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## **Universities and Corporate Social Responsibility Performance: An Implosion of the Reality**

### **Asemah, Ezekiel S.**

Department of Mass Communication

Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria

E-mail: [asemahezekiell@yahoo.com](mailto:asemahezekiell@yahoo.com)

Phone: +2348035053713.

### **Okpanachi, Ruth A.**

Department of Mass Communication

Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria

E-mail: [acheokpanachi@gmail.com](mailto:acheokpanachi@gmail.com)

+2348033327893

&

### **Olumuji, Emmanuel O.**

Department of Mass Communication

University of Jos, Nigeria

E-mail: [builderemma@yahoo.com](mailto:builderemma@yahoo.com)

Tel: +2348036023940

## **Abstract**

*The paper examines the need for universities to carry out corporate social responsibility programmes. Two theories were used as theoretical framework for the study (stakeholder's theory and uncertainty reduction theory). The qualitative research method was used as the research method while personal interview was used to gather data from the respondents. The population was made up of members of Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Plateau State Chapter. Ten public relations practitioners were interviewed on the need for universities to carry out corporate social responsibility programmes. Responses from the interview show that universities ought to be socially responsible to their stakeholders. Findings further show that CSR helps organisations, including universities to improve on their image. Findings also show that there are various areas of CSR universities can pay attention to; these areas are: economic responsibility, philanthropic responsibility, environmental responsibility, employee wellness and health, employment of qualified lecturers and legal responsibility. The paper therefore concludes that universities in the world over need to always engage in corporate social responsibility so that they can win the goodwill of their stakeholders. Based on the conclusion therefore, the study recommends that universities should endeavour to be social responsible, if they want to win the goodwill of their stakeholders and should endeavour to communicate their corporate social responsibility programmes to the stakeholders so that the stakeholders will understand them.*

**Key words:** Universities, corporate social responsibility, performance and goodwill

## **Introduction and justification of the study**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is about the integrity with which an organisation governs itself, fulfils its mission, lives by its values, engages with its stakeholders and measures its impacts and publicly reports on its activities. Thus, the recognition and acceptance of

corporate social responsibility as a vital communication tool in the hands of all organisations in all modern societies cannot be overemphasised. The need for corporate social responsibility in the management of our environment remains a pertinent issue more than ever before. In fact, it remains an essential instrument of civil social responsibility for the development and transformation of our cities, slums and the provision of necessary amenities, jobs and infrastructural facilities. The idea or thinking of corporate social responsibility is based on the fact that business organisations owe it as a duty, to give back parts of their profits to the society which constitutes the environment in which they are situated to carry out their operations in form of support for the well-being of such community (National Open University of Nigeria, 2010). It is interesting to note that between the 1920s and the 1970s, the old concept of corporate social responsibility viewed from the angle of profit maximisation began to give way to that of harmonisation of interest, especially in the developed countries (Asada, 2010). It can be said that organisations do not operate in vacuum; their activities will impact their surroundings which include their stakeholders, society and other influenced parties. Everyone should strive for a sustainable tomorrow, where the focus is to meet the needs of today without compromising the ability to meet our needs in the future, as well as creating opportunities for tomorrow. This also applies to institutions of higher education.

Organisations such as companies or universities ought to be socially responsible to their host communities, so that they can win their goodwill (Alshuwaikhat and Abubakar, 2008; Haden, Oyler and Humphreys, 2009; Hoffman and Woody, 2008). Similar to corporations, the question of what motivates universities to commit to their social responsibilities exists. However, in the lack of any specific law obliging universities to consider social responsibilities as their core policies and any incentive for considering social practices for universities' performance measurement, the social practices of universities seem to be more voluntarily-based and still unexplored.

Thus, there is a growing interest in social responsibility organisations; organisations are now not only expected to be responsible to their shareholders, but to society in general. Universities, as the centres of knowledge generation and sharing, play a very important role in solving world's problems by ensuring a sustainable tomorrow. However, it is questionable whether universities are concerned about corporate social responsibility performance. Most universities tend to focus only on teaching social responsibility in terms of corporate social responsibility initiatives and do not go beyond this by attempting to improve their communities (Atakan and Eker 2007). Yet, in order to compete in the changing education industry and also, to fulfill their mission in a world in perpetual transformation, higher education institutions must recognise that their own actions should reflect the values and norms which they claim to embody. This means deepening their commitment to corporate social responsibility at the operational level as well as the academic level, mostly by curricular activities. This will not only be beneficial to the institution itself, but also, will be beneficial to the society in general. Therefore, the question that strikes one's attention is: are universities supposed to be concerned about corporate social responsibility (CSR)?

