



ROLE OF COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS IN CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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ABSTRACT: *Academics and business professionals have grown increasingly interested in the topic of corporate social responsibility (CSR). In terms of corporate-community interactions, this study adds to the conversation on CSR in the context of the Nigerian oil industry. It especially entails a review of CSR programs implemented by multinational corporations (MNC) doing business in the Niger Delta and their effects on the traditional means of subsistence of the indigenous populations. In order to analyse the interaction between the host communities and the MNCs, this study explores community attitudes and expectations. This article uses a qualitative research approach and employs three focus groups, 28 semi-structured interviews, and twenty-eight interviews to gather empirical data. This is crucial because the majority of the CSR research in this area has focused on descriptive and in-depth theoretical explanations. The research's conclusions point to a highly complex interaction between the host communities and the MNCs. The host communities view the MNCs as unfair, indifferent to their plights, ignoring their obligations to them, and failing to live up to their expectations. Therefore, it is concluded that the local community have experienced conflict and ongoing unhappiness with the MNC as a result of the detrimental effects of oil extraction activities. They anticipate mutually beneficial outcomes.*

Keywords – Corporate Social responsibility, CSR. Community etc

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the modern corporation, executives have grappled with the relationship between the company and its larger society. Since the early 1970s, researchers in the field of business and society have argued that a company's goals should be both commercial success and social responsibility. The argument is made forcefully throughout this literature that being



involved in the community is both the "right thing to do" and one of the company's core obligations (Altman, 1999)

Studies conducted in the setting of western industrialized nations like Europe, the USA, and Australia have dominated research on CSR. Few researches have used CSR in poor nations (Lokshin et al., 2001; Peinado-Vara, 2006; Reddy and Camelia, 2007). Visser (2007, p. 474) offers the following four justifications for emphasizing CSR in developing nations as opposed to CSR in rich nations: Developing nations have the fastest-growing economies, making them the most lucrative growth markets for business; they also experience the world's most severe social and environmental crises; they are likely to have the greatest social and environmental impacts (both positive and negative); and they present a unique set of CSR agenda challenges that are collectively quite significant. The business aspect of CSR is mostly examined in CSR research conducted in poor nations (e.g. Quazi and O'Brien, 2000; Blowfield, 2003; Zulkifli and Amran, 2006). The CSR stories as told by the community side also need to be examined. Additionally, the majority of CSR research frequently generalizes to all developing nations (Frynas, 2006). There is a case for CSR research in developing countries like India with focus on specific socio-cultural aspects. Given the cultural richness and diversity of the country choosing any section of society as study object is likely to yield fruitful results. The specific socio-cultural settings of localized communities (**three districts of Goa in present study**) where CSR activities are quite active in some developing countries (as in present study India) may throw up interesting and enriching insights. Present study attempts to build on this dimension.

Importance of community in CSR definitions

A business should give back to the community and work to improve society's quality of life (Carroll, 1995; Snider et al., 2003). Many new definitions of CSR have been proposed since Carroll's seminal work in 1979. Marketing studies, for example, have identified CSR as a business entity's adherence to and fulfillment of responsibilities that may benefit the larger community (Carroll, 1991; Brown and Dacin, 1997; Albinger and Freeman, 2000; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2006) defines CSR as a company's ongoing commitment to act ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of its workforce and their families, as well as that of the local community and society at large; management studies define CSR as a



company's commitment to operate in an economically and environmentally sustainable manner while recognizing the interests of its stakeholders (Waddock and Post, 1990; Wood, 1991; Matten et al., 2003; Waddock, 2004). Although no one definition of CSR has been agreed upon, each definition is based on the idea that CSR is about how a business considers its economic, social, and environmental impacts in how it operates. CSR encompasses three critical dimensions: (1) consumer, employee, and other shareholder responsibility; (2) environmental responsibility; and (3) community development responsibility. T.L. Besser (1999). The collaboration between the corporation and the community, which is a key issue in understanding the phenomenon of CSR, is typically explained through the corporation's voice, while the community's voice is ignored.

