



SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PERFORMANCE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, society has witnessed an unprecedented neglect in the area of corporate social responsibility; this situation has diversely been greeted with several conflicts between host communities and the guest enterprises resulting in kidnapping, hostage takings, total shutdown of company facilities and eventual financial losses. In this paper, we examined the social responsibility performance of higher educational institutions in Nigeria. Four research questions were asked to produce the findings that: (1) host communities rate the institutions moderate in their social responsibility performance, (2) the most acknowledged social responsibility of the institutions by the communities is the offer of concessionary admission to indigenes of host communities, (3) host communities expect special employment opportunities from the institutions and (4) that the level of satisfaction of the communities regarding social responsibility of the institutions is very low. The paper concludes that higher institutions should boost their relationship with host communities through increased response to social issues.

Keywords: Social Responsibility, Performance, Host Communities, Educational Institutions

INTRODUCTION

In modern societies, no one has to tell businesses and organizations that their jobs consist of more than simply working towards profits. Several studies have indicated that there are signs and portents that signal the broader and more socially significant message that the wider environmental factors in business and society require attention. The primary concern of any organization's survival is dependent on how well it has operated its business within the environment in which it exists. The society therefore, is only not indispensable but perhaps the very essence of the business, hence, the extent to which successful businesses exist is a reflection of how the society views it.



The issue of social responsibility of various kinds of enterprises, organizations, government agencies and higher educational institutions has long been emphasized by scholars and professionals in the management discipline. According to Baridam (1995), “being socially responsible will make it easier for the firm to survive and enjoy satisfactory long- run profit”. This means that, there is need for mutual understanding to exist between institutions of any kind and the society where they operate. Put succinctly, organizations should relate their operations and policies to the social environment in ways that are mutually beneficial to the company and society.

According to Osaze (1991), while an organization is busy establishing goals, objectives and strategies for achieving its stated purpose, it must recognize that it is operating within an environment which expects it to operate in such a manner that would not disrupt its very essence. It is therefore believed that social involvement creates favorable public image, as a result, corporations have had to be socially responsible in order to operate successfully without violence arising from the communities in which it operates.

If a business organization, government agency, charitable organization or even a higher institution is to reach its goals effectively and efficiently, ways of accurately measuring and managing social responsibility performance must be found and implemented. The complexity of the society today, including the social, economic, political and environmental problems, coupled with the inability of governments to adequately address the needs and yearnings of her citizenry evokes a phenomenal anticipation that corporations be more socially involved in solving some of the major problems facing the communities.

The scenario painted above has necessitated the constant yearnings from the society on corporations and higher educational institutions alike to participate in providing for societal wellbeing. However, the extent to which this condition has been met or otherwise remains obscure and calls for scholarly attention, this is the whole essence of our paper. To achieve the purpose of our paper, four research questions are put forward:

- (1) To what extent has the institutions acted as socially responsible citizens?
- (2) What projects or social challenges have the institutions addressed in the past?
- (3) To what extent are the community members satisfied with such projects or social challenges?
- (4) What are the likely projects or social issues the community would prefer to be addressed by the institutions?

The Concept of Social Responsibility

The concept of CSR has gained unprecedented momentum in business and public debates and has become a strategic issue which affects the way in which a company does business (Ogutande and Mafimisebi, 2011). The World Economic Forum (2003) defined corporate citizenship as the contribution a company makes to society through its core business activities, its social investment



and philanthropy programs, and its engagement in public policy. Keith Davies (1960) see the concept as the “businessman’s decision and actions taken for reasons at least partially beyond the firm’s direct economic or technical interest”.

Similarly, Social responsibly has been diversely represented as obligation that is beyond law and economics for a firm to pursue long-term goals that are good for society Robins and Coulter (1999), obligation to pursue those policies, to make those decisions or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of a society (Bowen, 1953).

From a broader perspective emanates the view that corporate social responsibility is a four-part definition of CSR which encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations that society has of any given organization; namely: (1) be profitable (economic), (2) be obedient to laws and regulations (legal), (3) do what is right, fair and just (ethical), and (4) be good corporate citizens (philanthropic / discretionary) Carrol's (1979). This argument was further advocated with a pyramidal illumination as represented in figure 1.

