data on characteristics of greenhouse gases, energy, water, and biodiversity, among others, to enable the realisation of the SDGs in manufacturing organisations. This implies that, in order to realise the SDGs, entities must further develop KPIs for the SDG targets that can be used to track implementation and inform stakeholders of the results. Thus, collecting data, measuring performance, and reporting on the outcomes of SDGs implementation is vital to accomplishing SDGs.

2.3 | Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for the study is presented in Figure 1.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Institutional Theory and Stakeholder Theory. The general idea behind the Stakeholder Theory in this framework is that IOCs must consider the interests of the entire stakeholder groups in their own business activities not just those of shareholders. Therefore, the survival of the IOCs is contingent on their capacity to manage stakeholder relationships in terms of aligning their practices with the attainment of the SDGs. Furthermore, the instrumental perspective of Stakeholder Theory specifies how organisations, including IOCs, interact with their stakeholders based on their salience (Dong et al., 2014) in order to gain legitimacy to operate (Deegan & Blomquist, 2006). As a result, this viewpoint necessitates that the IOCs consider the risks and opportunities presented by the salient stakeholders in order to capitalise on the strategic opportunities available when implementing and reporting on SDG practices.

The framework also depicts that the integration of the SDGs into business practices as well as the potential for reporting and disclosing the SDG outcomes will be influenced by external forces such as coercive, normative, and memetic mechanisms from regulatory institutions, professional bodies, government, CSOs and NGOs. Similarly, internal forces such as top management support, skilled staff, and oversights from parents of joint venture companies, among others, are likely to also influence SDG implementation, reporting and disclosure.

Also, stakeholder groups based on Mitchell et al.'s (1997) typology are likely to complement institutional pressures to influence the IOCs to adopt, implement, and report on their SDG practices, as shown in Figure 1. Dangerous stakeholders are those who hold power and urgency although they may lack the legitimacy to back up their claims. In order to have their interests met, such stakeholders can be coercive or even violent in some cases (Şener et al., 2016). Hence, the

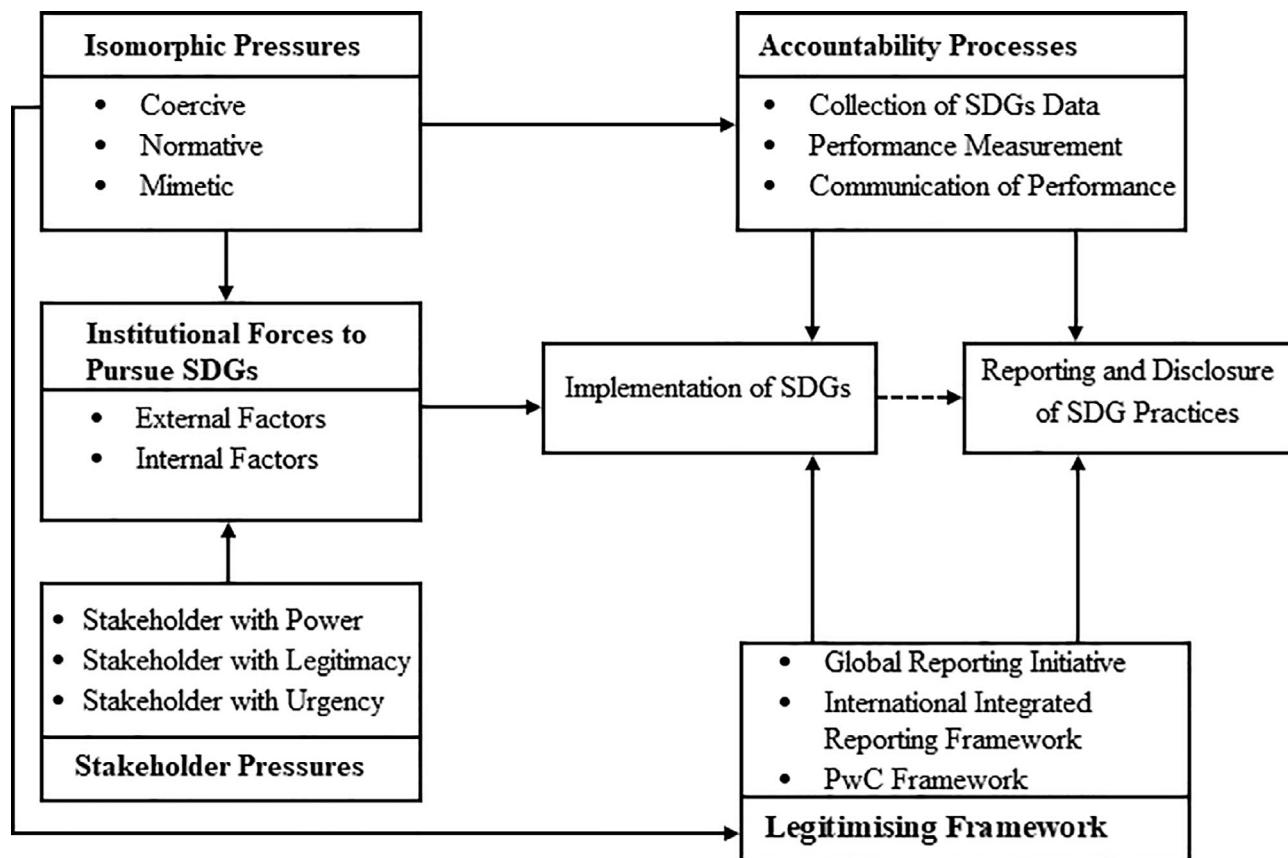


FIGURE 1 Theoretical framework. Source: Authors constructs

IOCs need to place a high value on the interest of these most salient stakeholders to legitimise their operations and stay in business.

The framework also demonstrates that institutional forces include both accountability processes can be used to track the IOCs contributions to SDG implementation and reporting. Similarly, institutional forces provide legitimising frameworks such as GRI, <IR> and PwC that shape companies' practices in order to address credibility gaps and to also avoid sanctions.

Finally, Figure 1 also denotes that due to resource constraints combined with other institutional and organisational factors, companies in the O&G industry may end up adhering to implementing and reporting SDG targets that 'avoid harm' rather than those that 'do good', thereby deviating from achieving the SDG Agenda of leaving no one behind.

3 | RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The investigation of the institutional factors that drive the indigenous oil company to integrate and report on SDGs, as well as the accountability mechanism deployed to track the company's contribution to SDGs, requires an exploratory approach to the execution of the study. As a result, this study employs a qualitative technique to analyse the phenomenon. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2009) explain that researchers employing the exploratory qualitative approach make an effort to

unearth, understand, describe, and interpret the meanings of the participants' actions in a natural setting, as the exploratory qualitative approach is typically grounded in conversations. This view is further posited by Creswell and Poth (2016) that, a researcher using exploratory qualitative approach does not attempt to manipulate events within a framework because this approach requires a naturalistic method centred on gaining understanding in a particular context in the real world.

The purpose of this study was to explore the institutional pressures and accountability processes in pursuit of SDGs in IOCs in Ghana. The exploratory approach helped to provide detailed information about participants' behaviours, emotions, characteristics, and preferences, among others, regarding SDG implementation and reporting; thus, highlighting emerging issues, ideas, and concepts during the research, as proposed in the existing literature (Braun et al., 2021; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

In addition, since a qualitative approach involves natural data collection such as interviews or ethnography, this study used the interview method, taking relevant notes of actions, words, attitudes, and behaviours throughout the study (Lewis, 2015). Twenty (20) semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected managers of organisations from various organisational levels and departments, as well as a variety of external stakeholders, over a 13-month period, from September 2020 to October 2021. Since firm policies and operations impact so many different stakeholders (O'Dwyer & Owen, 2005), it was critical to explore a



diverse range of viewpoints from stakeholders with diverse backgrounds and expertise.