Another approach to CSR is the Triple Bottom Line concept, which divides CSR into three sectors: (1) financial success (profit); (2) environmental success (the planet); and (3) societal success (people) (Elkington, 1998; Marrewijk, 2003). The Triple Bottom Line concept proposes that corporate performance can and should be measured not only by the traditional economic bottom line, but also by the social and environmental bottom lines (Norman and Macdonald, 2003). The importance of the social factor as a major dimension is also evident here. The dominant stream in CSR studies is now striving for the 'middle path,' in which the economic necessities of profit making are balanced with social concern and community welfare. According to Mallen (2005), businesses exist to serve the community and have a responsibility to contribute to society. The traditional view that management's sole responsibility is to maximize profits has long been challenged, but not entirely dismissed. While societal welfare is important, business aspirations must not be overlooked. Business ethics scholars have advocated for decency, honesty, and fairness. Strategic managers must recognize and acknowledge the legitimate claims of the firm and other stakeholders (Pearce and Robinson, 2002). According to Jensen (2001), managers must consider the economic and social interests of all stakeholders. This is a direct attempt in the operational environment to balance various commitments to groups and individuals. According to Coelho et al., (2003) and Frankental (2001), this debate has allowed CSR to remain vague and ambiguous. Although there is no agreement on definitions and other issues, it is widely acknowledged that CSR is an important component of business practice, whether voluntary or mandated. Stakeholder perception has shifted CSR from an organizationally controlled model to one of partnership and interaction, with more representational voices (Kuhn and Deetz, 2008).



Community as a Stakeholder

Successful environmental strategy will depend more on stakeholder support as the business environment gets more complicated and interconnected. This support can only be obtained when companies are aware of how their stakeholders view them (Scott, 1995; Barney, 1997; Kanter and Brinkerhoff, 1981). Doscher is credited with coining the word "stakeholder" (SRI, 1963). Stakeholders were originally described as individuals "in whom the organization had a stake, without whom an organization could not thrive" (Sternberg, 1997, p.3). The idea of stakeholders has changed from being seen as people in whom the organization has an interest to people who believe they have an interest in the organization. This "represents a fundamental change from those who affect the organization to those who are affected by it," according to Sternberg (1997, p. 3). (E.g. labor and bondholders vs NGOs and the constituencies they represent). Groups or persons with preferences or interests related to the focal corporation are referred to as stakeholders. The community, or its leaders, have increasingly been referred to as a stakeholder in recent years, in addition to other traditional stakeholders (owners and investors, managers, employees, consumers, and suppliers). (Boehm, 2002) Customers, communities, employees, governments, and shareholders are just a few of the groups that consistently put pressure on businesses to be socially and ecologically responsible (Sethi, 2003; Epstein, 2008; Hess & Warren, 2008; Sarkar, 2008).

Corporate-Community Mutual Relations

When members of one group believe they are better than the other, a collaborative partnership can become extremely complicated. A lack of understanding of the interdependence between the two groups as well as a lack of knowledge and respect for the beliefs, customs, and history of the other group may be indicated by such a behavior. 34 According to certain theories, both the community and the corporate each contribute unique qualities to the CSR's functioning, and successful collaborations require a wide range of various competencies (Boehm, 2002). CSR is useless in day-to-day operations, according to Ingham (2006), if management's top priority is not preserving the enterprise's long-term health. CSR is also thought to be developing as an industry; it doesn't appear to be just about corporate altruism but rather a sense of self and connection to stakeholders. Fougere and Solitander present an extreme interpretation of CSR perception (2009). They contend that certain groups view CSR as corporate colonialism.



Due to the inability of many small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) to continue CSR initiatives, multinational corporations and major companies are viewed by the general public as the industry leaders. According to Jye and Castka (2009), affluent corporate management techniques have had the same influence on public opinion as certain companies' generosity. A well-managed CSR program will improve not only the company's reputation in the community, but also its core economic drivers. But the main obstacle to the widespread adoption and diffusion of CSR is the predominating ambiguity surrounding its significance, scope, and interrelationship with other organizational activities in varied situations.

