

## **CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: A VERITABLE TOOL FOR CORPORATE IMAGE-MAKING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The article examined corporate social responsibility as a veritable tool for corporate image-making and community development. The researchers clearly explained each keyword and established how corporate organizations can use corporate social responsibility to build an image for their selves and also sustain the image as well as develop the communities/premises where they operate. The CSR is a major portfolio of the public relations unit/department of any organization, therefore, is saddled with making the organization accepted within the community they exist by bringing about development in all forms – social, economic, political, cultural and human. However, there are certain factors controlling corporate image, some of which are: newsworthiness and activities; the chief executive officer (CEO); employers; location; products, services, ideas; and communication effort. The study concluded that there is need for corporate bodies to be responsive to their environment and to the needs of their host communities, as well as being able to make the best out of their business through profit maximization.*

**Key Words:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Corporate Image, Development, Community Development

### **INTRODUCTION**

*The strength and weakness, as well as the continued existence of corporate institutions and their growth, do not only rely on advertising and public relations, but also on their Corporate Social Responsibility. Every organization, no doubt, thrives on a favorable environment. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the corporate institutions to make an environment favorable for their smooth operations. Corporate Social Responsibility is, therefore, both a tool and a means for corporate institutions to build and sustain a good image for themselves. However, this reward- good image, comes with a task- community development. The corporate institution is thereby obliged to assist in no little way in the development of the community (i.e. their host community). In doing so, it is endearing itself to the hearts of the locals, chiefs and village heads. Community development by corporate institutions cannot/should not come in only infrastructural developments. In this context, they can go a bit further in awarding scholarships to the locals or the people indigenous to the community to study in national schools or even abroad. This is the human development aspect of it, as the community does not only mean a geographical area but also people living in the area.*

### **The Philosophy of Corporate Social Responsibility**

The philosophy behind the act of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for organizations is that firms have to contribute to the development of their host communities. Leaving an environment better than one meets it demands that we assist in providing assistance to better the lives of people and state of things in our immediate environment (Uchehara, 2019).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) simply means the social responsibility of corporate institutions to their host communities by providing them with basic and essential social amenities. This submission was supported by Nworgu (2007) when he stated that corporate social responsibility borders on the ability of a corporate institution to provide basic and essential social services and or amenities to the communities where they operate. Nnamani (2010) submits that corporate social responsibility is “accountability in business and performance of social and environmental roles”, (p.237). However, the scholar further stressed that “it is generally regarded as the opposite of short-termism”, (p.238). Chile (2014, p.90) views CSR as a social investment and excellent opportunity to “bank” goodwill in the community. In view of this, he further posits that social responsibility companies refrain from actions that may be perceived by the public as insensitive or callous.

In light of the foregoing, Ajala (2001) adds that CSR is all that public relations is about because making involvement in the community is a natural part of successful business practice. According to Okoro, Udeze, and Agbo (1999), the interests of the community are expressed through government regulations and at times through unexpected demonstrations and other actions by the community neighbors. Aliede (2010, p.90) opines that the concept of corporate social responsibility is not a face-scratching exercise. It is rather an in-depth, integrated and management philosophy, which should touch all the operational segments of an organization. It entails balanced decision-making detailed enough to positive work in the overall interests of both the companies and their diversified classes of stakeholders and publics.

Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives are not only about philanthropy but translating these ideas into practical business strategies. Corporate Social Responsibility is driven efforts do not only relate to donating money but it talks about integrating social and ethical practices into business strategies that help the consumer in creating a positive brand image. With the increase in Corporate Social Responsibility awareness some companies promote a very elementary understanding of corporate governance and ethical standards (Kaur and Agrawal, 2011).

Corporate Social Responsibility thrives better in an atmosphere or environment of peace, rather than in an anarchical one.

### **Image and Corporate Image: A Conceptual Overview**

According to Udeze, Okoro, and Agbo (2010), image is the totality of impressions people have about company, an individual, an organization.

The personality of an organization as perceived by its various publics. This personality is formed not necessarily on the objective evidence but by impressions reviewed and subjective

evaluation made by the various corporate publics. Image is, therefore, the overall reputation or personality achieved by the organization in its public interface.

From the above, we can say that image is the reputation or perception of a person, group or corporate body, held by others, often as a result of what they (the corporate body) do or have done.

Corporate image is the immediate mental picture that audiences have of an organization. Corporate images can be fashioned more quickly through well-conceived communication programs. Corporations want to project an accurate and positive image to their stakeholders. They also covet a favorable reputation in the minds of these constituents. Corporate image is so important to organizations that no organization jokes with building and sustaining their corporate image. Be it a company or even a political party. Even political parties and politicians regard image in the same way as public relations officers of companies do, thus Okoye and Oparaugo (2019, p.147) write "...whether through mass media placement, events or social media efforts, building awareness of the candidate's name, party, platform and special areas of interest helps solidify his **image** in the minds of the general public.

However, Oparaeke (2012, p.58) sees a corporate image of an organization as the communication of all impressions perceived of that organization through its products, services, attitudes, behavior, social responsibility and responsiveness by all contacts with whom it has business, social occupational relationships. In order words, it is the summary of perception of all the relevant publics which have working relationship with the organization.

Corporate image can also be seen as the totality of the opinions and impression by the public has about an organization. The opinion or impression of the public about an organization is usually based on factors such as:

- Management style
- Organization's history
- Quality of product or service
- Staff attitude
- Corporate identity
- Performance
- Contributions to societal development

Corporate image is therefore concerned with building confidence and credibility in the organization. The corporate image of an organization is one of its most valuable assets. A good public image enables a corporation to make or build a corporate image where they operate, i.e. their host community. For example, no organization would want to be identified with negative things hence, sanctions could be matted out against staff of organizations who misrepresent the organization.