Espousing Carrol’s view, it is pertinent to note that society expects business to conform to laws and regulations formulated by governments that act as the ground rules under which business must operate. Differently paraphrased, corporations are expected to pursue profits within the framework of the law, which establishes what are considered fair operations. Society also expects that all goods and services and relationships with stakeholders will meet at least minimal legal requirements.

Ethical responsibilities include those activities that are not expected or prohibited by society as economic or legal responsibilities. Standards, norms, or expectations that reflect concern for select stakeholder input is fair, just, or in keeping with their moral rights. Ethics or values may be reflected in laws or regulations, but ethical responsibilities are seen as embracing the emerging values and norms that society expects of business even if not currently required by law. These responsibilities can be thought of as things the corporation “should do.”

These responsibilities are more difficult for business to deal with as they are often ill-defined or under continual public debate. Ethical responsibilities also involve the fundamental ethical principles of moral philosophy, such as justice, human rights, and utilitarianism. The changing or emerging ethical responsibilities are constantly pushing legal responsibilities to broaden or expand, while at the same time expecting business’s ethical behavior to go beyond mere compliance with laws and regulations.

Philanthropic responsibilities involve being a good corporate citizen and include active participation in acts or programs to promote human welfare or goodwill. Examples are contributions to the arts, charities, and education. Such responsibilities are not expected in an



ethical or moral sense, making philanthropy more discretionary or voluntary on the part of business even though society may have such expectations of business. Few in society expect corporations to have these responsibilities and they can be thought of as things corporations “might do.”

Carroll views the pyramid as a basic building-block structure, with economic performance as the foundation since it is the unrevealed core interest of organizations, and organizations are often time shy to put it as priority before the public. At the same time, business is expected to obey the law, behave ethically, and be a good corporate citizen. Although the responsibilities are portrayed as separate elements, in practice they are not mutually exclusive; however, the separation aids managers to appreciate the different obligations that are in a constant but dynamic tension with one another. For example, there are particular tensions between economic and ethical responsibilities.

In summary, Carroll views the total social responsibility of business as involving the simultaneous fulfillment of the four responsibilities—which, stated in pragmatic terms, means that the corporation should strive to make a profit, obey the law, be ethical, and be a good corporate citizen.

Judging from the points made above, the central theme of the subject of social responsibility hovers around the argument that social responsibilities are actions taken by organizations in being socially and environmentally interested as it engages in business practices to the extent that stakeholders benefit. Examples of such stakeholders are consumers, government, employees, stockholders the host communities in particular. Samples of these actions are in the areas of provision of basic infrastructural amenities, award of contracts, employment opportunities, scholarship awards, pollution abatement etcetera. Despite the burgeoning support associated with social responsibility practices, some scholars have argued unfavorably.