The interview method provides a thorough comprehension of the issue under consideration. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of published research on the subject in developing nations that employs interview-related techniques (Abdalla & Siti-Nabiha, 2015; Erin et al., 2022). As a result, interviews were the primary data gathering tool in this study. Majority of interviewers from within the organisation were from senior management (the Sustainability Managers and the Heads of different departments and sections). Senior managers were identified as a crucial source of rich information since they are usually involved in the company's sustainable development decision-making (Rodrigue et al., 2013). The interviews with top management members provided a more in-depth understanding of the pressures that the companies face and the accountability processes used to track the SDG integration and reporting.

External interviewees included government officials from relevant regulatory agencies such as the Petroleum Commissions (PC). Furthermore, members of CSOs and NGOs were approached for their viewpoints on the subject. The PC officials were relevant to this study because the Commission is the regulator of the O&G industry in Ghana and monitors whether the operations of O&G companies are consistent with sustainable development practises. CSOs and NGOs are one of the important stakeholders this researcher contacted. Civil societies in Ghana have led the way in pressuring government and corporate leaders to implement the SDGs due to lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals and past restrictions on their actions. Before the SDG implementation in Ghana, the Civil Society Platform on Oil and Gas (CSPOG) was in constant contact with the government. Ghana seeks participation of these non-governmental actors in SDG implementation to ensure localization and inclusion in corporate business models. In addition, this study included both the PC and non-governmental actors because laws, regulations and civil society pressures are found to be the main drivers of sustainability practices (Abdalla & Siti Nabiha, 2015; Lozano, 2015).

The interviews were semi-structured and the questions were open-ended therefore, the interviewees did not always directly answer the questions. Furthermore, the interviewees addressed the same issue in multiple responses. As a result, identifying relevant information was not limited to providing direct answers to the relevant question. Any mention of the issue by an interviewee was noted and taken into account.

Some of the interviews took place at the workplace of interviewees while others were conducted through the use of zoom video technology. Before conducting an interview with any of the participants who took part in the study, a briefing on the objectives of the study was given to each of them individually. The participants were also given the assurance that the information being gathered would be handled in a manner that would maintain the utmost level of discretion and privacy at all times. In summary, respondents were trained professionals in their respective fields with a minimum of 6 years of experience and a maximum of 16 years. Table 1 lists respondents.

TABLE 1 Respondents interviewed.

| Category of interviewee | Rank | Number |
|-------------------------------|------------------|--------|
| Petroleum Commission of Ghana | Senior officials | 3 |
| Sustainability managers | Senior managers | 7 |
| Departmental and unit heads | Senior managers | 7 |
| CSOs and NGOs | Senior advocates | 3 |
| Total | | 20 |

Source: Authors' construct.

The exact number of participants interviewed was not predetermined. Instead, the study agreed to interview as many participants as were required to achieve theoretical saturation (Guénin-Paracini et al., 2015). The quality of qualitative research is evaluated based on its trustworthiness (reliable and credible), as opposed to quantitative research, where reliability and validity are the two most important indicators used to assess the quality of a study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). To achieve trustworthiness, the production facilities of the chosen IOCs that took part in the study were visited, and observations were made throughout the visit. SDG documented information on the companies' websites, social responsibility reports, illustrations of environmental impact assessment reports, and the legal and regulatory framework governing environmental protection were also sources of information to achieve triangulation. All these sources were used to triangulate the information provided by the participants, and where discrepancies emerged, the participants were asked to clarify.

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to increase credibility and prevent misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the information provided by the interviewees (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The research findings presented in the following section were then organised using the emergent themes. It is worth noting that the answers to the research questions and the earlier accounting literature examined in this study informed the emerging themes (Tetteh et al., 2023). Finally, follow-up interviews were conducted to get to the bottom of any unanswered doubts (Walsham, 2006). See Appendix A for the interview guide.

Concurrent data analysis was carried out, and as the study progressed, emerging themes were investigated. The transcripts were double-checked for accuracy and read several times to fully comprehend the participants' world. The information was coded, and similar codes were combined to form themes and sub-themes. This data analysis procedure adheres to the principles of thematic analysis (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). The approach used in the study was inductive coding. Inductive coding is a bottom-up approach that derives codes from data (Saldana, 2021). This is essential when conducting exploratory research or developing new theories, ideas, or concepts (Saldana, 2021). The overall data analysis strategy was built on thematic analysis. In this regard, the study adhered to the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2006, 2014): (1) becoming acquainted with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) generating the report.

To this end, the study classified the participants' unique opinions and interpretations under the following themes: (1) Factors influencing the IOCs' commitment to SDGs; (2) accountability processes to track the IOCs' contribution to the SDGs; and (3) obstacles preventing IOCs from implementing and reporting SDG activities. The next section presents the empirical analysis.

4 | FINDINGS

4.1 | Factors influencing the commitment of IOCs to SDGs implementation

The results of both external and internal institutional pressures that compel IOCs in Ghana to incorporate SDGs into their sustainable development policies are provided in this section. The section also provides results of stakeholders perceived by IOC management to be exerting the most pressure, as well as how the companies respond to such pressures.

4.1.1 | External factors influencing the commitment of IOCs to SDGs implementation

The need to comply with operating permits and local laws and regulations was the first external pressure that emerged from the collected data. All O&G companies operating in Ghana, regardless of nationality, must adhere to the laws and regulations of the host country. These companies are required to furnish the appropriate authorities with an environmental impact assessment (EIA) report. Almost all oil companies have developed and implemented health, safety, and environmental (HSE) policies and procedures to comply with legislation and to localise the achievement of SDG related targets. One of the managers, SM4, in charge of the programme related to sustainable development, raised the following point:

The government has been aggressive in ensuring that all contractors including those under exploration and production sharing agreements pay special attention to all environmental and sustainable development issues. The Environmental Protection Agency and other regulatory agencies are all urging strict adherence to activities that promote SDGs.

The government's dedication to fighting environmental degradation and emissions influenced oil companies' social and environmental initiatives that relate to the SDGs. The study also reveals that if a company violates the oil-sharing agreement, the government may cancel that company's operating licences, implying that an O&G company may lose its operating licence if it does not follow rules established by the Energy Ministry, the Petroleum Commission, or the Environmental Protection Agency. A head of departments, HD2 of one of the companies reveals that:

The agreement we sign with the government and international oil companies mandates us to engage in sustainable development or SDG practices and to disclose them. For example, the agreement states that all laws of Ghana including the demands of the Petroleum Commission should be adhered to... If we fail to comply, the authorities will withdraw our licence, sanction or slap the company with fines.

Losing an operating licence or paying fines for violating government laws and regulations coerce indigenous oil companies to include SDGs into their business models. These companies comply with the requirements and present their SDG related reports to regulatory authorities, top management, and partners.

Again, the study discovers that the government's objective of encouraging foreign investment for the country's economic development conflicts with its priority of ensuring oil and gas businesses follow best sustainable development practices. According to Suleman and Zaato (2021), the Ghanaian government relaxes laws and regulations to encourage domestic and foreign industry. A Ghanaian environmentalist (ENV 1) had this to say:

What they claim to be doing to encourage oil companies to incorporate SDGs into their business models is a leap service. The government rather relaxes the enforcement of the law to generate more revenue from the companies to address economic hardship in the country.

The overarching requirement for economic development stoked competing institutional pressures on the companies, which in turn caused friction in their day-to-day operations. Is it about addressing SDG goals on climate change, unemployment, or working towards alleviating poverty? As a result of the government's demand for increased oil production to generate more revenue for economic development, compliance with the laws and the industry regulations appears to be a secondary consideration.

Responsibility for ensuring oil companies to integrate SDGs into their operational strategies rests not only with the government and industry, but also with a wide range of non-governmental actors such as NGOs, think tanks, and academics who advocate for more accountable governance and management in the O&G industry. Indigenous companies are image-conscious due to the environmental sensitivity of their operation. Rising sea levels, major weather disasters, and unpredictable environmental conditions make it more expensive and harder for O&G companies to operate in ecosystems they have damaged due to the practices. As a result of this, the non-governmental actors in Ghana have levelled accusation that the oil companies are not operating in a sustainable manner (Ayanoore, 2021). This accusation has resulted in local oil companies becoming more socially and environmentally responsible.