CSR and Community Expectations/Perceptions:

The underlying assumption drawn from the data thus far examined is that the MNC owed the community a duty that is viewed as their obligation to the host communities. This study supports the idea that CSR is still hotly debated and that different disciplines and contexts conceptualize it differently (Dahlsrud 2008). The various conceptualizations of CSR are also a result of the society's varied interests in it (Moir 2001). CSR cannot be generally defined since it is a socially constructed notion, according to Dahlsrud's (2008) argument. The expectations in the host communities differed substantially based on the differing perspectives on CSR. In response to the research question about what the respondents expected from the host communities, some respondents asked the company for financial benefits, others wanted jobs, some expected infrastructure, while others wanted complete control over the oil resources. Other respondents said to "give us contracts," while others said to "do it yourself," and still others said to "let it be anything." The character of the partnership can be summarized by these various opinions and demands. In exchange for the MNC extracting oil from their property, a valuable output is expected from the arrangement. The host communities appear to be dependent on the MNC for the social and economic advantages they consider as their right. According to George, Kuye et al. (2012), who accept this viewpoint, the NDR's youth unrest is the outcome of communities' anger with international corporations' failure to meet their expectations. As part of their drive for a better life and as a CSR initiative by the multinational corporations, they claim that the host communities' demand for food, clothing, shelter, job, and infrastructure amenities. The level of underdevelopment in the area, despite the length of time oil firms have been operating there, also caused alarm among the attendees. The communities' hopes for the developments in this area have generally not materialized (Idemudia and Ite 2006). Participants believe that despite the MNC declaring billions of dollars in profit, they are



socially irresponsible because the CSR initiative to improve their standard of living through the provision of basic infrastructure amenities has also not been fulfilled (George and Kuye 2012). Regarding unemployment, the host communities voiced their discontent with the MNC over the way that the corporation frequently conducts hiring without giving preference to the natives of the host communities. The majority of job openings, according to locals, are typically advertised online, where many locals lack access and would not, therefore, be aware of them. Other times, the recruitment process may not even be disclosed to the host community until it is over. The MNC contend, however, that the communities lacked the credentials and expertise required for such roles. For this reason, the communities disagree, believing that all children in the host communities should have access to employment opportunities regardless of their level of education or technical skill. As part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR), MNCs are required to be in charge of hiring and training local youngsters. Given that CSR calls for actions to be made in response to the needs of significant stakeholders, this would be reasonable or even expected. The environmental aspects put a particular emphasis on problems with soil, water, and air pollution from oil spills and gas flare-ups. The majority of the participants lamented the region's regular gas flare-ups and oil spills. In this area, environmental contamination brought on by the oil spill has become commonplace (Aghalino 2009). The MNC is accused by the host communities of failing to replace pipes that were put in place decades ago and frequently cause oil leaks. They repeatedly made promises to do so but never followed through because they believed that altering the oil pipelines would be extremely expensive for the MNCs. The host towns also charge the federal government with negligence and a lack of regulatory entities acting as checks and balances to keep an eye on the MNCs' business affairs. Others contend that businesses cannot be absolved of responsibility for the degradation of their environment, regardless of how much infrastructure provision falls under the purview of governments. However, it is the responsibility of the government to enact the appropriate laws to safeguard the environment. According to Ejumudo, Edo et al. (2012), including environmental issues in MNCs' CSR plans will help to further reduce conflict and violence. According to the discussion thus far, it appears that the MNC views fulfilling the expectations of the host communities as an unavoidable evil if the MNC is to function in a favorable and peaceful environment. The MNC's profits have suffered as a result of the host communities' hostile attitude. This implies that fulfilling stakeholder expectations may play a significant role in fulfilling shareholder expectations. This supports the ideas put forth by



Goyder (2003), who contends that businesses should embrace what he terms "conviction CSR" to make sure that they, in addition to abiding by the law and meeting shareholders' expectations, have a good influence on people, the environment, and the planet. Similar to how Griseri and Seppala defined it, it is evident that CSR cannot be successful without taking into account societal values and expectations in business operations. The MNCs believe that it is challenging for them to choose the best CSR activities to implement in these communities due to the diversity of community expectations. Varied interest groups within a community, such as the young, women, and chiefs, would make different requests for what the MNC should do for the community. The MNC has a different opinion of the CSR program since they use a "one size fits all" approach, which does not produce good results. The corporation may be more concerned with what they want to do for the community as part of their CSR than what the community is asking for if they use phrases like "that is not our area of specialization" or "we are not into such projects." The claim is that the MNC should adopt a different strategy for CSR that is based on an appreciation of and integration of community perceptions and needs assessment rather than corporate policies. According to Ako, Lawrence Ogechukwu, and colleagues (2009), for one's CSR projects to be successful, the uniqueness of the area/terrain should be taken into consideration. Meeting these expectations would increase host communities' commitment and foster a friendly relationship, both of which could help the company survive (Idemudia and Ite 2006).

