
ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Assessing the CSR and Community Development Programmes of Lafarge Africa Plc in Cross River State

Lawrence Ekwok | Oгри, Eric Ugor

^{1,2}Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, University of Calabar, Cross River State.

Abstract: There is a growing consciousness among the global business community that corporations or business organisations can no longer act independently of the individuals or key stakeholders in their business operations, especially members of the host communities. Part of the realisation stems from the fact that creating and maintaining mutually beneficial relationship with host communities is highly dependent on the extent to which firms contribute to the sustainable development of the community and its inhabitants. This study assesses the Corporate Social Responsibility and community development programmes of Lafarge Africa Plc in Cross River State, against the backdrop of sustainable community development. The survey research design was used to gather data for the study; and interview, group discussion and questionnaire were utilised as research instruments to obtain information for the study. This study was premised on the stakeholder theory, which states that companies or firms should be accountable to their stakeholders, which are the group of individuals that are affected by the firms' activities. Findings revealed that proactive CSR is an essential mechanism for driving sustainable community development. This was evident by the contribution of Lafarge's intervention in the advancement of the host communities at different levels. However, the company's approaches to CSR still partly trail the path of philanthropic or charitable donation as most projects were selected and executed without due recourse to the people's input. Based on the above discoveries, the researchers recommend that the company should adopt a more participatory approach in selecting the kind of development project to embark on based on needs priority of the people. Also, the researchers suggests that rather than relying on reactive or make-shift measures to manage its relationship with the people, the company should adopt a more proactive communication approach in order to avert potential altercations with members of the host communities.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainable Community Development, Mutual understanding, Proactive CSR

INTRODUCTION

Given the shrinking role of government in providing the basic infrastructural

needs of the citizens due partly to limited resources, coupled with rising abrasive systemic corruption, the role of the private sectors as major drivers of national development is becoming increasingly essential. As part of the social contract between business and the society, corporations are expected to behave in a socially responsible manner towards the public by complementing their social and economic needs as well as ensuring optimal environmental sustainability. Such gestures are encapsulated in the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of every corporate entity.

According to the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) defines CSR as “the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community and society at large to improve their quality of life”, (WBCSD, 2002, p. 2). This entails that CSR involves the dedication of corporations to enhance the general well-being of both the internal and external publics. In other words, besides catering for the welfare of members of the host community in which a company is located, CSR programmes also involve catering for the welfare of employees, who constitute the internal public of an organisation. However, the concern of this study is the external public, particularly Lafarge’s host communities. According to Daramola (2008, p. 20): “As a specialisation of PR, CSR (through effective community relations) is devoted to creating a relationship of good neighbourliness between an organisation and groups within the community in which it is physically located”. CSR as a business practice revolves around the idea that corporate entities can no longer act as separate economic entities operating in detachment from the host community or the society at large. According to Hohnen (2007, p. 2), “CSR should be seen as the way that firms – working with those most affected by their decisions – can develop innovative and economically viable products, processes and services within core business processes, resulting in improved environmental protection and social conditions.” In other words, corporations are required to embark on programmes aimed at impacting positively on the socio-economic development of members of their host communities, as well as, adopt environmental friendly business operations. These constitute the three bottom-line of sustainable CSR – social, economic and environmental sustainability.

Similarly, citing Hopkins (2007), Scarlett (2011, p. 4) consider CSR as “a business concept whereby a company seeks to behave in socially and environmentally responsible ways so that its business contributes to society in meaningful and lasting ways.” In other words, sustainable CSR is usually about development efforts aimed at meeting the basic needs of the present and future generation – lasting development. It promotes social equity, economic prosperity and environmental sustainability. CSR is seen as a social contract between business entities and the society in which it operates. Being an integral part of the communities in which they operate, businesses are becoming increasingly aware that their long-term success is depend heavily on continued display goodwill and the sustenance of mutual relationship with a wide range of individuals, groups and institutions - stakeholders.