### **Factors Controlling Corporate Image**

1. News Worthiness and Activities: The public relations practitioner must always be promoting those things in his organization, which will generate interest among the target publics.
2. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO): The CEO is the person heading an organization, therefore he is responsible and accountable for the company or organization and its performance. Therefore, his personality is regarded as a symbol or reflection of its image.
3. Employers: The caliber, training, education, standard and efficiency of the employers of an organization largely reflects and determines the image and personality of the organization.
4. Location: The premises/operational environment of an organization plays an important role in building a corporate image for the organization.
5. Products, Services, Ideas: The products, services, and ideas of an organization are considered the ultimate and final expression of corporate image. Without a good product, idea or service, whatever the organization does can never be considered right; and will be looked at somehow, by the general public.
6. Communication Effort: The organization through its Public Relations Officer (PRO) and other mouth-piece(s) of the organization must be in constant communication with the public in a bid to build and/or retain a corporate image.

(Source: Garbett, 1988).

### **Meaning of Development**

Development, in its most simplistic definition, means progress. It presupposes change, for the better. Such change might have to transcend a lot of variables or aspects of life and circumstances (Nwosu, 2005). According to Ojobor (2017), there is an agreement among scholars that development is an improvement in the quality of life, which brings benefits to a majority of the people. Okoro (2005) and Ojobor (2017) describe it as a positive change for the better from conditions (social, economic, political, cultural and human) that are no longer considered good enough for the goals and aspirations of a society, to those that are most likely to meet those goals and aspirations. Agbo, Ojobor, and Ezinwa (2010, p.108) submitted that there seems to be a general agreement that any development process must exhibit the following features:

- Development should bring change;
- This change should be for the better;
- This change should be for the benefit of the major of the people;
- The process should be participating, that is, involve the people as closely as possible.

Also, Okwumba (2017, p.58) stated:

- Development is an unilinear and irreversible process inherent in every single society;
- Development implies structural differentiation and functional specialization;

- The process of development can be divided based on certain economic criteria into distinct stages showing the level of development achieved by each other;
- Development can be stimulated by external endogenous factors, and by internal measures that support modernized sectors and modernized traditional sectors.

Olewe (2001, p.2-4) also outlines some characteristics that development should have. They are that:

- It should be a participatory process of social change and be sensitive to the environment;
- It should be a rational process of organization that is systematic about program formulation and implementation;
- It should provide quantitative and qualitative transformation in all sectors as well as adequately mobilize the masses to enable them to contribute meaningfully to socioeconomic, political and cultural development.

Others, according to Ojobor(2017, p.15) are:

- Greater equality and freedom
- Equitable distribution of development benefits
- Manageable population growth
- Free flow of information
- Growth of social infrastructures like roads, water, electricity, health institutions, and schools, and
- Stable political system

### **The Concept of Community and Community Development**

Omeje (2010) posits that the community is a relatively small and isolated center with stable population in which all economic and social services necessary to live can be maintained. Community is a social organism made up of all the interaction among the residents and the organizations within which they identify (Nnamani, 2010). A human community requires positive interrelationships among all members in order to function smoothly and efficiently. A company, or institution (be it hospital or multi-national) can have difficulty operating effectively in a community that is disrupted or inefficient, it is necessary for them to accept the responsibility of corporate citizenship.

Community development, as a concept, means the overall development-economic, social, political, infrastructural, human, etc. of a community with a view to improving the quality of life of the community people. It can also be seen as an effort geared towards improving the standard of living of a community by providing them with basic and social amenities. Community development (CD) refers to initiatives undertaken by a community with partnership with external organizations or corporation to empower individuals and groups of people by providing these groups with the skills they need to effect change in their own communities. These skills are often concentrated around making use of local resources and building political power through the

formation of large social groups working for a common agenda. Community developers must understand both how to work with individuals and how to affect communities' positions within the context of larger social institutions (Ismail, 2009)

Community development seeks to empower individuals and groups of people with the skills they need to effect change within their communities.

However, community development can also be regarded as the improvement of the lifestyle as well as making available those non-existing facilities in a community. These facilities range from good water, electricity, motorable roads, adequate health care, etc.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Corporate social responsibility has become a veritable tool for corporate image-making and community development. Therefore, there is a need for corporate bodies to be responsive to their environment and to the needs of their host communities, as well as being able to make the best out of their business through profit maximization. Companies must be involved in corporate social responsibility programme and projects. This is about corporate charity as opposed to corporate stinginess (Nworgu, 2007). Companies/corporate institutions have some social obligations to their host communities where they operate. They must carry out their functions. It is by this doing this that they become socially responsible to the community where they exist and operate, thus building a corporate image for themselves and at the same time, developing the community. Corporate social responsibility is, however, concerned with many aspects of a company's impact, from sourcing to service delivery or product disposal and can affect a host of cost-based as well as reputational aspects of a business.

In the light of the foregoing, Chile (2014, p.92) submits that "because corporate social responsibility programme affects the image of a company, it has become part of the public relations portfolio." The major job of the public relations department of a company that adopts corporate social responsibility philosophy is to study the problems of the community and sensitize the management of the various categories of corporate social responsibility which the company should undertake at an appropriate moment. For example, a company can identify that a community stream is far away from the residential area, and decide to provide them with bore-hole water.

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