# Corporate Social Responsibility and its Effect on Community Development: An Overview

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***Abstract:*** *Traditionally, businesses primarily exist to make profit. The profit motive has often been perceived as representing a lack of concern for all other objectives of an organisation. But, today businesses are realising that in order to stay profitable in a rapidly changing environment, they would have to become socially responsible. Hence, there is a growing demand and expectation from various stakeholders who expect business to go beyond their profit agenda and be socially responsible. The belief that beyond making profit for the shareholders, business enterprises should also serve the interest of all other stakeholders has culminated into the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This concept has engendered considerable interest in recent years. CSR refers to strategies corporations or firms conduct their business in a way that it's ethical, society friendly and beneficial to the community development. The objective of this paper is to examine the effect of CSR on community development. The paper adopts a library based research methodology focusing mainly on primary and secondary sources. The result of this paper shows that the traditional view of business being essentially to maximise profit has changed in recent years. The traditional view is no longer accepted in today's business environment. Corporations have now adopted the concept of CSR, which is concerned with economic, environment, and social performance. The paper concludes that the effect of CSR on community development can be seen from different angles like protecting the environment. Some of the world's largest companies have made a highly visible commitment to CSR, for example, with initiatives aimed at reducing their environmental footprint.*
***Keywords:*** *Business, corporations, corporate social responsibility, community development, environment, organisation, stakeholders*

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## I. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a business system that enables the production and distribution of wealth for the betterment of its stakeholders through the implementation and integration of ethical systems and sustainable management practices. In other words, CSR refers to strategies corporations or firms conduct their business in a way that is ethical, society friendly and beneficial to community in terms of development [1]. Therefore, CSR has been seen as competitive advantage of companies if they exercise their duties or responsibilities towards the society [2]. By engaging in CSR activities, corporations tend to gain better recognition as responsible corporate citizens from the perspective of international and local investors [3].

Today, consumers are more aware of the corporations' responsibility through better education and through the influence of the media. It may no longer be accepted for business organisations to neglect CSR. The role of business in society is no longer focused on creating wealth alone but is also focused on acting responsibly towards stakeholders [4]. Presently, businesses continually face pressures from different stakeholders, such as employee pressures to recognise certain employee rights in the workplace, consumer pressures for the business to withhold price increase and produce safe products, community and environmental pressures that the business operation does not threaten the safety of the local community [5]. Because of all these pressures coming from different stakeholders, corporations find it inevitable to resort to CSR.

The objective of this paper is to examine the effect of CRS on community development. The paper intends to address the effect of CSR on community development as perceived by community of stakeholders and how impacts are felt by them. The paper is divided into five parts, excluding the introduction. The first part

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deals with the general concept of CSR. This part of the discussion is important as it will go on to show that CSR requires corporations/organisations to adopt a broader view of its responsibilities that includes not only stakeholders, but many other constituencies such as the community where the business is being conducted. The second part addresses the merits and demerits of CSR. Under this part, the paper argues that regardless of the reasons why corporations voluntarily indulge in CSR, one also has to bear in mind the advantages and the disadvantages of pursuing CSR activities. For example, whether businesses should primarily focus on maximising its profit or mainly focus on pursuing CSR activities which may not produce any immediate gain but may result in long-term gain to the business from the continued support to the business by all of its stakeholders and the community at large. The third part deals with the effect of CSR on community development. In this part, the paper argues that the effect of CSR on community development can be viewed as any direct or indirect benefits received by the community as a result of social commitments of corporations to the overall community and social system. The fourth part addresses the challenges in implementing CSR. Under this part, the paper argues that some of the challenges are of general application regardless of being a developing or developed country. However, the paper also argues that some of the challenges are peculiar to corporations operating in developing countries. The fifth part focuses on the conclusion. This part will embrace some recommendations bearing in mind that the effective implementation of CSR maybe hindered by the challenges addressed in this paper.

## II.   The Concept Of Corporate Social Responsibility

The concept of CSR started to evolve back in 1910s when the role of corporate directors was perceived as exceeding the narrow interest of stakeholders [6]; and businesses have been educated on the need to be socially aware and responsible as early as 1930s [7]. In other words, the term CSR was originally founded by E. Merrick Dodd in 1932. Bowen [8], the "father of CSR" views CSR as the obligation of business to pursue organisational policies and make decisions desirable in terms of social objectives and values. Businesses are not just instrumental in producing goods and services, they are affecting an entire society in diverse and complex ways [9]. Therefore, business should act ethically to improve community's quality of life [10]. There are many ways businesses demonstrate their CSR initiatives. For example, a company may embed social elements into products to demonstrate CSR towards customers. To reduce its adverse impact on the environment, a corporation may reduce carbon emissions in its business operation. To the community, some corporations may make money contributions to improve education facilities.