Accusations have changed how local oil companies manage legitimacy gaps. After the SDGs were adopted in 2015, local oil companies

realised they have a significant position in the national economy in contributing to the SDG agenda. They swiftly design a new approach that combines NGO requests to legitimise their companies' social licence to operate as a local oil company with the country's interests in mind. SM2, one of the companies' managers, revealed:

Well as a corporate entity, we are aware these NGOs and CSOs are working hard to make the world a more sustainable place by spreading information about climate change, environmental sustainability, gender equality at the work place, poverty alleviation in oil communities and many more. Their voices are loud and failure to meet their demands they can damage the reputation of the firm especially when the media picks the matter up.

Another manager (SM3) of one of the companies also emphasised that:

Embedding SDGs into our company's practices is the way to go now if you don't want Civil Society Organisations like Think Thank and others to come after you. They keep putting pressure on us, as if we've decided not to act responsibly. Their accusations will continue, so we must do our best as well.

According to the findings, non-governmental actors mount pressure on local oil companies to comply with environmental and social responsibility. The reputations of local companies will suffer if they do not comply. Again, it is realised that the actions of non-governmental actors have an impact on the reputations of the companies. As a result, the management of the companies respond to the concerns raised by the non-governmental actors involved and acknowledge the necessity of altering their sustainability practices in order to conform to acceptable standards.

4.1.2 | Internal factors influencing the commitment of IOCs to SDGs implementation

The emerging theme for internal pressures driving local oil companies to incorporate SDGs into their operational practice is pressure from the audit requirements of foreign partners. There is therefore the need to safeguard the company's reputation, and the commitments made by the company's top management. The Ghana local content policy and participation law, Regulation 4 (L.I. 224) requires foreign oil companies to form joint ventures with local firms and provide equity to local partners to obtain a licence in Ghana's oil and gas industry. The regulation also requires that Ghana National Petroleum Company (GNPC) be a party to all Ghanaian upstream petroleum agreements. Regulations 24 and 25 promote joint ventures between local and foreign companies to facilitate technology transfer to Ghanaian firms (L.I. 2204). Due to this arrangement, some local companies viewed their

parent companies as internal stakeholders who exercise control over their technical and operational processes.

Surprisingly, local oil company with this arrangement followed their parent company's sustainability policies. The audit pressure from foreign partner is seen as internal pressure for companies to adopt SDGs. This demand from parents of local oil companies has become an institutional driver for them to address sustainability challenges in their operations. SM 4, one of the officials of the local companies emphasised the role of parent companies to realisation of the SDGs as follows:

...I will say that our foreign partner acts as a change agent to especially when it comes to addressing SDG-related issues in our operations. They sometimes expect too much from the local firm during their audit when they know some of the 'green' production equipment are expensive for a local firm to acquire.

The study also indicates that international partners of local oil companies continue to monitor and implement SDG-related policies in their subsidiaries to safeguard their image as partners to local firms. This is noted since Ghana has many concerns that have captured the public's attention. Another officials SM1 illustrated:

Since our foreign partners began auditing our sustainability practices, we have done a lot to meet their expectations and the requirements of the industry regulators, which I cannot share with you all at this time. But our partner audits our company's health, safety and environmental practices.

Foreign partners audit their partners to encourage them to adopt distinct identities in complex host countries. This protects the parent firm from the local firm's harmful impacts. Foreign partners are worried about social and environmental issues and guarantee local companies follow stringent procedures to maintain their brand, the study found. Local companies' and their international partners' reputations would suffer if they ignore social and environmental issues. As mentioned by one of the officials (HD 2) of the companies:

Apart from our foreign partner, we have social licence to operate in Ghana so our management will always insist we do what is required to protect our image ...

Another source of coercive pressure for local oil companies to engage with SDGS is the need to protect the reputation particularly their foreign partners. Reputation is important for businesses because it is a marketable asset that can be used in dealings with stakeholders (Abdalla & Siti-Nabiha, 2015; Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2022). The senior managements of the companies care about health, social, and environmental issues. The top managements of local oil companies are eager and understanding, and they know that social and environmental sustainability are crucial to their commercial operations and ability to continue operating.

4.2 | Accountability processes to track the contribution of IOCs to the SDGs

SDG integration or operationalization refers to the use of SDGs to guide the action of companies in their sustainability strategies (Mhlanga et al., 2018). This relates to the 'how' of SDG engagement (Silva, 2021). SDGs could be integrated or operationalised in the organisation in a measurable, accountable, and assessable manner, with adequate monitoring and assessment systems in place (Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2022). During interactions with company officials, the following key areas relating to accountability mechanisms were discovered: (1) the collection of data pertaining to SDG integration and performance; (2) the measurement of performance on the SDGs; and (3) the communication of performance on the SDGs.

4.2.1 | The collection of data pertaining to SDG and mapping them to business practices

Although the study did not have a benchmark to examine the extent to which the companies had incorporated the goals and targets, it was revealed that the SDGs have been integrated into core business practices by incorporating them into corporate systems, policies, standards, and processes. For instance, one of the Manager, SM5 explained:

In the beginning, it was difficult to incorporate the SDGs into our business practices. However, when guidelines on this topic were issued by accountancy bodies and other relevant agencies, we began by conducting an impact assessment to determine the benefits and costs of doing a high-level mapping of our value chain.

Respondents also stressed the importance of monitoring and assessing adverse effects and developing a response plan. Interconnected SDGs and scattered data sources across departments and processes in respondents' organisations made accountability for the SDGs harder to implement. Even though oil company data sources are fragmented, individuals in authority try their best to integrate SDGs into business practices. It was also revealed that the public is sometimes misled into believing that mapping SDGs to business/production processes is easy, however that is not the case in fact. The magnitude of this task was alluded to in the response of SM6:

Our company has aligned environmental goals related to issues like carbon emissions as well as the use of water and other natural resources. However, aligning the social aspects of SDGs, such as eradicating poverty and combating corruption, is not common in the real business processes because these issues are more difficult to monitor and assess for success.

Despite methodological hurdles, oil companies should set sustainable development targets that include all of their economic, social, and environmental priorities. The studies also showed that some organisations have not fully operationalised a data-collection procedure across production/business practices. Some businesses focused on areas that attracted public attention to build business cases and satisfy powerful stakeholders, while the influence of selection processes on the SDGs was emphasised as an accountability challenge.

4.2.2 | Measuring performance on SDGs integration

Measuring the contribution of a company to the SDG integration was another means of fostering accountability. Selecting KPIs and linking them to outcomes helps drive, monitor, and communicate progress. This can serve as the basis for these activities. The integration and measurement of performance of the SDGs with widely used frameworks, such as those of the GRI, the <IR> framework, and the PwC framework, were revealed by some of the responses.

An official (SM4) explained as follows:

...we always choose to measure inputs, activities, and outputs and use them as proxies to estimate outcomes and impacts in order to know our contribution to the SDG agenda.

Several contributions emphasised the use of GRI and <IR> framework throughout the accountability processes to determine if the anticipated results in measuring and administering performance were achieved. A head of marketing (HD3) revealed the following as the approach to measurement systems:

We talk to the people who are most affected by our work and try to meet their needs as we develop baseline measures for the most important indicators. Once they are happy, we know that what we've done meets the SDG target's goal.

4.2.3 | Performance reporting and disclosure on the SDGs integration

Aligning company practices with the SDGs creates a reporting expectation (Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2022). SDG target 12.6 encourages governments to encourage business to adopt SDG practices and include SDG data in their reporting cycle. Respondents felt it was vital to make public know how local oil companies contribute to the SDGs for action. It was also suggested that local oil companies could emphasise Ghana's SDGs. It was therefore hoped that reporting and disclosing contributions will resonate more with grassroots folks. Reporting and disclosure will help



CSOs, the government, accountancy agencies, and other key stakeholders understand how local oil companies are committing to the SDG implementation.