### **Significance of the study**

Corporate social responsibility has been seen for sometime as an activity that should be carried out by organisations; universities are often seen as organisations that are not established for business purpose and so, they tend not to embrace corporate social responsibility; but the fact remains that universities and other tertiary institutions need to carry out corporate social responsibilities so as to win the goodwill of their stakeholders. Most studies on corporate social responsibility are on large multi-national corporations; there are not many studies on corporate social responsibilities of higher institutions of learning. The fact again remains that universities that leave up to their responsibilities in terms of their corporate social responsibility performance are likely to gain the goodwill of their host communities than those that do not leave up to their responsibilities.

Therefore, reputation is based on accomplishments or worthwhile efforts to gain publics' goodwill; it has to be more than mere publicity efforts (Mohamad, Bakar and Rahman, 2007). Moreover, it is commonly accepted that a good reputation can create a strong competitive advantage (Filho, 2010, Smith 2007). Consequently, corporate social responsibility has emerged as a valuable and necessary strategy to the competitive business environment of today. Yet, besides creating a good reputation and a competitive advantage, corporate social responsibility can help the business world to contribute to the well-being of the society, as successful corporations need a healthy society (Porter and Kramer 2006). Since higher education institutions have begun to behave in a business-like manner, they also need to be managed in the same manner. Therefore, implementing corporate social responsibility strategies in a higher education institution should be considered in order to obtain a true competitive advantage and a positive reputation. Moreover, practising what is taught and thereby generating a real example of the academic knowledge can create a unique proposition for any higher education institution. Besides, as the complexity of higher education operations increasingly overlap with societal interests, higher education institutions are pressured for responsible practices. Thus, responsible higher education practices not only will contribute to the well-being of the shareholders and the public in general, but also, these practices will increasingly become a long-term value proposition for the institution itself.

The study serves as a reservoir of knowledge where future researchers can easily tap knowledge as the work is documented. The study also serves as a tool to the management of universities and other tertiary institutions in Nigeria and the world over, in appreciating the need for corporate social responsibility performance and may also give a direction to policy formulation. More so, the study is important because it offers useful recommendations on how universities and other tertiary institutions can better practise corporate social

responsibility so as to win the goodwill and support of their stakeholders.

### **Understanding corporate social responsibility**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be seen as the "economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organisations at a given point in time" (Carroll and Buchholtz 2003, p. 36). The concept of corporate social responsibility means that organisations have moral, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities in addition to their responsibilities to earn a fair return for investors and comply with the law. Carroll and Buchholtz's four-part definition of CSR makes clear the multi-faceted nature of social responsibility. The economic responsibilities cited in the definition refer to society's expectation that organisations will produce goods and services that are needed and desired by customers and sell those goods and services at a reasonable price. Organisations are expected to be efficient, profitable and to keep shareholder interests in mind. The legal responsibilities relate to the expectation that organisations will comply with the laws set down by society to govern competition in the marketplace. Organisations have thousands of legal responsibilities governing almost every aspect of their operations, including consumer and product laws, environmental laws and employment laws. The ethical responsibilities concern societal expectations that go beyond the law, such as the expectation that organisations will conduct their affairs in a fair and just way. This means that organisations are expected to do more than just comply with the law, but also make proactive efforts to anticipate and meet the norms of society even if those norms are not formally enacted in law. Finally, the discretionary responsibilities of corporations refer to society's expectation that organisations be good citizens. This may involve such things as philanthropic support of programmes benefiting a community or the nation. It may also involve donating employee expertise and time to worthy causes.