In recent time, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practice of corporations in Nigeria is gaining more recognition. Most multinational and indigenous oil and gas companies, telecommunication, financial and manufacturing sectors are gradually embracing the ideals of CSR. Nevertheless, the problem is that the approach to CSR practice in Nigeria still leaves much to be desired. According to Amaeshi, Adi, Ogbechie and Amao (2006, p. 2), “many indigenous firms in Nigeria perceive CSR practice as corporate philanthropy aimed at addressing socio-economic development challenges in the country”. It is not uncommon to find CSR discourses in theory and practice overtly constructed along such moral ends as philanthropy and rendering of charitable services to the people. It has become very apparent that such gestures do no amount to anything in terms of real development initiatives. Development initiative is a conscious, deliberate and purposeful attempt aimed at impacting positive change in the lives of the people. Thus, any CSR activity aimed at enforcing development cannot afford to be philanthropic in nature. According to Ekwok and Ogri (2018, p. 76), “CSR initiatives should be planned along the line of sustainable development ... under three core areas of economic growth, ecological balance and social progress”.

Furthermore, as part of the misconception to CSR practice, most corporate entities in Nigeria engage in humanitarian activities solely to portray their companies or organisations’ image in the public limelight through elaborate media hype. This amounts to attracting cheap popularity at the public’s expense. Quite often, the processes of planning and implementing CSR projects by corporations are carried out in isolation of the target or proposed beneficiaries. Many companies engage in CSR activities without due consultation or proper engagement with members of the host community.

The study focuses on the Corporate Social Responsibility programmes of Lafarge Africa Plc in Akamkpa and Akpabuyo Local Government Areas of Cross River State, with a special emphasis on community development initiatives of the company. Lafarge Africa Plc is a member of the LafargeHolcin Group, which is a global cement manufacturing company. The company has plants in different parts of Nigeria with the Mfamosing plant at Akamkpa LGA in Cross River State as one of the largest in terms of production capacity (LarfargeHolcin, 2015, p. 11).

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To assess the CSR concerns and community development projects of Lafarge Africa Plc in selected host communities in Cross River State.
2. To examine the contributions of the CSR projects of Lafarge Africa Plc to the sustainable development of their host communities in Cross River State.
3. To evaluate the nature of communication strategies evolved at all levels of project implementation

4. To ascertain the level of effectiveness of the company's CSR communication approaches in terms of stimulating inclusive and sustainable community development initiative.

Research Questions

In a bid to achieve the objectives enumerated above, the researcher set out to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the CSR and community development priority areas of Lafarge Africa Plc to members of selected host communities in Cross River State?
2. How have these projects executed by the company met the yearnings of the people in terms of sustainable community development?
3. What communication strategies are adopted by Lafarge Africa Plc at all levels of projects planning and implementation?
4. How effective is Lafarge's CSR communication approaches in terms of stimulating inclusive and sustainable community development initiative?

Corporate Social Responsibility Practice of Lafarge Africa Plc

Lafarge Africa Plc is a member of LafargeHolcim group, which is a merger between the two global cement manufacturing companies: Lafarge and Holcim. The company is highly reputed as one of the leading manufacturing companies dealing in cement and quality concrete solution production in Africa, especially in Nigeria. According to the information gleaned from the company's website (<http://www.lafarge.com.ng>), the company has operational base in four states in Nigeria. These include: the Sagamu and Ewekoro plants in Ogun State, Ashaka plant in Gombe State, Mfamosing plant in Cross River State and a terminal in Atlas Cement Company Limited in Rivers State. Lafarge Africa Plc is the producer of Elephant Cement, AshakaCem, UNICEM and Elephant Supaset among others. The company has an annual production capacity of over ten Million Metric tons (10 MMT) of cement in Nigeria alone (Lafarge, 2015, p. 13).

The Mfamosing plant is located in Akamkpa LGA in Cross River State, South-South Nigeria. The plant was established in 2002 following the acquisition of the assets of the defunct Calabar Cement Company (CalCemCo) and was renamed the United Company of Nigeria Limited (UNICEM). In 2009 a Greenfield cement manufacturing plant with installation capacity of 2.5 MMT was constructed in Mfamosing; and in 2016 a second plant was inaugurated bringing the total annual installation capacity of the Mfamosing Plants I and II to Five Million Metric Tons (5 MMT), (Lafarge, 2015, p. 11). The company claims that it actively embarks on CSR initiatives aimed at contributing to the development of the host communities in its operational areas. The company's CSR priority areas include: Health and Safety, Economic Empowerment/Employability skills, Shelter, Education and Infrastructural support. The target beneficiaries are members of the host communities in the company's operational areas.