The following interviewee emphasised the importance of communicating SDG performance to customers and the general public. The official, SM4 said:

We want to share our SDG performance with our customers and community members. They need to see the impactful programmes we have initiated.

The local oil companies work with global customers who are concerned about certain production and supply-chain norms and standards. As a result, the companies are concerned with communicating with and disclosing to these critical global customers. The general public is another group of stakeholders mentioned by some interviewees. According to one of the official, SM 6:

Because we are an oil producing company, there are a lot of expectations from the general public as well as other stakeholders, which includes the regulators. They need to know how we have handled carbon emissions and preserved the water body and other natural resources in the country.

Another respondent, SM1 added that:

The general public and our shareholders are interested in finding out more about the social responsibility projects. They are interested in knowing about the contributions that our company has made to the society. This is the reason why we publish reports that include SDG performance.

It is possible that the prominence of the oil and gas industry is the reason for the emphasis placed on the public as a stakeholder. As a result of this, the public expects oil companies to disclose more information to maintain their legitimacy and reputation. The study found the kind of material issues firms prioritise when reporting SDG success. Material issues in sustainability reporting show substantial economic, environmental, and social impacts of a company could be favourable or bad (Erin et al., 2022). They also influence stakeholders' judgements and actions.

One of the officials (SM7) described what oil companies typically highlight in their sustainability/integrated reports regarding SDG performance:

It is likely that the strategic priorities that our company has identified as a result of the actions we've taken to incorporate SDGs into our business practices will be included on the list of material issues that our company reports and discloses. When communicating the performance to the priorities that were established, we

report both the positive and negative aspects of the performance outcomes.

Another respondent (SM2) also emphasised that:

... we take into account concerns that are extremely important to the various stakeholders. This involves addressing the reasonable interests, concerns, and expectations that have been voiced by our stakeholders in relation to our company's actions and we respond to them, even if the SDG in question that relate to that issue has not been prioritised by the company.

The local oil companies report and communicate SDG issues such as climate change, sustainable water management, employment, decent work among others. Therefore, aligning the company's reporting with the SDGs requires communicating performance in terms of the SDGs' expectations and ensuring that disclosures use the same terminology as the SDGs so that all stakeholders can relate.

4.3 | Obstacles preventing IOCs from implementing and reporting SDG activities

Companies are making effort to integrate SDGs and report on their progress but they are confronted with both internal and external hurdles, according to the literature (Erin et al., 2022; George et al., 2016). This section explores the context-specific problems local oil companies face when integrating and reporting on SDG implementation. According to the findings, companies face more implementation challenges than reporting. The sub themes that emerged from the analysis are as follows: (i) inadequate financial resources, (ii) Organisational capabilities (iii) institutional barriers.

The research showed that local oil companies lack the financial resources to integrate SDGs into business practices. The departments/units responsible for SDG-related activities in oil companies are usually overwhelmed at the start of the financial year by demands from other departments/units within the company, as well as institutions and individuals from the surrounding communities and beyond. Interviewees agreed that these requests usually exceed their expectations and provide obstacles in prioritising SDGs aims. SM7, one of the interviewees, stated the following:

The requests we receive are almost always greater than our budgetary allocation. Before considering merry-making projects, we must first consider which areas, if not aligned with the SDGs, will have a negative impact on our core operations.

On the issue of inadequate funding, some interviewees stated that although the company has engaged in activities that promote SDGs, when the information, particularly about social sustainability, is

disclosed in the entities' sustainable reports, the company ends up exposing itself to the public that it is capable of providing these interventions, and institutions and groups end up pressuring the company to provide them with similar interventions. For instance, one of the interviewees (HD6) said that:

Oh yes, we take pride in disclosing our contributions to the SDGs in the company's sustainability report, but as we do so for the sake of attracting more business, we also end up receiving more requests to engage in social interventions. This exceeds the budgets and that is why we may report on certain SDG programmes and ignore others.

The oil companies' sustainability reports paid some attention to how sustainability affected their day-to-day operations, but they devoted a lot of attention to broader concerns such as biodiversity. Due to financial constraints, local companies are still hesitant to broaden their scope to address all SDG-related concerns affecting them. An official, SM 2 explained:

Aligning our business practices with the SDGs takes a lot of work and money. We are rational; we don't do everything at once... We have to take it slow... We are very careful because we are a big company. If we make a mistake, it will have a big effect on us.

According to the responses, cost sometimes limits a company's ability to implement SDG programmes that are unrelated to their core mandate or business and that is why certain aspects of SDG integration and reporting are taken for granted.

The organisational structuring system was discovered to be a contributing factor. Goals, routines, organisational structures etc., have an impact on firms as a social system. Although integrating sustainability into core business and governance is crucial to accomplishing stated goals therefore, various organisational activities must be reformed to match with the shift (Jones et al., 2016). It would also be necessary to evaluate the effort required to design the business strategy and firm structure, as well as the need for new organisational competences such as team motivation, organisational culture, and participation. Restructuring hinders SDG implementation and reporting due to embedded organisational dynamics. Regarding this barrier, one of the respondents from operations department (HD5) shared the following explanations:

We are changing the systems, but it must be done gradually. We had our strategic focus and organisational settings in place before the SDGs were promoted. We are in the seventh year of its enrollment, but we cannot achieve all of the goals in such a short period of time, which is why the agenda is set to expire in 2030. Some of the SDGs that require massive structural change must be sacrificed in order to achieve economic gains too.

Setting new goals that demonstrate SDG adherence is vital for performances of Ghanaian oil companies. All employees must agree on new environmental, social, and economic concerns. If a company's goals coincide with the SDGs, its leaders must commit to sustainable development.

It was also cited that institutional barriers, such as the complication of regulations and the absence of a legal system that is conducive to the implementation of SDGs in the private sector, are to blame for the fact that some SDGs being regarded as superior over others in the firm's operational practices and integrated or sustainability reports. Regarding this barrier, a heads of finance department (HD7) provided the following:

...there are no stringent regulations in place that force an institution to incorporate all of the Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, the integration is left up to the management's discretion due to the absence of a single framework. GRI and IIRC [<IR>] are both involved in the promotion of SDGs; however, their primary focus is on reporting and disclosure rather than the direct incorporation of SDGs into the business strategy of the company.

Another respondent, SM3 noted as follows:

...Well, the truth is that companies use sustainability reports to build their reputations and improve their image. We don't have a standard policy as a country or industry about how closely SDGs must be linked to actual business practices. Because of this, we choose the SDGs whose KPIs [Key Performance Indicators] directly address the impact or outcome of our activities.

As our planet faces massive economic, social, and environmental challenges, companies whose activities have the greatest impact on the planet have attended SDGs that promote the entity's image and reputation to the neglect of those that do not come with obligations or coercive pressures to address.

5 | DISCUSSION

5.1 | Factors influencing the commitment of IOC to SDGs

The findings illustrate a case in which two key external stakeholders, the government and non-governmental actors such as CSOs and NGOs, exert coercive pressure on companies to be environmentally and socially sustainable. According to both the Institutional Theory and Stakeholder Theory, different interest groups exert different degrees of pressure on an organisation and have different expectations (Scott, 2013; Simoni et al., 2020). Interestingly, institutional



pressures on local oil companies came from the government. The government wants companies to follow laws and procedures to help accomplish SDGs, but it also pressures them to increase oil production for economic motives.

Despite pressure from many sources, local oil companies follow the rules, and those in joint ventures with international companies follow the directives and practices of their parent company to legitimise their operations and stay in business. The government is the most salient stakeholder with power, legitimacy and urgency because it can extend or terminate the operating licence of a company.