Corporate social responsibility is an approach whereby a company considers the interests of all stakeholders both within the organisation and in society and applies those interests while developing its strategy and during execution. Corporate social responsibility offers organisations various opportunities not only to differentiate themselves from competitors, but also, for reducing costs (Nolan, Norton and Co., 2009, cited in Ali, Rehman, Yilmaz, Nazir and Ali, 2010). Corporate social responsibility is defined by Wood, (1991), as “a business organisation’s configuration of principles of social responsibility, processes of social responsiveness and policies, programmes and observable outcomes as they relate to the firm’s societal relationships.” Corporate social responsibility is an approach to decision making, which encompasses both social and environmental factors. This means that companies do not only have one objective - profitability, but that they also have objectives of adding environmental and social value to society (Mirfazli, 2008, cited in Mohr, Webb and Harris, 2001). Similarly, Petkus and Woodruff (n.d), cited in Mohr, Webb and Harris (2001) define social responsibility as “both avoiding harm and doing well”. Deetz (2003) opines that corporate social responsibility action is being reactive to the needs of the community. Mohr, et al (2001) has defined corporate social responsibility as “an institution’s commitment to minimising or eliminating any harmful effects and maximising its long run beneficial impact on society”.

Corporate social responsibility has to do with an organisation going out of his way to initiate actions that will impact positively on its host community, its environment and the people generally. It can be seen as a way of acknowledging the fact that some business fall outs have adverse effects on the citizens and society and making efforts to ensure that such negative impacts are corrected (Adeyanju, 2012). Posk (1999), cited in Adeyanju (2012) as a matter of fact, believes that corporate social responsibility means that a corporation should be held accountable for any of its actions that affect people, communities and its environment. This may be the reason why the World Business

Council on Sustainability Development (1998), cited in Adeyanju (2012) describes CSR as “the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large”.

The foregoing implies that corporate social responsibility is concerned with treating the stakeholders of a firm ethically or in a socially responsible manner; since stakeholders exist both within a firm and outside a firm, hence, behaving socially and responsibly will increase the human development of stakeholders both within and outside the corporation. Matten and Moon (2004), cited in Adeyanju, (2012) presents a conceptual framework for understanding corporate social responsibilities, the ‘implicit’ versus the ‘explicit’ corporate social responsibilities. Explicit corporate social responsibility is about corporate policies with the objective of being responsible for what the society is interested in. Explicit corporate social responsibility can for example be voluntary, self-interest driven corporate social responsibilities policies and strategies. Implicit corporate social responsibility is a country’s formal and informal institutions that give organisations an agreed share of responsibility for society’s interests and concerns. Implicit corporate social responsibilities are values, norms and rules which result in requirements for corporations to address areas that stakeholders consider important. Corporate social responsibility is based on the idea that corporations are more than just profit-seeking entities and that they must be responsible for the societal and environmental effects of their business activities (Lantos, 2001).

### **Review of previous relevant studies**

Much has been written on CSR from the business organisation’s perspective. Although universities have been in existence for centuries as the foundation of education and the development of human sustainability, a key question is the relevance of social responsibility of the university which can be termed as USR – University Social



Responsibility. What is the context of USR within the university and what are the mechanisms that are put up to manage USR? The changes and challenges universities face with regard to operations are discussed by Vukasovic (2008) and Felt (2003) in terms of mass expansion of higher education (increased accessibility of higher education), internationalisation, student access and mobility, decrease in public expenditure, diversification and commercialisation of higher education and the impact of information and communication technologies (ICT). All these have impacted on the delivery of quality education as well as on the notions of autonomy, academic freedom, its changing focus and responsibilities towards society (Vasilescu, Barna, Epure and Baicu, 2010).

Nagy and Robb (2008) highlighted the corporatisation of the universities and the increased call as a good corporate citizen. University social responsibility is a rather new concept; universities have tried to exemplify it in their vision and mission statements. In a wider sense of social responsibility, schools and institutions should not only meet all local, state and federal laws and regulatory requirements, but they should treat these and related requirements as opportunities for improvement beyond mere compliance. Schools and institutions should stress ethical behaviour in all stakeholder transactions and interactions. Highly ethical conduct should be required and monitored by the schools and institutions' governance body (Shawyun, 2011). Shwayun (2011) further notes that:

Managing social responsibility requires the use of appropriate measures and human resources for those measures. The schools or universities need to address their current and future impact on society in a proactive manner and ensure ethical practices in all student and stakeholder interactions. University administrators, faculties and staff and students identify, support and strengthen their key communities as part of good citizenship practices. They will need to define performance or outcome

indicators to ensure that the social consciousness and responsibility meet the basic requirements and expectations to service the stakeholders.