Literature shows that definitions of CSR by and large fall into two general schools of thought. First, are those theorists who argue that a business is obliged to maximise profits within the boundaries of the law and minimal ethical constraints [11]-[12]; and second, those that advocate a broader range of obligations towards society [13]-[14]. It would appear from the literature that society generally expect business to move away from their limited economic focus and be more socially responsible. Therefore, the second view seems to be more convincing in the context of this paper. This is due to the fact that the concept of CSR here is defined as companies, like individuals, should strive to be good corporate citizens by contributing to the community to a greater extent than is generally required and the corporation as an economic institution has a social service as well as a profit making function. Hence, CSR can be defined as a socially responsive behaviour derived from normative or ethical considerations.

In addition, the concept of CSR means that corporations/organisations have some measure of moral, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities apart from their responsibilities to earn a fair return for investors and comply with the law [15]. In other words, CSR simply refers to strategies corporations or firms conduct their business in a way that is ethical and society friendly [1]. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, CSR can involve a range of activities such as working in partnership with local communities, and involving in activities for environmental conservation and sustainability.

In discussing the concept of CSR, it is equally important to take note of the fact that the present-day CSR (also called corporate responsibility, corporate citizenship, responsible business and corporate social responsibility) is a concept whereby business organisations consider the interest of society by taking responsibility for the impact of their activities on several stakeholders i.e. communities as well as their environment. The obligation shows that the organisations have to comply with legislation and voluntarily take initiatives to improve the well-being of the employees and their families as well as for the community and society at large.

Despite the growing recognition of CSR by businesses, the concept of CSR continues to attract public debate as corporations, who have the powers and resources [14]-[16], have been urged to act responsibly for the betterment of our society. Most scholars agree with the notion that firms/corporations have responsibilities to society beyond profit maximization [17], [18]-[19]. Besides economic responsibility, many suggest that businesses are responsible to a broader range of stakeholders, including not only stakeholders and investors, but also employees, suppliers, communities, government, and the natural environment [20], [21], [22], [23], [24],

[25]-[26]. It has also been widely recognised that strategic CSR can improve competitive advantage because good deeds are beneficial for a business as well as society [17], [27]-[28].

Researchers have used several theories to explain the reasons why corporations/companies voluntarily indulge in CSR activities. Some of the theories are: the stakeholder theory, the legitimacy theory and the political economy theory [29]. The stakeholder theory contends that organisations perform CSR activities because of the ethical demand on organisations to do so [28], and also because of the need to manage the perception of powerful stakeholders that could exert an adverse impact on organisation [30]. The legitimacy theory argued that organisations voluntarily indulge in CSR to show that they are conforming to the expectations and values of the society within which they operate [29]. The political economy theory says that organisations engage in CSR because they want to create a political arrangement that would in the long-run suit their private interest [31]. Regardless of the theories mentioned above, the paper argues that the main reason why organisations have chosen to engage in CSR is because of the ethical consideration by organisations that it is in their best interest to contribute to healthy societies, ecosystems and economies and also because of the economic consideration that CSR will enhance the long-run position of the organisations.

### III. Merits And Demerits Of Corporate Social Responsibility

As mentioned earlier, there is no doubt that organisations indulge in CSR activities for various reasons. However, it is equally important in the context of this paper to consider the merits and demerits of pursuing CSR activities. The argument in favour of the concept of CSR starts with the belief that if businesses are to have a healthy climate in which to function in the future, then it is in their long-term self-interest to be socially responsible. It is believed that the merit of CSR is that it can win new business, increase customer retention, develop relationships with suppliers, make an organisation an employer of choice, differentiate an oganisation from its competitors, improve business reputation, reduce risk, and provide access to investment and funding opportunities [32]. The proponents of CSR contend that proacting is more practical and less costly than reacting to social problems once they have surfaced [33]. Therefore, costly social problems such as employee turnover and customer boycott can be avoided by actively pursuing CSR activities. Hence, it would suffice to note that there is a positive relationship between CSR and corporate financial performance [1].