In contrast to the findings of a number of studies (see, e.g., Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2022; Lozano, 2015; Rodrigue et al., 2013), it was not totally apparent in the case of the oil companies that rules and regulations were the key drivers of social and environmental responsibility among companies. Non-governmental players, including CSOs and NGOs, rather drive the companies' desire for change. Historically, organisations viewed CSOs and NGOs as less salient stakeholders (Erin et al., 2022; Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2022). This study, like others that were conducted in developing nations (Deegan & Islam, 2014; Mzembe & Meaton, 2014), indicates the expanding importance of CSOs and NGOs in promoting sustainability practices within organisations.

The management of the companies perceives the CSOs and NGOs to have a high degree of coercive influence, legitimacy, and power to influence the companies' prestige and reputation, as demonstrated by past research (see e.g., Erin et al., 2022; Ismael & Zakaria, 2019). Even though some oil companies are joint ventures, it is believed that their foreign partner would be held responsible if a local company had an environmental problem.

The importance of CSOs and NGOs is attributed to the fact that when a corporation engages its non-managerial stakeholders, such as CSOs and NGOs, it increases their corporate visibility due to their frequent interaction with the general public. Due to the fact that SDG implementation and reporting increases the transparency and accountability of a company, stakeholder confidence and corporate legitimacy are enhanced (Ceessay, 2020; Deegan & Islam, 2014). The oil companies are implementing the concerns raised by these non-governmental actors regarding the implementation of the SDG targets, as these organisations have resorted to 'naming and shaming' companies for poor social and environmental performance.

In addition, a number of internal factors influenced the SDG practices and reporting oil companies. The study reveals that the protection of the companies and the reputation of the joint venture partners is the greatest internal pressure felt by local oil companies. This was exacerbated by the legitimacy crisis encountered by international oil companies, which affected the entire industry. In order to safeguard their reputations, local companies also participated in socially and environmentally responsible activities. As a result of audit pressures from their international partners, many joint venture companies were compelled to include SDGs into their business practices.

These companies were audited to ensure their activities fit with the SDGs by following their international partners' recommendations. Top management considered sustainability as important to preserving

their operating licence and guaranteeing long-term survival. Erin et al. (2022) found that SDG practices require senior management endorsement. Since sustainability concerns are under the responsibility of the top management, they can guarantee that changes are implemented to ensure compliance with SDG integration and reporting.

Compared to normative and mimetic pressures, coercive isomorphism from those with power, such as regulators and actors on whom oil companies rely for resources, had the greatest impact on the companies' SDG practices and reporting. From the perspective of Stakeholder Theory, these coercive pressures emanated from salient stakeholders such as CSOs and NGOs that publicly name and shame businesses for failing to adhere to best SDG practices. The objective of such action by non-governmental actors is to harm the reputations of companies for failure to implement the SDGs. It is also observed that the CSOs and NGOs appear to have taken over the role of regulatory authorities in the country in the fight for social and environmental sustainability and accountability in relation to SDG implementation and this is due to their power and urgency salience.

5.2 | Accountability processes to track the commitment of IOCs to the SDGs

Beyond the institutional pressures to incorporate SDGs into business practices, our analysis of the Ghanaian case adds fresh perspectives to the three logical steps of SDG accountability, namely data collection, SDG performance measurement, and communication/reporting of these results.

In terms of data collection, the emphasis on centralization and standardisation of measurement is justified by the necessity to share indicators throughout departments and functions to provide accurate aggregation of qualitative evidence for SDG implementation policies. This practice responds to calls for organisations to create sustainable management systems, as environmental and social dimensions are often disconnected from financial performance, leaving the contribution made by economic success unclear (Hristov & Chirico, 2019).

It is also evident that some companies have focused on areas that have attracted public attention to establish business cases and satisfy influential stakeholders. The actions of some of these oil companies are not surprising, given that existing research shows that there is no limit to selecting SDG targets and KPIs beyond those that appear relevant. The option depends on each company's characteristics. Each company selects SDG targets that summarise its situation and perspective to attain this goal. Previous studies (see, ElAlfy et al., 2020; Hristov & Chirico, 2019) have discovered that organisations prioritise environmentally friendly business practices, which result in increased sales as a direct result of increased brand value and image building. The study further found that local companies employed GRI, <IR>, and PwC frameworks to measure performance and communicate SDG results. This result responds to the demand for business entities to adopt frameworks that will assist in measuring and communicating SDG outcomes to stakeholders (Abhayawansa et al., 2021; Hayakawa, 2017).

In the quest to communicate SDG performance, the responses of the interviewees shed light on two major institutional logics: disclosure and transparency logic and reputation and image building logic. The former is exemplified by the emphasis of the interviewees on stakeholder engagement and the disclosure role of sustainability reports, whereas the latter is exemplified by the emphasis of interviewees on their companies' status as role models and the public relations role of sustainability reports.

The consensus on the disclosure role of SDG integration, for instance, and the emphasis on transparency as a rationale to communicate SDG performance are consistent with the sustainability and business accountability discourses being promoted by international and NGOs (Ismael & Zakaria, 2019). However, mostly the SDGs were only minimally or not at all implemented by the businesses. With the notable exception of a very small number of company representatives who could link specific strategies, goals, targets, indicators, actions, or results, the majority of the representatives exhibited an incredibly superficial approach to SDG integration and reporting. In most of the interviews, it appears SDGs are only used to freshen up company reports with colourful visuals and fancy icons, a practise known as 'SDG icon-picking' that may be indicative of impression management and SDG-washing (Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2022). The fact that the SDGs are so broad, as noted by Siegel and Lima (2020), has given ample room for cherry-picking and given rise to a form of sustainability metonymy, wherein meeting selected targets of choice (e.g., economic growth, eliminating global hunger) are taken to signify compliance with the whole of the 2030 Agenda, regardless of other goals and targets disregarded in the process.

Additionally, the logic of cherry-picking is to build company reputation and image which is consistent with the business case discourse, which is part of the conventional business concept widely adopted by corporate executives (García-Meca & Ferrero, 2021). The current findings on reputation and image building through SDG performance communication to stakeholders are consistent with the existing literature (Erin et al., 2022; Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2022). Similarly, the literature reveals that companies in environmentally sensitive industries may be more involved in SDG targets that 'avoid harm' rather than in those that 'do good'. Hence, the use of the Sustainability/SDG reports by the companies as a scheme with quasi-implications, facilitates impression management.

5.3 | Obstacles preventing IOCs from implementing and reporting SDG activities

Accounts of SDG practices and reporting by respondents show that the companies face varying degrees of difficulty in responding to stakeholder pressure to integrate and report on SDGs. For instance, while reporting on SDG activities is not a statutory obligation for organisations, majority of businesses believe there is no need to extend their budgets to satisfy those standards, and this result in the decision to disregard specific SDG practices and reporting. This challenge emphasises the need of firms investing more money in

initiatives that assist in preventing harm, as opposed to those that are designed to do good.

The lack of adequate organisational capacity to account for SDG implementation and reporting has also been recognised as a challenge. It could be challenging for businesses to entirely synchronise their existing processes with SDG implementation. Another difficulty that arose was the absence of a standardised reporting and integration framework for SDGs. The results of this study offer a critical analysis of the theoretical role discussed in the literature review. It is acceptable for organisations to share useful information about their SDG activities because they are bounded by social contracts within their environment. The findings of this study reveal that it will be nearly impossible to implement the SDGs effectively for national development without the help of corporate organisations. This is in line with a study by Erin and Asiriwa (2019), which found that corporate organisations are crucial to making the SDGs a reality. The inclusion of SDGs in organisational practices is expected to be driven by institutions with sufficient financial resources and scalable organisational structures. These institutions are also expected to report on their performance, whether it is positive or negative, in their corporate annual reports (Van der Vaal & Thijssens, 2020).