CSR Communication Strategy – The Stakeholder Engagement Approach

Effective communication is germane to the success of any given CSR initiative or programme. Communication is a useful requirement for engaging key stakeholders by corporate entities, especially in the planning and implementation of CSR initiative. However, communication efforts can only succeed when it is backed up with a well-defined communication strategy aimed at communicating effectively with the right social group. It is very important to proactively and strategically engage key stakeholders right from the stage of programme formulation to programme implementation and monitoring. Many CSR projects, no matter how good they may appear to be, do fail because of lack of proper stakeholder engagement. According to Scarlett (2011, p. 11), “A disconnect in communication between CSR initiatives and public awareness will impede any potential benefit to a company; so, it is important to intelligently and strategically communicate this to the public”. In the context of this work, stakeholders groups may include: the government, company’s representatives, members of the host communities and their various representatives.

Apart from awareness creation, effective CSR communication enables corporations to tailor their CSR programmes toward addressing the essential needs of the people, thereby creating or enhancing mutual understanding between the firm and the people. Sustainable CSR can only thrive in an atmosphere where there exist effective communication between a firm and its stakeholders. There are different approaches in which companies can communicate their CSR initiatives, depending on the nature of their stakeholders. However, in particular respect to members of a local community, the stakeholders’ engagement approach should be more preferred. While channels like e-mail, internal memos, newsletters, the company’s websites, annual reports as well as the mass media can be used to communicate a company’s CSR programmes to employees, investors and shareholders, customers and the general public, communicating CSR initiatives to local communities through these means will not make any impact on the target audience. To be effective, communicating with this special group of people needs an approach that is consultative and participatory in nature. This is why the stakeholder engagement or inclusion approach is more preferable.

Stakeholder engagement has to do with “involving constituents in business processes and decision-making to inform, consult or solve problem” (Network for Business Sustainability [NBS], 2010, p. 1). Stakeholder engagement approach is essentially and mutually beneficial strategic approach that results in better-informed, all-inclusive, more participatory and effective policies or programmes execution. It is mutually beneficial in the sense that issues of concern to both the stakeholders and the organisation can be easily addressed and resolved to avoid unnecessary social backlash or unrest.

One key reason why companies must consider seriously the issue of stakeholder’s engagement as part of its corporate CSR function is the increasing realisation that stakeholders are becoming more and more sophisticated and aware of

the company's social responsibilities to its various stakeholders. Even the so-called members of the local host communities now have high expectations about the firm's responsibilities of giving back to the society. It is most times very difficult to meet such expectations and demands, no matter how hard the company tries or the amount of money budgeted for such purposes. But through close communication engagement, it becomes very easy to create mutual understanding and enable the people to better appreciate the initiatives of the company. According to Morsing and Schultz (2006, p. 323), "... corporate CSR today require more sophisticated and ongoing stakeholder awareness and calls for more sophisticated CSR communication strategies than previously."

There are different CSR stakeholder's communication strategies, which range from simple publicity or awareness creation strategy to a more participatory or involving approach. Morsing and Schultz (2006) identify three approaches to stakeholder relations and communication based on the classification of models of Public Relations by Grunig and Hunt (1984). These include: the stakeholder information strategy, stakeholder engagement strategy and the stakeholder involvement strategy. The stakeholder information strategy is a one-way communication model from the organisation to its stakeholders. In this model, communication is essentially viewed as *telling*, not *listening* (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). The model assumes that stakeholders are influential as they can either give support to the activities of the organisation or show opposition that can stall the activities of the company. As a result, "the company must inform stakeholders about its good intentions, decisions and actions to ensure positive stakeholder support" (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 327). Companies adopting this model engage in active press relations programmes to create information and news for the media.

The second strategy, which is the stakeholder response strategy, is based on two-way asymmetric or lopsided communication model of where communication flows to and from the public. Using this model, the company attempts to change public attitudes and behaviour in its favour. The company needs to engage stakeholders by making the corporate decisions and actions relevant for them because the company needs the external endorsement from external stakeholders. Thus, communication is perceived as feedback in terms of finding out what the public will accept and tolerate (Morsing and Schultz, 2006, p. 327). Like the stakeholder information model, the stakeholder response model caters more for the interest of the company.