Corporate-Community Interface- Changing Dimensions

The conventional form of community relations that was once used in the corporate world has significantly changed from the new model of CCR. In the previous system, donations were made because executives favored particular causes and frequently specified beneficiaries. The majority of programs were managed and executed solely within the headquarters community. By responding to grievances and emergencies, local management preserved positive relationships with the community. This style of community relations was still used by certain of the study's businesses; a link between these businesses and poorer overall corporate social performance was discovered. Altman (2000)

Corporation as a Social Entity



Many academics consider businesses to be a type of social arrangement that needs to be legitimated in order to sustain healthy, long-term relationships with the many communities on which they depend (Nasi et al., 1997). According to the accountability model, stakeholders, and legitimacy theories, businesses need to be aware of and responsive to social and political issues that have a substantial impact on their operations (Freeman, 1984; Ullmann, 1985; Meyer and Rowan, 1991; Mitchell et al., 1997; Rowley, 1997; Deegan, 2002; Valor, 2005). Professionals in community relations are now required to determine how their work adds value to the company. The capacity to maintain or improve the company's license to operate comes in last, with better employee morale and loyalty coming in second and third. Corporate leaders and managers today view giving back to the society as a commercial requirement (Altman, 1999)

CSR and Socio-Cultural Factors

When comparing perspectives from the USA, China, and India, Wong et al. (2009) discovered that culture was an underlying component. Such comparison studies of various contexts may deepen our understanding of CSR. Companies have been criticized for not paying enough attention to their social and environmental impact because they didn't realize that such issues had become an economic reality in numerous discussions and cases (Buchholz, 1993; Dehant and Altman, 1994; Welford, 1994; Jaffe et al., 1995; Porter and van der Linde, 1995; King and Lennox, 2001; Schaltegger and Synnestvedt, 2002). However, environmental and social challenges frequently have an impact on a company's costs and revenue, which has an impact on that company's ability to succeed economically (King et al., 2001; Schaltegger et al., 2002).

Importance of local communities and their culture exemplified through studies done in

Nigeria Delta Regions- It is well acknowledged that the dynamics of conflict in the area are largely influenced by community beliefs, expectations, and the sociocultural norms that shape these perceptions. According to Wheeler et al. (2002), the attitudes and beliefs of the many parties in the famed Ogoni dispute hold the key to understanding the root of the conflict and, consequently, a potential resolution. In addition, Okafor (2003) noted that in his investigation into the causes of the antagonistic nature of corporate-community relations in Nigeria, a key element that was identified was community perception of business activities, and perception was also seen as a major factor that can drive corporate-community engagement. Agim (1997)



also argued that oil MNCs must start by looking for and comprehending local attitudes and cultures if they are to have harmonious relationships with their host communities. Despite the aforementioned claims, it is unfortunate that these issues of community views, expectations, and local cultures have not yet received enough consideration in analysis and have consequently had no influence on the creation or application of CSR policies by oil MNCs.

How Values affect CSR?

Although values have many different definitions, it is generally accepted that values have an impact on behavior. People "create values based on their history and life experiences, and those values in turn shape subsequent behaviors," according to Kahle et al. (1988), for instance. According to several studies (Rokeach, 1973; Mayton et al., 1994; Fukukawa et al., 2007), values significantly influence human attitudes and behavior and may serve as motivators and guiding principles for behavior and activities (Hemingway, 2005; Fritzsche and Oz, 2007). Values "impact individuals in their perceptions, interpretations of situations, and so direct people in their decisions, choices, and behaviors," according to Gandal et al. (2005). As a result, values have an impact on how CSR acts are evaluated (Hemingway and Maclagan, 2004; Siltaoja, 2006). Values also have an impact on how much a person perceives CSR to be, along with societal activities and norms or standards. Values can act as information filters, influencing beliefs by encouraging people to accept information that appears to be consistent with their values. Values can also act as information social amplifiers by encouraging people to seek out or selectively pay attention to information about specific issues, such as the environmental consequences of their actions (Stern and Dietz, 1994).

Why the Voice of Community Matters?