Linking the discussion of the findings to the theoretical framework, it was clear that external and internal factors influenced the commitment of IOCs to SDGs implementation, reporting, and disclosure. The external forces originated from coercive, normative, and memetic mechanisms emanate from regulatory institutions, professional organisations, the government, CSOs, and NGOs. Similarly, internal forces such as top management support, skilled personnel, and oversights from the parents of joint venture companies, among others, impacted the implementation, reporting, and disclosure of the SDGs. Also, it emerged that legitimising frameworks, such as GRI, <IR>, and PwC, shape the IOCs practices to address any credibility gaps to avoid sanctions from influential stakeholders.

6 | CONCLUSION, CONTRIBUTION AND SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE STUDIES

6.1 | Conclusion

The paper used Institutional Theory and Stakeholder Theory to investigate and explain how and why IOCs interact with their internal and external environments, as well as how their strategic responses influence SDG implementation and reporting. The paper focused on three goals: the factors that primarily influence the IOCs' commitment to SDG and how the companies respond to such pressures; the accountability processes used to track the IOCs progress on contributing to the SDGs; and the obstacles that prevent IOCs from implementing and reporting SDG activities.

The findings lead to three broad conclusions. First, pressures are increasing on IOCs to ensure accountable implementation and reporting of SDG practices for sustainable development. In pursuit of the



SDG agenda, the IOCs appear to be sensitive to both internal and external stakeholder pressure. Senior management, foreign partner audit processes, and the desire to safeguard a company's reputation were found to also constitute internal pressure on the companies to realise the SDGs, even though the government and non-governmental entities also continue to impose external pressure on them. The study also reveals that competing stakeholder pressures, as well as differences in stakeholder power, resulted in differences in the companies' responses to SDG implementation and reporting. Hence, the study concludes that CSOs and NGOs are a subgroup of stakeholders with the most influence and are better positioned than other stakeholder groups to exert pressure on oil companies to commit to SDG implementation in Ghana. One plausible conclusion is that non-governmental actors have taken on the role of 'regulator' of organisational practices in the context of a developing country with weak regulatory oversight and enforcement.

The findings confirm previous evidence that both theoretical frameworks are effective in explaining the decisions of firms to implement sustainable development practices (Braam & Peeters, 2018; Herold, 2018; Simoni et al., 2020). As noted by García-Meca and Ferrero (2021), Erin et al. (2022), and Lu et al. (2021), research on SDGs practices by corporate organisations is in its infancy in the accounting literature, and additional evidence is required. Moreover, the findings expand on previous evidence regarding the factors that influence corporate organisations to promote SDGs in developing nations.

Also, beyond the institutional pressures to incorporate SDGs into business practices, our analysis of the Ghanaian case adds fresh perspectives to the three logical steps of SDG accountability used by the local oil companies to track their contribution to SDG implementation and reporting, namely: data collection, SDG performance measurement, and communication/reporting of these results. More precisely, the study concludes that two major institutional logics shape the quest to implement and communicate SDG performance to stakeholders: disclosure and transparency logic and reputation and image building logic. Although global institutional influences for companies to comply with the use of KPIs from GRI, <IR>, PwC framework among others shape their SDG implementation and reporting. In view of this, a plausible conclusion is that firms' internal institutional environment also influences the alignment of company interests and priorities to the implementation and reporting of SDG targets. As a result, the practice has been a hybrid which include both meeting SDG targets that help companies avoid harm and those that build the image or reputation necessary for a business case.

Regarding the third objective, the results indicate that the IOCs are making little progress towards the achievement of the SDGs because of financial limitations, rigid organisational environments that prevent change, and a lack of a standardised institutional framework. Again, voluntary disclosure of SDG activities encourages companies to pursue SDG initiatives that 'avoid harm' rather than 'do good'. Thus, these companies use SDGs implementation as a strategy to promote reputation management (Van der Waal & Thijssens, 2020) and SDG reporting a camouflage tool.

6.2 | Contribution and suggestion for future studies

The paper makes a key contribution to the accounting literature by extending the motivation for corporate SDG practices (see e.g., Abdalla & Siti Nabiha, 2015; Erin et al., 2022; Gerged & Almontaser, 2021; Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2022; Ite, 2018), to unravel how non-governmental actors such as CSOs and NGOs have taken on the role of 'regulator' of organisational practices in the context of a developing country with weak regulatory oversight and enforcement. These findings, in particular, highlight the significant role played by CSOs and NGOs in shaping SDG practices and disclosure in the extractive industry. This study also contributes to organisational studies by elucidating companies' engagement with the SDGs as a means of enhancing their social legitimacy and linking current activity to the SDGs as a means of impression management (van der Waal & Thijssens, 2020), two strategies that might be associated with SDG-washing in the extant literature (van der Waal & Thijssens, 2020).

This research has some practical implications. It shows that local oil companies must restructure their business processes to achieve the SDGs. Local oil companies must, therefore, reorganise their internal management accounting and control to integrate and report SDGs efficiently. This is necessary because local oil companies found it challenging to synchronise their existing operations with the SDGs. For a company to gain legitimacy, its SDG agenda must incorporate non-governmental stakeholders' concerns into corporate decision-making.

Finally, the findings provide a sound framework for designing policies and mechanisms to increase company integration of SDG targets into their strategic focus and disclosure of SDG actions in annual or sustainability reports in emerging economies. The SDG integration and disclosure practices should be better regulated, and this should include terms of the reliability of information and the implementation of verification mechanisms carried out by qualified auditors, given the critical importance of the issues covered by the SDGs and their public interest. The verification of SDG disclosures by government-appointed experts and external stakeholders, such as government representatives and NGOs, would likely increase the credibility of companies' actual practices and sustainability/SDG reports.

One limitation of the study is that the data analysed are the experiences of individuals who were called to give oral testimony about the issue under investigation, although their responses were triangulated with written archival documents on the companies' websites, environmental impact assessment reports, and other sources. More research could examine the institutional pressures on the IOCs to adopt SDG practices and the accountability and governance systems used to track their progress in contributing to the 2030 agenda in, say, 4 years. The research could examine how close they were to what respondents believed was required and how much that helped or hindered value creation for stakeholders, that is, society and the economy. Future research could also investigate whether the influence of CSOs and NGOs results in actual or symbolic change in organisational practices. Again, future research could look into the interaction between the norms of international oil companies and the values of

their Ghanaian partners in pushing for sustainability practices, that is, the process of imported normative isomorphism.

ORCID

Lexis Alexander Tetteh  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5087-9701>