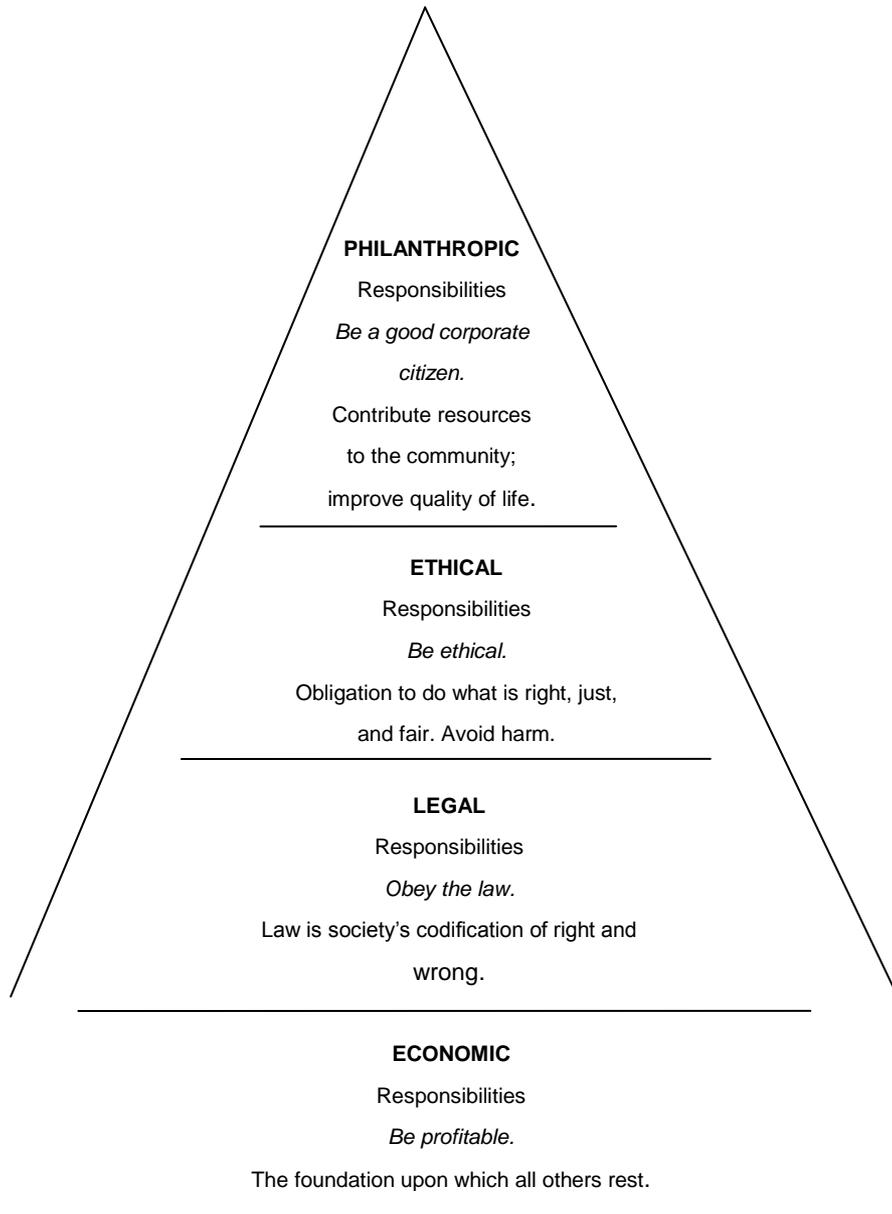
Arguments against Corporate Social Responsibility

One of the best known arguments against businesses performing social responsibility activities was advance by [Friedman \(1970\)](#). He argues that “to make business managers simultaneously responsible to business owner for reaching profit objectives and to society for enhancing societal welfare represents a conflict of interest that has the potential to cause the demise of business as it is known today”. Again [Friedman \(1970\)](#) posited that

“... there is one and only one social responsibility of business-to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition, without deception or fraud ... few trends could so thoroughly undermine the very foundations of our free society as the acceptance by corporate officials of a social responsibility other than to make as much money for their stockholders as possible.”



Figure-1. Carroll's Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility



The argument against social responsibility is further buttressed in [Wood \(1991\)](#) as follows:

- Profit maximization is the primary purpose of business, and to have any other purpose is not socially responsible and constitutes a sabotage of the market mechanism,
- Business corporations are responsible to the shareholders and, in effect, have no authority to operate in the social area
- Social policy is the jurisdiction of governments, not business
- Business lacks training in social issues, and lacks social skills necessary to carry out social programs.

- Social responsibility is viewed by some as another excuse to let big business increase its power. The increase in power comes as a result of business becoming involved in social as well as economic matters. Imposing business values on social issues may lead to inappropriate domination: business already has sufficient power, and it would be inappropriate to extend that power to other matters.
- Business involvement in social matters increases costs—not only costs to the organization, but also possibly even social costs—instead of decreasing them. This in turn may lead to business failures.
- There is no acknowledged source of reliable guidance or policy for business in social responsibility questions, and it is not easy to make the choice between responsible and selfish action in social issues. Social responsibility is an elusive concept for which few standards are available to evaluate and control the actions of corporations.