Meeting community expectations is now considered as increasingly crucial for the sustainability of the business as local communities have been recognized as stakeholders with "salience" in recent years. In fact, Waddock and Boyle (1995) said that CCR has evolved into a function that blends stakeholder interests, notably those of its employees and communities with those of the company. CCR is no more just a buffer between the firm and its environment. Burke (1999) refers to the relationship between corporations and their host communities as a "psychological contract" that "contains both the explicit and implicit expectations that corporations and host communities have for one another." Burke calls this agreement



"dynamic." The decision-making latitude that corporations once enjoyed has been restricted. Communities are increasingly at the center of decisions that affect businesses today. A corporation must implement corporate strategies that recognize the increased role of communities in establishing policy and regulatory agendas if it wants to remain in operation and maintain its operating license.

Negative Picture of CSR in the Eyes of Community

In their study conducted in Uganda, Bagire et al. (2011) state that CSR was thought to be mostly employed to enhance company image. Taking care of the less fortunate and thanking customers were other highly scored perceptions. CSR was not viewed as business community involvement or social responsiveness. The prevailing opinion was that CSR initiatives were carried out for commercial gain. However, the stakeholders praised CSR as a commendable corporate action that indirectly benefited living. Through improved access to education, talent development, leisure and entertainment, and relief, the activities had helped society. Additionally, the results showed that many people did not distinguish between CSR as a social deed and as a commercial technique. According to a large body of research, the benefit communities or target groups don't participate in CSR choices very much (Bagire et al., 2011). Instead of trying to live up to community expectations, businesses committed to doing what was beneficial for business. These studies highlight the necessity for businesses to consult with communities. This will give a place for discussion and eventually lead to gains for both parties. To engage in CSR for the benefit of both company and society, Tracey et al. (2009) elaborated on the idea of duality.

Voice of Marginalized sections of Community

Newell (2005) expresses concern over the fact that many discussions of corporate responsibility and citizenship fail to take into account how businesses interact with local communities, particularly those that are less affluent. Even though they may be projected as the "intended beneficiaries," poorer parts of communities are frequently underrepresented or excluded entirely when CSR strategies are framed and implemented. This is either due to the fact that they are not recognized as legitimate stakeholder groups in the same way that an NGO or trade union might be, or it is due to the frequently incorrect assumption that those organizations (NGOs or trade unions) will serve as adequate middlemen for the representation



of the concerns of poorer groups. Newell goes on to say that poorer groups are frequently underrepresented in the policy-making process, underrepresented in terms of their ability to defend their own interests, and underrepresented in terms of their ability to connect with international activist networks that could help amplify their voice or bring attention to their plight. National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), a power company, offers an interesting example of a company that is simultaneously party to global claim-making regarding corporate citizenship and engaged in local-level conflicts around the meaning and realization of those obligations. Newell uses NTPC as an example in his article. The claims made by the company regarding its social and environmental obligations and the accounts of the communities impacted by the plant in Vizag, Andhra Pradesh, are in stark contrast. This example highlights the significance of hearing and comprehending the voice of the underprivileged rather than relying solely on the one-dimensional predictions of corporate entities. Multi-party accountability for environmentally sustainable industrial development: the challenge of active citizenship (study by A. B. S. V. Ranga Rao and R. D. Sampath Kumar). A study of the Simhadri Thermal Power Project's stakeholders was conducted in 2003 by the PRIA/Department of Social Work in New Delhi.

Dominant Segments of Community Getting Greater Benefits of CSR – In the study on Nigerian Oil Industry and community perception of CSR, Idemudia found that the more power segments of society got the better benefits from business firms' CSR. Oil multinational corporations (MNCs) have historically engaged local communities through local chiefs and elders. As elders and chiefs are highly respected in communities and are expected to put the interests of the community before their own, this strategy is an attempt to some extent reflects local culture. Traditional rulers are now frequently viewed with suspicion, though, as a result of this oil MNC strategy's recent accusations of corruption, fund theft, and nepotism. This circumstance necessitates a change in strategy to take into account modern realities and concerns about accountability and transparency. Elders and chiefs are still important, but community engagement should be expanded to involve more of the community (Idemudia, 2007).

Conclusion:

The implication for policy-makers is to involve different stakeholders in defining a local definition of CSR, either as individual businesses or through umbrella bodies. The academic



community could contribute through empirical research, community and civic leaders could do so through feedback exchange, and the government could do so through the network of private-public partnerships (Bagire, V.A. et al, 2011). CSR is about corporate sustainability through engagement with various stakeholders, as stressed by Ingham (2006). Humphreys (2000) argued that a company cannot expect to build a solid foundation for high-quality relationships if it does not pay close attention when being spoken to.

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