REFERENCES

- Abdalla, Y. A., & Siti Nabiha, A. K. (2015). Pressures for sustainability practices in an oil and gas company: Evidence from Sudan. *Qualitative Research in Accounting and Management*, 12(3), 256–286.
- Abdul, S. U. (2020). Multinational corporations (MNCs) and sustainable development goals in developing countries: Querying the impact of shell petroleum development company in Nigeria. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Public Policy, Administration and Development Strategies*, 4(1), 17–25.
- Abhayawansa, S., Adams, C. A., & Neesham, C. (2021). Accountability and governance in pursuit of sustainable development goals: Conceptualising how governments create value. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 34(4), 923–945.
- Acheampong, M., Yu, Q., Cansu Ertem, F., Deba Enomah Ebude, L., Tanim, S., Eduful, M., Vaziri, M., & Ananga, E. (2019). Is Ghana ready to attain sustainable development goal (SDG) number 7? A *Comprehensive Assessment of its Renewable Energy Potential and Pitfalls*, *Energies*, 12(3), 408.
- Adams, C. (2020). Sustainable development goals disclosure (SDGD) recommendations. https://integratedreporting.org/wpcontent/uploads/2020/01/Adams_Druckman_Picot_2020_Final_SDGD_Recommendations.pdf
- Adams, C. A., Druckman, P. B. & Picot, R. C. (2020). *Sustainable development goal disclosure (SDGD) international integrated reporting council and world benchmarking Alliance*. London. ACCA.
- Adams, R., Kewell, B., & Parry, G. (2018). Blockchain for good? Digital ledger technology and sustainable development goals. In *Handbook of sustainability and social science research* (pp. 127–140). Springer.
- Adongo, R., & Kim, S. (2018). Whose festival is it anyway? Analysis of festival stakeholder power, legitimacy, urgency, and the sustainability of local festivals. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 26(11), 1863–1889.
- Alves, E. R., Gomes, E. R., & Corsini, L. F. (2014). The characteristics of power, legitimacy and urgency of stakeholders and the actions of corporate social responsibility of companies. *Asian Journal of Business and Management Sciences*, 3(7), 34–46.
- Amodu, N. (2020). Attaining the sustainable development goals in Africa: The new CSR for multinational corporations. *Journal of Sustainable Development Law and Policy (the)*, 11(1), 86–105.
- Anderies, J. M., Folke, C., Walker, B., & Ostrom, E. (2013). Aligning key concepts for global change policy: Robustness, resilience, and sustainability. *Ecology and Society*, 18(2), 26–41.
- Arena, M., Azzone, G., Ratti, S., Urbano, V. M., & Vecchio, G. (2023). Sustainable development goals and corporate reporting: An empirical investigation of the oil and gas industry. *Sustainable Development*, 31(1), 12–25.
- Ayanoore, I. (2021). The factors eroding enterprise development in Ghana's oil and gas sector: A critical reflection on why the enterprise development Centre failed. *The Extractive Industries and Society*, 8(3), 100906.
- Bebbington, J., & Unerman, J. (2018). Achieving the United Nations sustainable development goals: An enabling role for accounting research. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 31(1), 2–24.
- Bennich, T., Weitz, N., & Carlsen, H. (2020). Deciphering the scientific literature on SDG interactions: A review and reading guide. *Science of the Total Environment*, 728, 138405.
- Bernardi, C., & Stark, A. W. (2018). Environmental, social and governance disclosure, integrated reporting, and the accuracy of analyst forecasts. *The British Accounting Review*, 50(1), 16–31.
- Boiral, O., Heras-Saizarbitoria, I., & Testa, F. (2017). SA8000 as CSR-washing? The role of stakeholder pressures. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 4(1), 57–70.
- Braam, G., & Peeters, R. (2018). Corporate sustainability performance and assurance on sustainability reports: Diffusion of accounting practices in the realm of sustainable development. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 25(2), 164–181.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., Boulton, E., Davey, L., & McEvoy, C. (2021). The online survey as a qualitative research tool. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24(6), 641–654.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2014). What can “thematic analysis” offer health and wellbeing researchers? *International journal of qualitative studies on health and well-being*, 9(1), 26152.
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2015). *Business research methods*. Oxford University Press.
- Caiado, R. G. G., Leal Filho, W., Quelhas, O. L. G., de Mattos Nascimento, D. L., & Avila, L. V. (2018). A literature-based review on potentials and constraints in the implementation of the sustainable development goals. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 198, 1276–1288.
- Ceesay, L. B. (2020). Exploring the influence of NGOs in corporate sustainability adoption: Institutional-legitimacy perspective. *Jindal Journal of Business Research*, 9(2), 135–147.
- Chen, J. C., & Roberts, R. W. (2010). Toward a more coherent understanding of the organisation–society relationship: A theoretical consideration for social and environmental accounting research. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 97(4), 651–665.
- Clarkson, M. E. (1995). A stakeholder framework for analyzing and evaluating corporate social performance. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(1), 92–117.
- Cole, M. J., & Broadhurst, J. L. (2021). Measuring the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in mining host communities: A south African case study. *The Extractive Industries and Society*, 8(1), 233–243.
- Coulbaly, M., Silwé, K. S., & Logan, C. (2018). *Taking stock: Citizen priorities and assessments three years into the SDGs*. Afrobarometer.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.
- de Freitas Netto, S. V., Sobral, M. F. F., Ribeiro, A. R. B., & Soares, G. R. D. L. (2020). Concepts and forms of greenwashing: A systematic review. *Environmental Sciences Europe*, 32(1), 1–12.
- Deegan, C., & Blomquist, C. (2006). Stakeholder influence on corporate reporting: An exploration of the interaction between WWF-Australia and the Australian minerals industry. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 31(4–5), 343–372.
- Deegan, C., & Islam, M. A. (2014). An exploration of NGO and media efforts to influence workplace practices and associated accountability within global supply chains. *The British Accounting Review*, 46(4), 397–415.
- Diaz-Sarachaga, J. M. (2021). Shortcomings in reporting contributions towards the sustainable development goals. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 28(4), 1299–1312.
- DiMaggio, P., & Powell, W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in Organisational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48, 47–160.
- Dong, S., Burritt, R., & Qian, W. (2014). Salient stakeholders in corporate social responsibility reporting by Chinese mining and minerals companies. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 84, 59–69.
- EIAIly, A., Palaschuk, N., El-Bassiouny, D., Wilson, J., & Weber, O. (2020). Scoping the evolution of corporate social responsibility (CSR) research in the sustainable development goals (SDGs) era. *Sustainability*, 12(14), 5544.
- Eriksson, E., & Lundberg, A. (2022). Sweden's shift towards mandatory sustainability reporting: An investigation of non-financial disclosure by Swedish firms in light of the directive 2014/95/EU. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1681212/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Erin, O., & Asiriwua, O. (2019). Does public transparency and accountability impact SDGs? A case study of selected African countries. *African Accounting and Finance Journal*, 2(1), 24–52.