Conversely however, proponents of social responsibility have hinged their debate on the grounds that social responsibility performance brings about long-run benefits, cordial relationships among stakeholders, as well as good public image to practicing organizations. This view is discussed in the next heading

Reasons for Involvement in CSR

[Robins and Coulter \(1999\)](#) and [Wood \(1991\)](#)'s views on CSR are succinctly put as follows: that:

- Business should operate in such a way as to fulfill society's needs or expectations. It should do so for a very pragmatic reason: it is believed in some quarters that business functions by the consent of society and therefore must be sure to satisfy the needs of society.
- A social responsibility role should be undertaken in order to prevent some public criticism and discourage further government involvement or regulation. This is a defensive approach designed to offset possible government action against those in the business system who use their power irresponsibly.
- Business must realize that society is a "system" of which corporations are a part, and that the system is interdependent. Therefore, if business institutions interact with others in society, the need for social involvement along with increasing interdependence comes the need to participate in the complex system that exists in society.
- Social responsibility is in the shareholder's interest; that is, being socially responsible will simply be profitable, especially in the long term. Corporate virtue is good for profits.
- A poor social responsibility role on the part of the corporation means poor management to some investors. They view failure to perform in society's interest in much the same way as they view the corporation's failure to perform in financial matters. Similarly, consumers are showing increasing interest in and support for responsible business practices.



- Business must realize that social problems can become opportunities, or can lead to profits. Expenditures on pollution abatement may result in the retrieval of materials that were formerly disposed of as waste, or may allow for equipment to operate more efficiently, thereby generating more profits on future operations.
- Preventing is better than curing. It is better to take a proactive stance than a reactive one.

METHODS

The study was a simple descriptive survey, and People in four communities that host higher institutions in Rivers state formed the study populations. These communities are: Nkpolu Oroworukwo (Rivers State University of Science and Technology), Rumuolumeni (Ignatius Ajuru University), Bori (Rivers State Polytechnics) and Omoku (Federal College Technical). Purposive sampling technique was employed in the selection of thirty (30) respondents from each of the communities. The respondents were however drawn from within the category of opinion leaders in the communities comprising Community Development Committee members, Clan heads, Chiefs, Women leaders and youth leaders. A total of 120 respondents were issued questionnaire or interviewed, out of which only 86 copies of the questionnaire were successfully retrieved in useable form.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

To what extent has the institutions acted as socially responsible citizens?

Table 1 provides answers to research question one

Table-1. extent to which institutions have acted as socially responsible citizens

Extent in scale	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	7	8.1%
High	21	24.4%
Moderate	38	44.2%
Low	6	7.00%
Very low	14	16.3%
Total	86	100%

Source: Research data, 2013

From Table 1, 8.1% of the respondents agreed that the higher institutions in their community have been socially responsible to a very high extent, 24.4% agreed for high extent, 44.2% said it is to a moderate extent, 7% says it is to a low extent while 16.3% says it is to a very low extent.

Research Question 2

What projects or social challenges have the higher institutions address in your community?



Table 2 provides answers to research question 2

Table-2.Projects or social challenges addressed most by higher institutions in their host communities

S/No	Projects/Social Challenges	Frequency	Percentages
1.	Concessionary admissions	32	37.2%
2.	Scholarships/Bursaries	12	14.0%
3.	Award of contracts to community contractors	7	8.1%
4.	Extension of campus electricity to community	2	2.3%
5.	Cash and gift donations during festive seasons	10	11.6%
6.	Award of honorary degrees to deserving indigenes	1	1.2%
7.	Special employment opportunities	10	11.6%
8.	Reservation of top positions for indigenes	2	2.3%
9.	From 1-8 is applicable	10	11.6%
TOTAL		86	100%

Source: Research data, 2013

From Table 2, 37.2% of the respondents agreed that the higher institutions in their communities give concessionary admission to indigenes, 14.0% said it is scholarship awards/Bursaries, 8.1% agreed it is awards of contracts, 2.3% opted for extension of electricity, 11.6% said it is cash donations, 1.2% consented to award of honorary degrees, 11.6% said it is special employment opportunities, 2.3% agreed it is reservation of top positions and 10% agreed that the institutions touch all the areas so listed.