The above assertion goes to show the relevance of corporation social responsibility in university administration. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a comprehensive community-change initiative (CCI). By design, comprehensive community change initiatives create community-level change through the active and comprehensive involvement of key community players. Through comprehensive efforts and targeted action plans, communities can improve educational outcomes, employment and health and well-being of community residents. Corporate social responsibility is a driving force in strengthening the process skills of individuals in the community, enabling people to work together toward common goals and objectives (Rausch and Patton 2004). Corporate social responsibility is all about a company knowing, managing and improving its impact on the economy, the environment and society.

A study by Wright (2010), examined how a cohort of university presidents and vice-presidents in Canadian universities conceptualise sustainable development, sustainable universities, the role that universities play in achieving a sustainable future, key issues facing the university and the barriers to implementing sustainability initiatives on campus. They showed that although the majority of participants were well versed in the concept of sustainable development, they were less familiar with the concept of a sustainable university. However, as the author mentioned, majority of them were dedicated to having their university become more sustainable. The participants also listed “financial predicaments”, “lack of understanding and awareness of sustainability issues amongst the university population”, and “a resistance to change” as the main barriers in the path of sustainability. Pollock, Horn, Costanza and Sayre (2009) also insisted that “complex and ineffective governance, traditional disciplinary boundaries and the lack of a shared vision at

academic institutions often hinder university's progress toward leading the world to a more sustainable and desirable future".

Dahan and Senol's (2012) conducted research on "corporate social responsibility in higher education institutions: Istanbul Bilgi University case." The aim of the study was to analyse Istanbul Bilgi University in the context of corporate social responsibility practices. The scholars noted that for any institution, whether public or private, to be successful in corporate social responsibility strategy, corporate social responsibility actors have to be internalised and must be supported by the management of the University. If the management of an organisation does not support corporate social responsibility, there is nothing the workers can do to carry out corporate social responsibilities. So, the study examines corporate social responsibility performance of Istanbul Bilgi University and attempts to ascertain the factors which are likely to affect the corporate social responsibility performance of the university. The researchers adopted interview as a technique of data collection. The researchers conducted semi-structured interview with the interviewees and it lasted for one hour. The researchers also made use of published institutional documents, under graduate students' handbooks, website of the University and nonpublished reports, to gather data for the study.

The findings from Dahan and Senol's (2012) research show that corporate social responsibility performance cannot be successful if the management of an organisation is not in support of it. The second finding shows that Istanbul Bilgi University carries out corporate social responsibility, but the extent to which it does is minimal. The authors concluded that most Universities, Bilgi University inclusive only focus on teaching corporate social responsibility in terms of corporate social responsibility initiatives and do not perform corporate social responsibilities. The authors therefore recommend that Universities should endeavour to carry out corporate social responsibly as it is one of the ways they can with the goodwill of their stakeholders.

Nejati, Shafaei, Salamzadeh and Dareai (2011) conducted research on “corporate social responsibility and universities: A study of top 10 world universities’ websites” The researchers embarked on the research with a view to finding out whether the top ten world Universities actually leave up to expectation in terms of corporate social responsibility performance and if they do, to what extent?. In the study, the authors used content analysis to analyse the websites of the top 10 world universities ranked by Times Higher Education (THE 2009). The authors in analysing the corporate social responsibilities of the universities paid attention to organisational governance, human rights, labour prices, environment, fair operating practices, consumer (students) issues, community involvement and development. The study sample included Harvard University (US), University of Cambridge (UK), Yale University (UK), University College, London (UK), Imperial College London (UK), University of Oxford (UK), University of Chicago (US), Princeton University (US), Massachusetts Institute of Technology (US) and California Institute of Technology (US).

The authors studied the content of the university official websites to analyse different aspects of the social communication and social reporting and tried to identify and match it with CSR core areas. The authors therefore reviewed all the related web pages of the universities, including news, media, department web pages, etc and not just direct links form the homepage. The findings from the study show that leading universities in the world have taken corporate social responsibility seriously and announce this in their websites. Their findings further show that all the 10 Universities studied have covered areas of organisational governance, human rights, labour practices, environment, fair operation practices and consumer issues with consumers considered as students of universities in their websites. The authors therefore concluded that the University’s role in the society is evolving. Universities are no longer just institutions of higher education and research, which grant academic degrees in a variety of subjects, but rather, they are turning into institutions of higher

education and research which train responsible humans, create cutting edge knowledge to solve the issues and problem in the society. Thus, the authors concluded that the entire top 10 world leading universities are in some way or another, engaged in corporate social responsibility and sustainability issues and announce these in their website contents.