- Erin, O. A., Bamigboye, O. A., & Oyewo, B. (2022). Sustainable development goals (SDG) reporting: An analysis of disclosure. *Journal of Accounting in Emerging Economies*, 12(5), 761–789.
- Friedman, A. L., & Miles, S. (2006). *Stakeholders: Theory and practice*. Oxford University Press.
- García-Meca, E., & Ferrero, J. M. (2021). Is SDG reporting substantial or symbolic? An examination of controversial and environmentally sensitive industries. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 298, 126781.
- George, R. A., Siti-Nabiha, A. K., Jalaludin, D., & Abdalla, Y. A. (2016). Barriers to and enablers of sustainability integration in the performance management systems of an oil and gas company. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 136, 197–212.
- Gerged, A. M., & Almontaser, T. (2021). Corporate adoption of SDG reporting in a non-enabling institutional environment: Insights from Libyan oil industries. *Resources Policy*, 74, 102240.
- GRI. (2016). Sustainability reporting guidelines Netherlands: Global reporting initiative. <https://www.pwc.nl/en/topics/blogs/a-new-era-in-sustainability-reporting>
- Guénin-Paracini, H., Malsch, B., & Tremblay, M. S. (2015). On the operational reality of auditors' independence: Lessons from the field. *Auditing: A Journal of Practice & Theory*, 34(2), 201–236.
- Hayakawa, Y. (2017). Business sector efforts and challenges to achieve the sustainable development goals: A case study from Japan. *Journal of Environmental Information Science*, 45, 31–36.
- Heras-Saizarboritoria, I., Urbieto, L., & Boiral, O. (2022). Organisations' engagement with sustainable development goals: From cherry-picking to SDG-washing? *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 29(2), 316–328.
- Herold, M. H. (2018). Demystifying the link between institutional theory and stakeholder theory in sustainability reporting. *Economics, Management and Sustainability*, 3(2), 6–19.
- Hossain, M. A., Ngo, H. H., Guo, W. S., & Nguyen, T. V. (2012). Biosorption of Cu (II) from water by banana peel based biosorbent: Experiments and models of adsorption and desorption. *Journal of Water Sustainability*, 2(1), 87–104.
- Hrasky, S. (2011). Sustainability footprints and legitimation strategies: Symbolism or action? *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, 25(1), 174–198.
- Hristov, I., & Chirico, A. (2019). The role of sustainability key performance indicators (KPIs) in implementing sustainable strategies. *Sustainability*, 11(20), 5742.
- IFAC. (2017). The 2030 agenda for sustainable development: A snapshot of the accountancy profession contribution, p. 31. <http://jicpa.or.jp/news/information/2030-agenda-sustainable-development>
- International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC). (2015). Assurance on IR: Overview of Feedback and Call to Action, IIRC, Discussion Papers, July 2015. <https://www.integratedreporting.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/IIRC-Assurance-Overview>
- Ioannou, I., & Serafeim, G. (2017). The consequences of mandatory corporate sustainability reporting. Harvard Business School Research Working Paper, (11–100).
- Islam, M., & Deegan, C. (2008). Motivations for an organisation within a developing country to report social responsibility information: Evidence from Bangladesh. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 21(6), 850–874.
- Ismael, M., & Zakaria, Z. (2019). Perception of preparers of sustainability reports in the Middle East: Contrasting between local and global. *Meditari Accountancy Research*, 28(1), 89–116.
- Ite, D. U. (2018). Embedding and operationalizing sustainable development goals in the Nigerian oil and gas industry. In *SPE Nigeria annual international conference and exhibition*. Society of Petroleum Engineers.
- Jones, P., Hillier, D., & Comfort, D. (2016). The sustainable development goals and business. *International Journal of Sales, Retailing and Marketing*, 5(2), 38–48.
- Kostova, T., Roth, K., & Dacin, M. T. (2008). Institutional theory in the study of multinational corporations: A critique and new directions. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(4), 994–1006.
- Lauwo, S. G., Azure, J. D. C., & Hopper, T. (2022). Accountability and governance in implementing the sustainable development goals in a developing country context: Evidence from Tanzania. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 35(6), 1431–1461.
- Lewis, S. (2015). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches. *Health Promotion Practice*, 16(4), 473–475.
- Lozano, R. (2015). A holistic perspective on corporate sustainability drivers. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 22(1), 32–44.
- Lozanova, S. (2014). *US oil and gas sustainability spending sluggish compared to extraction growth*. TriplePundit <http://www.triplepundit.com/2014/01/us-oil-gas-sustainability-spendinggrow-sluggish-compared-extraction-growth/>
- Lu, J., Liang, M., Zhang, C., Rong, D., Guan, H., Mazeikaite, K., & Streimikis, J. (2021). Assessment of corporate social responsibility by addressing sustainable development goals. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 28(2), 686–703.
- Martínez-Ferrero, J., & García-Meca, E. (2020). Internal corporate governance strength as a mechanism for achieving sustainable development goals. *Sustainable Development*, 28(5), 1189–1198.
- McKeon, N. (2017). Transforming global governance in the post-2015 era: Towards an equitable and sustainable world. *Globalizations*, 14(4), 487–503.
- Mhlanga, R., Gneiting, U., & Agarwal, N. (2018). Walking the talk: Assessing companies' progress from SDG rhetoric to action. *Oxfam*.
- Michel, J. (2016). *Beyond aid: The integration of sustainable development in a coherent international agenda*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Mio, C., Panfilo, S., & Blundo, B. (2020). Sustainable development goals and the strategic role of business: A systematic literature review. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 29, 3220–3245.
- Mitchell, R. K., Agle, B. R., & Wood, D. J. (1997). Toward a theory of stakeholder identification and salience: Defining the principle of who and what really counts. *Academy of Management Review*, 22(4), 853–886.
- Mojarad, A. A. S., Atashbari, V., & Tantau, A. (2018). Challenges for sustainable development strategies in oil and gas industries. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Business Excellence*, 12(1), 626–638.
- Mzembe, A. N., & Meaton, J. (2014). Driving corporate social responsibility in the Malawian mining industry: A stakeholder perspective. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 21(4), 189–201.
- Narimissa, O., Kangarani-Farahani, A., & Molla-Alizadeh-Zavardehi, S. (2020). Evaluation of sustainable supply chain management performance: Indicators. *Sustainable Development*, 28(1), 118–131.
- North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nygård, H. M. (2017). Achieving the sustainable development agenda: The governance–conflict nexus. *International Area Studies Review*, 20(1), 3–18.
- O'Dwyer, B., & Owen, D. L. (2005). Assurance statement practice in environmental, social and sustainability reporting: A critical evaluation. *The British Accounting Review*, 37(2), 205–229.
- Oliver, C. (1991). Strategic responses to institutional processes. *Academy of Management Review*, 16(1), 145–179.
- PwC. (2019). <https://www.pwc.com/jp/en/knowledge/column/pwc-sdg-reporting-challenge-2019-01.html>
- Rodrigue, M., Magnan, M., & Boulianne, E. (2013). Stakeholders' influence on environmental strategy and performance indicators: A managerial perspective. *Management Accounting Research*, 24(4), 301–316.

- Saldana, J. (2021). The coding manual for qualitative researchers. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 1–440.
- Sancha, C., Longoni, A., & Gimenez, C. (2015). Sustainable supplier development practices: Drivers and enablers in a global context. *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management*, 21(2), 95–102.
- Scott, W. R. (2013). *Institutions and organisations: Ideas, interests, and identities*. Sage.
- Şener, İ., Varoğlu, A., & Karapolatgil, A. A. (2016). Sustainability reports disclosures: Who are the most salient stakeholders? *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 235, 84–92.
- Siegel, K. M., & Lima, M. G. B. (2020). When international sustainability frameworks encounter domestic politics: The sustainable development goals and agri-food governance in South America. *World Development*, 135, 105053.
- Silva, S. (2021). Corporate contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals: An empirical analysis informed by legitimacy theory. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 292, 125962.
- Simoni, L., Bini, L., & Bellucci, M. (2020). Effects of social, environmental, and institutional factors on sustainability report assurance: Evidence from European countries. *Meditari Accountancy Research*, 28(6), 1059–1087.
- Suleman, S., & Zaato, J. J. (2021). Local content implementation and development in Ghana's upstream oil and gas sector for sustainable development: Contemporary issues on policy management. *Discover Sustainability*, 2(1), 1–15.
- Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (2009). Integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to research. *The SAGE Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods*, 2, 283–317.
- Tetteh, L. A., Agyenim-Boateng, C., & Simpson, S. N. Y. (2023). Institutional pressures and strategic response to auditing implementation of sustainable development goals: The role of public sector auditors. *Journal of Applied Accounting Research*, 24(2), 403–423.
- Unerman, J., & Bennett, M. (2004). Increased stakeholder dialogue and the internet: Towards greater corporate accountability or reinforcing capitalist hegemony? *Accounting, Organisations and Society*, 29(7), 685–707.
- Van der Waal, J. W., & Thijssens, T. (2020). Corporate involvement in sustainable development goals: Exploring the territory. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 252, 119625.
- Verdantix. (2014). *US oil and gas sustainable business spend 2012–2017*. Enablon <http://enablon.com/reports/us-oil-gas-sustainable-business-spend-2012-2017>
- Walsham, G. (2006). Doing interpretive research. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 15(3), 320–330.

How to cite this article: Tetteh, L. A., Agyenim-Boateng, C., & Simpson, S. N. Y. (2023). Institutional pressures and accountability processes in pursuit of sustainable development goals: Insights from Ghanaian indigenous oil companies. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.2554>

APPENDIX A

A.1 | Original interview questions

1. What institutional factors primarily influence the IOCs' commitment to SDGs?
2. Which stakeholders are perceived by the managements of the IOCs to be exerting the most pressure on the organisations to commit to SDG practices, and how do the companies respond to such pressures?
3. What accountability processes are used to track an IOC's progress on contributing to the SDGs?
4. What obstacles prevent IOCs from implementing and reporting SDG activities?
5. What leads companies to stop (certain aspects of) sustainability and integrated reporting?

A.2 | Revised and follow-up Interview questions

1. Why does your organisation seek to meet the needs of some 'powerful/important' stakeholder?
2. Some aspects of SDG integration into business models were ignored. Why were those stakeholder areas taken for granted?