Research Question 3

To what extent are the community members satisfied with the type of projects or social challenges addressed by the institutions

Table 3 provides responses to research question 3

Table-3. Extent of Satisfaction

Extent of satisfaction in scale	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	4	4.7%
High	17	19.8%
Moderate	10	11.6%
Low	23	26.7%
Very low	32	37.2%
Total	86	100%

Source: Research Data, 2013

Table 3 reveals that 4.7% of the respondents agreed their level of satisfaction is very high, 19.8% said it high, 11.6% said their satisfaction is moderate, 26.7% said it is low, whereas 37.2% said their satisfaction is very low.

Research Question 4

What project or social problem do the communities preferably expect the institutions to address?

Table 4 provides responses to the above research question

Table-4. Preference expectation of communities

Expected projects	Frequency	Percentage
Concessionary admissions	21	24.4%
Scholarships/Bursaries	16	18.6%
Award of contracts to community contractors	4	4.7%
Extension of campus electricity to community	-	-
Cash and gift donations during festive seasons	8	9.3%
Award of honorary degrees to deserving indigenes	-	-
Special employment opportunities	27	31.4%
Reservation of top positions for indigenes	10	11.6%
TOTAL	86	100%

Source: Research Data, 2013

Table 4 indicates that 24.4% of the respondents prefer the institutions to grant concessionary admission, 18.6% show preference for scholarships and bursary, 4.7% opts for award of contracts, zero percent accepted extension of electricity and award of honorary degrees, 31.4% agreed for special employment opportunities, and whereas 11.6% said they prefer reservation of top positions to be occupied by their indigenes.

DISCUSSION

Majority of the respondents are of the view that higher institutions in their communities have only shown a moderate interest in being socially responsible. Such status is basically unimpressive because it simply indicates that the organizations in question have not bought into the burgeoning global call on corporate bodies to be socially responsible. It was equally found that concessionary admission forms the highest and most implemented social responsibility of the higher institutions. By concessionary admission, we refer to conditions where indigenes of host communities who fall below the prerequisites for admission are granted certain waivers. The challenge of this practice though is enormous because it is a large window for introducing non- teachable students into the system.

It was equally gathered that the higher institutions are rated very low in terms of social responsibility performance. The implication is that so much more are expected of them in this respect in order to boost relationship with the communities. And lastly, we found that the communities expect special employment packages far and above any other projects. This means that they would want their sons and daughters whose qualifications may be inadequate per se to be given priority considerations that will place them at advantage above other applicants.



That is to say that it is a requirement that indigenes of host communities be given priority consideration regarding employment; not minding their educational qualifications, competences and abilities. In the extreme scenario young men and women demand for monthly salaries from organizations they do not work for under the guise of ‘**stay at home status**’; by this, the name of such person is only mentioned on pay days and never at work points.

CONCLUSION/ RECOMMENDATIONS

The rate of awareness among the host communities in terms of its relationship with their hosts has been on the increase. This situation has got to a point when common lock-up shops are now expected to be solving societal problems within its neighborhood. By this development, no organization can hide anymore and failure to leave up to expectation tantamount to breakdown of peaceful coexistence and trouble with her host community. This is the reason why so much expectation is now made on the higher institutions which by status are merely nonprofit making organizations.

In response to this situation, higher institutions are expected to boost its relationship with her host communities through constant social supports. This can be done through concessionary admissions, but in doing that, reasonable standards must form threshold for waivers to avoid offering admission to those who will eventually cause social problems in the school environment. More so, indigenes of the communities who meet minimum standards for employment should be employed into sensitive positions where their people will be proud and perceive the organization as very caring and socially sensitive.

Finally, for there to reign a peaceful coexistence, opinion leaders, chiefs and elites of these communities should be given contracts, even though it is just the non technical ones assuming they lack the expertise. By so doing, the beneficiaries will not only talk good of the institution, but will also influence their community positively using the dividends from such transactions and everyone will ultimately perceive the organization as good corporate citizens.

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