### **Theoretical underpinning**

The significance of theories in every research exercise cannot be overemphasised. As noted by Lewis (1958), cited in Amodu (2012, p. 52), good theories enable researchers to put facts in Perspectives and to hypothesise what will happen, even before they happen. Folarin (2005) cited in Amodu (2012, p. 52) avers that theories help researchers to manage realities. Corporate social responsibility performance of organisations, including universities, has theoretical foundations; hence some theories have been selected to serve as theoretical guide for the study. The theories are: stakeholder's theory and interactional view theory and uncertainty reduction theory.

### **Stakeholder's theory**

The concept "stakeholder" according to its first usage refers to groups whose support, the organisation needs, so as to remain in existence. The concept was developed to a theory and championed by Edward Freeman in the 1980s (Freeman and Reed, 1983, p. 89, cited in Amodu, 2012, p.52). Stakeholder theory is a theory of organisational management and business ethics that addresses morals and values in managing an organisation. Freeman (1983) identifies and models the groups which are stakeholders of a corporation and both describes and recommends methods by which management can give due regard to the interests of those groups. In short, it attempts play to address the "Principle of Who or What Really Counts.

The stakeholder theory of CSR is based on the assumption that organisations, whether private or public), have obligations to several groups that make up the society. These constituents are referred to as stakeholders- individuals and groups that are critical to the existence

of the organisation; they influence what the organisation does, or they are being influenced by organisational actions. As an integral part of the normative CSR theories, the stakeholder theory stipulates that management has a moral duty to protect not only the corporation but also the legitimate interest of all stakeholders. Thus, all stakeholders' interests must be maximised at all times. In this way, when an organisation invests in the society, it is expected to reap this in form of improved reputation and understanding when things go wrong; and to equally maximise even the profit motive of the owners in the process (Green, 1997, cited in Olatunji, 2013). Olatunji (2013, p. 34) further avers that:

The stakeholders' concept enables management to address the divergent needs and interests of critical groups, including owners of capital, employees, customers and suppliers, as well as the needs of those of emerging groups including governments, competitors, consumers, advocates, environmentalists, special interest groups and the media. There is need for the interests of these groups to be taken into consideration because they do play vital roles in the success of the business enterprise.

The foregoing implies that the stakeholder's theory presupposes that a corporation has stakeholders who are generally the groups and individuals that benefit from or are harmed by the corporation's actions. The rights of these parties can either be violated or respected by the corporation (Hartman, 2005, cited in Amodu, 2012, p.52). Stakeholder's theory presupposes that the firm is a system of stakeholders operating within the larger system of the host society that provides the necessary legal and market infrastructure for community members. The stakeholder's theory identifies the groups and individuals relative to a corporation; it also describes, as well as, recommends methods by which the interest of each party can be catered for by the management of an organisation. This explains why Philips (2004) avers that the question of who is and who is not a

stakeholder has been discussed for years; some of the questions that appear relevant to a proper conceptualisation are: should stakeholder's status be a reserved right for constituencies having close relationship with organisations? Should the status be seen to apply broadly to all groups that can affect or be affected by the organisation? Should activists, competitors, natural environment or even the media be classified as stakeholders? Freeman and Reed (1983) however made attempt to answer the question; they explain that the narrow definition only includes the groups that are vital to the survival and success of the organisation, while the wider or broad definition accommodates all groups that can affect or be affected by the actions of the corporation.

In the traditional view of the firm, the shareholder view, the shareholders or stockholders are the owners of the company and the firm has a binding fiduciary duty to put their needs first, to increase value for them. However, stakeholder theory argues that there are other parties involved, including government bodies, political groups, trade associations, trade unions, communities, financiers, suppliers, employees and customers. Sometimes even competitors are counted as stakeholders - their status being derived from their capacity to affect the firm and its other morally legitimate stakeholders. The nature of what is a stakeholder is highly contested (Miles, 2012) with hundreds of definitions existing in the academic literature (Miles, 2011). Freeman argued that business relationships should include all those who may "affect or be affected by" a corporation. Approaches to this question have focused on relationships between organisations and stakeholders based on exchange transactions, power dependencies, legitimacy claims or other claims (Cummings and Doh, 2000).