The argument against the concept of CSR typically begins with the classical economic argument championed by Milton Friedman. Friedman [34] contends that there is only one social responsibility of business, which is to use its resources for maximising the profit of the shareholders. Friedman argued that if the free market cannot solve the social problems that exist, then it falls upon the government and not upon business to do the job. The antagonists to CSR argue that a key demerit of CSR is that it dilutes the primary objective of businesses because it requires businesses to sacrifice some profit in order to serve all stakeholders [35]. The antagonist to CSR also argue that businesses are not equipped to handle social activities and at such silent demerit of CSR is that it steers businesses into an area in which they do not have the necessary expertise [35]. Also, there is a resonating argument that it can make businesses less competitive globally, where CSR is undertaken at such a significant cost disadvantage that can reduce business profits and impair business plans to expand its operations globally [36].

### IV. Corporate Social Responsibility And Its Effect On Community Development

Before addressing the effect of CSR on community development, it would be vital to define the term 'community development'. In the context of this paper, we have adopted the widely used meaning of community development given by the United Nations. The United Nations [37] defines 'community development' as an effort of individuals in a community conducted in such a way to help solve community problems with a minimum help from external organisations. External organisations include government and non-government organisations, and corporations of various types and sizes such as small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and multinational corporations (MNCs). The implication of the UN's definition of community development is, therefore, emphasising creativity and self-reliance in the community for short and long term goals, but not to defy the CSR roles of the various types of business firms. Hence, the effect of CSR on community development in the context of this paper encapsulates any direct and indirect benefits received by the community as results of social commitment of corporations to the overall community and social system. The following are the common effects of CSR on community development:

First, CSR helps in sharing the negative consequences as a result of industrialization. Corporations by indulging in CSR activities tend to adopt ethical business processes. For example, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) is a major driving force on the concept of CSR. WBCSD has formulated three conceptual framework on CSR as the generation of economic wealth, environmental improvement, and social responsibility. WBCSD defines what a corporation/company has to do, in order for it to win and enjoy the confidence of the community as it generates economic wealth and responds to the dynamics of environmental improvement.

Second, CSR provides closer ties between corporations and community. By indulging in CSR activities, the existence of corporations in the social system is felt beyond a perception that corporation is a place just to get employment and producers of goods and services. By doing so, corporations and community would stay in peace and harmony [1]. This becomes a social capital that is essential in community development.

Third, the adoption of CSR activities in multinational corporations bring about the transfer of technology. In other words, closer ties help in transfer of technology between MNCs that give concerns on CSR and communities in the host countries. MNC is a corporation that has its facilities and other assets in at least one country other than its home country. Very large MNCs have budgets that exceed those of many small countries [1]. Therefore, through transfer of technology coupled with CSR process, the targeted community would gain in the various aspects of product development and marketing, such as better price and quality, as well as concern for people's well-being [1].

Fourth, CSR helps protect the environment. It cannot be denied that some of the world's largest corporations have made a highly visible commitment to CSR, for example, with the initiatives aimed at reducing their environmental footprint [1]. These corporations take the view that financial and environmental performance can work together to drive corporation growth and social reputation. This attitude can only serve to enhance the employment value proposition such as interest in "going green" gains traction [38]. Environmental based CSR programs are important in promoting human well-being, maintaining the environment integrity and for protecting the environment and natural resources. This includes the availability and accessibility of assured resources like clean air and water and having adequate livelihoods.

Fifth, CSR promotes interdependency between a corporation and community. In other words, the closer link between a corporation and community is another aspect of CSR role in community development because in a long-run it creates sustainable development. Business is expected to be a good corporate citizen. In order to achieve this good corporate citizenship symbol, corporations/companies must adhere to the core principles of sustainable development in the process of conducting their businesses.

Sixth, a CSR program can be seen as an aid to alleviate poverty. According to Carroll [12], it is important for managers and employees to participate in voluntary and charitable activities within their local communities, especially in projects that enhance a community's quality of life. Successfully implemented CSR programs on community development promote growth, reducing poverty and financially beneficial for the members of a society. Multinational companies like shell and Cisco system open new branches and operate in developing countries to provide job opportunities for the local people and directly reduced unemployment among those poor. This situation automatically improves their socio-economic status.

Seventh, a CSR program helps in data gathering for other public organisation function. For instance in the United States, Intel and IBM (examples of mega ICT firms) assisted under-staffed police departments with information gathering and processing by installing cameras with video processing abilities in areas where there are high rates of crimes [1]. Intel has also conducted initiatives to educate local communities on how they can use technology to prevent crime or at least to use it to detect who committed the crime [39]. By indulging in CSR activities, these technology companies no doubt have provided some benefits to the community.

Eighth, CSR brings about corporate sustainability goals. For example, the European Union (EU) has developed a corporate sustainability framework, which identifies a progressive set of economic, social and environmental objectives that companies are encouraged to achieve. In Europe and elsewhere outside the United States, companies have been taking their social role seriously for years, often under the banner of corporate sustainability [1].