Stakeholder's theory of CSR is related to the belief that corporations have an obligation to constituent groups in society other than stockholders and beyond that prescribed by law or union contact. Thus, stakeholder theory takes into account individual or group with a stake in or claims on the company, including shareholders, employees, customers, supplier and local community. Thus, Webster (2013) avers

that a corporation's stakeholders consist of all those entities that are affected by the corporation and how it does business. This includes shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers and the community in which it exists. The stakeholder value perspective places emphasis on operating the business in a manner that benefits all stakeholders involved. However, the bottom line is that none of a corporation's stakeholders benefit when organisational stability is threatened. Employees rely on the stability of the business to maintain their jobs and the community relies on tax revenue generated by working citizens to maintain infrastructure. None of these needs can be met without maintaining profitable businesses in the community.

The existence of an organisation, as noted by Jones (2004), cited in Amodu (2012, p.52) depends on its ability to create valued and acceptable outcomes for different groups of stakeholder. Consequent upon the explanation given above and the application of the theory in several studies, the theory has been adopted for this work. The theory therefore has serious implication to this study. The underlying assumption is that since every organisation needs the goodwill of the publics, whether internal or external, to succeed therefore, universities have reasons to be socially responsible to their stakeholders. The stakeholder theory is considered appropriate for this study because of its managerial nature. It alerts the organisation to the existence of the array of parties that it is responsible to. In the context of this study therefore, the theory helps universities to become aware of the fact that they have publics (internal and external) that are affected by their actions and services, thus, they need to be socially responsible to them.

### **Uncertainty reduction theory**

This theoretical perspective was originated by Berger and Calabrese in 1975; they drew on the work of Heider (1952). The uncertainty reduction theory asserts that people have a need to reduce uncertainty about others by gaining information about them. Information gained can then be used to predict the others' behaviour. Reducing



uncertainty is particularly important in relationship development, so it is typical to find more uncertainty reduction behaviour among people when they expect or want to develop a relationship than among people who expect or know they will not develop a relationship. Thus, the uncertainty reductions theory explains how interpersonal communication is the primary way to reduce uncertainty. Uncertainty normally occurs when two strangers meet and each of them try to read the other. By interacting each other, one becomes more comfortable and can usually predict future behaviour. When the two communicate, the tension and awkwardness normally decreases, making the relationship more intimate. Over time, as the intimacy of the relationship increases, the uncertainty dissolves. Research has found that communication plays a critical role in initial interactions and relational development. Berger and Calabrese (1975) were the first to investigate the role of communication in initial interactions with the development of a theory of uncertainty reduction. Its widespread influence led to its adoption in other relational and communicative contexts such as small group, organisational, mass communication and computer-mediated communication. Although the theory was initially formulated to explain how people maintain relationship through interpersonal communication, it is applicable to organisational communication and corporate social responsibility. The theory is relevant to the study because uncertainty is unpleasant and therefore motivational; people communicate to reduce it. Thus, universities need to communicate their corporate social responsibility activities to the stakeholders so as to reduce uncertainty on the part of the stakeholders.

### **Methods and materials**

The qualitative research method was adopted in this study. The rationale for using qualitative research method is based on three important characteristics as highlighted by Wimmer and Dominick (2003). The authors observed that a qualitative research is an interpretative study which allows each observer to create reality as part of the research process, which believes in the fundamental

differences in human beings and strives for the depth of the study, rather than the breadth of it.

The personal interview was the qualitative research design adopted for the study. The personal interview enables researchers to gather qualitative data; exploring the need for universities to carry out corporate social responsibility. In this regard, the researchers asked open-ended questions, as this allowed the participants to express their opinions concerning the subject of study. Ten public relations practitioners in Jos, Plateau State, were interviewed on “universities and corporate social responsibility performance”. The ten public relations practitioners were purposively selected from the members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Plateau State Chapter. Three research questions were raised and the interviewees were allowed to explore the answers from different angles. The interview schedule was analysed in line with Yin’s (1984), cited in Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafu and Okpanachi (2012) explanation building method based on the research objectives and in relation to the research questions designed for the study. The three research questions are: are universities supposed to carry out corporate social responsibility? Why should universities carry out corporate social responsibility? What areas of corporate social responsibility should universities pay attention to?

## **Discussion of findings**

**Research Question One:** *Are universities supposed to carry out corporate social responsibility?*

On whether universities should carry out corporate social responsibility, the interviewees said that universities ought to be socially responsible to the environments where they operate; they need to be socially responsible to the stakeholders. Universities are seen as 21<sup>st</sup> century corporations that should not only be interested in training manpower, but should also carry out certain social services to promote sustainable development in the areas where they operate. As noted by Gossen (n.d) “universities are often looked upon to take a

leadership role within societies; they are expected to lead by example, whether through advanced research or by extending the bounds of justice on a global scale. A societal trend that has been gathering momentum over the past couple of decades or so is the significant role of corporate social responsibility (CSR)”. The growing importance of CSR in the business world is clear. Universities have an opportunity to lead in an area that most businesses have recognised as important. Universities can and should build on a tradition of the past decades of attempting to engage in positive social actions.

**Research Question Two:** *Why should universities carry out corporate social responsibility programmes?*

The responses from the interviewees show that there are several reasons why universities should carry out corporate social responsibility programmes. CSR as it were, helps organisations, including Universities to improve on their image. Thus, Universities that value CSR will win the goodwill of their stakeholders. While CSR is in part about building positive relationships, Gossen (n.d) avers that it can help an institution to develop a competitive advantage and stand out from its competitors. Universities realise that it is a competitive market in terms of creating an ongoing stream of satisfied alumni, attracting new students and addressing the concerns of business supporters, a strategy which incorporates CSR is a start.

As argued by Alshuwaikhat and Abubakar (2008), “many of them as a result of their large size, expressive movement of people and vehicles, high consumption of materials and strong development of complex activities, may even be considered as small towns”. Therefore, it is inferred that universities should be responsible toward society and their stakeholders. Stakeholders provide organisations with a range of resources such as capital, customers, employees, materials and legitimacy (Deegan, 2002). They also provide the “licence to operate” to the organisations in return for the provision of socially acceptable or legitimate, actions. To strengthen this social contract which allows organisations to continue operations, they need to be socially

responsible. This can be an underlying reason why we would expect universities to be involved in corporate social responsibility and reporting it to society. However, as discussed by Filho (2000), “although there is a high level of acceptance on the importance of pursuing sustainability - with its economic, social and environmental dimensions, there is a significant misunderstanding regarding the meaning this term and a considerable portion of this terminological confusion is generated in university field”. Gossen (n.d) avers that:

The stakeholders of a university include present students, future students and corporate supporters, among many others. Another group of potential stakeholders are future students. Prospective students are interested not just in the academic reputation of the university, but also in the character of the institution. Incoming students are drawn to institutions that reflect a culture of social responsibility. It makes a difference in terms of selecting a university. Another important group of university stakeholders are corporate supporters of a university. These businesses that provide financial and strategic support to a university are increasingly acclimatised to working with CSR concerns. They will benefit from an alignment of a university strategy that reflects their own concerns. Universities can meet the expectations of stakeholders by adopting a well-conceived CSR strategy in the same manner as other organisations. Universities have an opportunity to embrace the concerns of their stakeholders, such as students and business supporters and to lead in responding in the realm of practising and communicating CSR.

**Research Question Three:** *What areas of corporate social responsibility should universities pay attention to?*

Responses show that there are several areas of CSR that universities can pay attention to; these areas are ethical responsibility, legal responsibility, employee wellness and health, etc. On employee health and wellness, responses show that universities have to be socially responsible to their employees. The employees are an organisation's greatest assets; since the longevity of employees is influenced by the lifestyle choices that they make, universities need to offer tools and incentives that encourage employees to adopt or maintain healthy lifestyles. There is also the need to offer a variety of benefits aimed at protecting employees' physical and emotional health.