## V.    Challenges In Implementing Corporate Social Responsibility

The challenges in the implementation of CSR activities vary from one country to another country i.e. developing and developed countries. The following are the common challenges faced mostly by developing countries in the implementation of CSR:

Lack of community participation in CSR activities. In most developing countries, there is lack of interest of the local community in participating and contributing to CSR activities of companies. This is largely attributable to the fact that there exists little or no knowledge about CSR within the local communities as no serious efforts have been made to spread awareness about CSR and instill confidence in the local communities about such initiatives. The situation is further aggravated by lack of communication between the companies and the communities at the grassroots.

Political and social insecurity. One of the fundamental factors that motivate companies (whether a foreign or local) to do business in a country is the availability of political as well as social security. With political and social security looming in most developing countries (especially in Africa), companies will find it very challenging to engage in CSR for fear of not maximising profit which is to the detriment of its stakeholders and the organisation as a whole.

Negligible and non-existent benefits. Social responsibility should result in positive outcomes for both the business and community. However, often the results falls heavily in favour of the business involved. Businesses invest a comparatively small amount into community projects and then use their effort to promote their brand and gain access to markets all around the country. The public relations and brand building they receive far outweighs their investment in socially responsible projects.

Corruption and selfishness is another challenge faced in the implementation of CSR activities. Most countries, especially in Africa are blessed with abundance of natural and human resources. As a result of this, the countries attract the activities of multinational companies who explore these resources to increase the wealth of the nation as well as transform the economic and social environment for the betterment of community. Apart from increasing the wealth of the nation, most of these companies enshrine in their policy the responsibility of providing some social services to the society they affect through their CSR [36]. It is quite pathetic when the level of corruption in most African countries pose a major challenge to these companies in implementing CSR. Without regards for morals and humanity, when resources meant to be used for implementing CSR to improve the lives of people in the society gets to the hands of the leaders of these communities, they are siphoned and used for their selfish and personal aggrandisement [36].

Apart from corruption and selfishness as addressed above, there is also an expression by the corporations operating mostly in the developing countries about the existence of lack of transparency on the part of the local implementing agencies as they do not make adequate efforts to disclose information on their programs, audit and utilisation of funds meant for CSR activities.

## VI.    Conclusion And Recommendations

The concept of CSR has continued to be the subject of academic and business debate. CSR pertains to business actions taken for reasons beyond the direct profit interest. The concept of CSR encourages companies to consider the interest of the communities by providing social infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, roads, water supply in their area of operations as a way of impacting them positively. Hence, the concept of CSR has been universally acknowledged and as a best practice and a forward looking policy frame through which corporation/companies may positively impact and add value to their local communities. Today, in most developed nations consumers are aware of the corporations' responsibility through better education and through the influence of the media. Therefore, it may no longer be accepted for corporations or business organisations to neglect CSR. The role of businesses in society is no longer focused on creating wealth alone but also focused on acting responsibly towards the community at large. In order to have an effective means and ways of implementing CSR, the paper recommends the following measures to be put in place:

Corporations/companies should liaise with community authorities to identify areas of opportunities available to them to better the lives of the people through the provision of some social amenities. This will go a long way to improve the general living standard of the people.

In addition, corporations/companies should involve the community in the planning, formulation, implementation and evaluation of CSR project. This will eliminate stakeholders' conflict in some communities.

Governments and local authorities should provide enabling political and social environment to motivate companies operating in their respective countries to carry out sustainable social responsibility to improve the lives of the local community.

A proper monitoring system should be put in place to address the challenge pose by negligible and non-existent benefits. This can be done by adopting a balancing act of maximising profits and at the same time serving the local community. One has to bear in mind that CSR requires that attention should be diverted away from the objective of shareholders wealth maximisation (which is a profit motivated based calculation) into the objective of societal wealth maximisation (which is a morally based calculation).

Government agencies who are charged with the responsibility of implementing and enforcing CSR should maintain a high moral and ethical standard to ensure its effectiveness. The same goes to the relevant Ministry and other agencies saddled with the responsibility of enforcing environmental laws in most developing countries should adequately be funded to be able to manage the activities of the government.

Governments and local authorities should explore the areas where a certain amount of tax will be used by corporations/companies to undertake community based projects such as schools, electricity, clean water, jobs and income generating activities. This can be inform of tax exemption. This will make corporations/companies be more responsible in the area of work and contribute significantly to national development.

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