Corporate social responsibility also covers commitment to protecting and even improving the environment for the benefit of current and future generations. Environmental protection and preservation makes sound business sense. It not only enriches the lives of our employees, our clients and their loved ones, it can also reduce our expenses and improve our bottom line. Through actions such as, but not limited to, using energy-efficient properties, reducing our reliance on paper and investing in alternative energy and clean air technology. Environmental responsibility covers precautionary approaches to prevent or minimise adverse impacts support for initiatives, promoting greater environmental responsibility, developing and diffusing environmentally friendly technologies and similar areas.

Another area of CSR identified by the respondents is ethical responsibility. Ethical responsibilities are responsibilities that an organisation puts on itself because its owners believe it is the right thing to do; not because they have an obligation to do so. Ethical responsibilities could include being environmentally friendly, paying fair wages or refusing to do business with oppressive countries (Smith, nd). Ethical CSR entails incorporating responsible practices that minimise the societal harms of business operations (Lantos, 2001). There are many ways for universities to implement ethical business practices; these include provision of healthcare benefits to employees, promoting staff as at when due, etc. Furthermore, legal responsibility is another area universities need to pay attention to.

Smith (n.d) avers that an organisation's legal responsibilities are the requirements that are placed on it by the law. Legal responsibilities can range from securities regulations to labour law, environmental law and even criminal law. Universities ought to be socially responsible in the aspect.

Universities also need to take into consideration philanthropic responsibilities. Philanthropic responsibilities are responsibilities that go above and beyond what is simply required or what the organisation believes is right. They involve making an effort to benefit society; for example, by donating services to community organisations, engaging in projects to aid the environment or donating money to charitable causes (Smith, n.d). Philanthropic corporate social responsibility involves giving funds, goods or services, sometimes serving as advertising. Philanthropic CSR describes a company's support for a cause or activity that occurs outside of their business operations, but provides benefit to society. Under the umbrella of philanthropic CSR, there are distinguishing elements that drive motivation for an organisation's involvement and actions; these differences are represented by altruistic (intrinsic) and strategic (extrinsic) motivations (Lantos, 2001; Matten and Moon, 2008; Du, Bhattacharya and Sen, 2010). Altruistic motives are woven into the corporation's character as part of its intrinsic institutional values and environment (Matten and Moon, 2008). An example of intrinsic motives that is frequently cited in the literature is Ben and Jerry's Homemade Ice Cream, which donates a portion of its profits to causes that the founders believe in, like education and gay rights (Lantos, 2001; Hopkins, 2007; Kerlin and Gagnaire, 2009; Du, Bhattacharya and Sen, 2010). Strategic motives, however, are considered more of a business investment, where company contributions are expected to yield a profitable return (Lantos, 2001). Whatever the motives, it is certain that CSR has become an important tool for measuring a company's reputation and public image (Ellen, Webb, and Mohr, 2006).

Universities also need to pay attention to economic responsibility. An organisation's first responsibility is its economic responsibility; that is

to say, an organisation needs to be primarily concerned with turning a profit. This is for the simple fact that if a company does not make money, it will not last, and employees will lose jobs and the company will not be able to think about taking care of its social responsibilities. Before a company thinks about being a good corporate citizen, it first needs to make sure that it can be profitable (Smith, n.d). This implies that economic responsibility covers areas like integrity, corporate governance, economic development of the community, transparency, prevention of bribery and corruption, payments to national and local authorities, use of local suppliers, hiring local labour and similar areas.

### **Conclusion**

The need for universities to engage in corporate social responsibility for the promotion of goodwill cannot be overemphasised. This study has sufficiently demonstrated that universities need to engage in CSR in order to win the goodwill of their host communities and other important stakeholders. Universities are 21<sup>st</sup> century organisations that should carryout corporate social responsibility programmes. The study shows that there are various areas that universities can pay attention to: these areas are: economic responsibility, philanthropic responsibility, environmental responsibility, employee wellness and health, employment of qualified lecturers and legal responsibility. The paper therefore concludes that universities in the world over need to always engage in corporate social responsibility so that they can win the goodwill of the stakeholders. Based on the findings and conclusion therefore, the study gives these recommendations: Universities should endeavour to be social responsible if they want to win the goodwill of their stakeholders and universities should endeavour to communicate their corporate social responsibility programmes to the stakeholders so that the stakeholders will understand them.

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