The third approach, which is the stakeholder involvement strategy, is an interactive, participatory, dialogic and a two-way symmetric communication approach that recognises active relationship building with the stakeholders. Both the organisation and the stakeholders are equally influenced in decision-making processes that concern both of them. According to Paine (2009, p. 1), "a strategic approach that is rooted in understanding the nature and importance of the stakeholder relationship is what elevates a communications program from being ordinary, to being truly transformative at a

corporate level.” In the stakeholder involvement approach, the purpose of communication is to create effective mutual relationship in which the organisation and its stakeholders actively participate in fashioning the best ways to advance their common goals. Paine (2009, p. 2) further avers that “working with stakeholders is about building, cultivating, nurturing and fixing relationships. The rapport you have with the stakeholder is a two-way street – your organization may have its priorities and pain points, but remember that so too does the stakeholder.” In other words, relationship building, which is the core of effective stakeholder engagement, thrives on empathy – a situation whereby the company identifies with the challenges and wellbeing of the stakeholders and vice-versa.

Theoretical Framework: The Stakeholder Theory

The Stakeholder theory was propounded by Edward Freeman, a moral philosopher, in 1984 in his book. Freeman’s idea about stakeholder came at a time when the dominant ideology held by many scholars was that a company's aim is to accumulate profit so it can redistribute among the stakeholders. This idea was formed the basis of Milton Friedman’s Shareholder’s theory. Friedman’s theory was based on the premise that managements are hired as the representatives of shareholders to run the company for their gains, and therefore they are morally and legally compelled to serve the shareholders’ interests. According to Freeman, the company's aim is to meet the needs of stakeholders. So much attention has been shifted from serving the interest of shareholders to the idea that firms have stakeholders and should proactively pay attention to them. A firm that diligently seeks to serve the interests of a broad group of stakeholders will create more value over time (Harrison and Wicks, 2013).

Citing Freeman (1984), Morsing and Schultz (2006, p. 324) define stakeholder as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm’s objectives.” They further aver that the emphasis on stakeholders’ engagement has now been moved from a focus on stakeholders ‘being managed by companies to the interaction that a company has with their stakeholders based on a rational and process oriented views.’ In other words, stakeholders group should be considered as part and parcel of the firm rather than external bodies. According to Freeman (2001, p. 42):

Corporations have stakeholders; that is, groups and individuals who benefit from or are harmed by, and whose rights are violated or respected by corporate actions ... just as stockholders has a right to demand certain actions by management so do other stakeholders have a right to make claims.

Freeman (2001) enumerates the stakeholders of a typical modern corporation to include: Owners (investors), management, suppliers, employees, local community and customers. The stake of each of these groups is reciprocal, since each can affect the others in terms of harms and benefits as well as rights and duties. For instance, owners have financial stake in the corporation in the form of stocks and bonds; and they expect some kind of financial return from their investments. In the same vein, employees have their jobs and usually their livelihood at stake and in return for their labour, they expect

security, wages, benefits and meaningful work.

More so, members of the local community grant the firm the right to build facilities and carry out business activities in their locality. In return, they benefit from the tax base, economic and social contributions of the firm. In addition, the firm is expected to maintain environmentally friendly operations. Their activities must not be considered to be harmful to the health of the people and the ecosystem. The firm is expected to create and maintain good rapport with key stakeholders in the community, who will in return provide the required conducive atmosphere for the firm's operation. Among several stakeholders groups, the local community management should be taken more seriously by the firm as doing so is very crucial to the smooth operation of the firm. Anything short of that is tantamount to shooting oneself on the foot. According to Freeman (2001, p. 43), "when the firm mismanages its relationship with the local community, it is in the same position as a citizen who commits a crime. It has violated the implicit social contract with the community ...". In the light of the above assertion, part of the social contract of a firm to the community is to contribute to the sustainable development of the community; and such development initiatives are usually championed through the Corporate Social Responsibility programmes of the firm. Community development initiative is not an optional requirement for any firm which desire to have a hitch-free operation. It is part and parcel of the stakeholder management process.

Research Methodology

The survey research design was used to gather data for this study. The main instruments employed were unstructured interview, questionnaire and group discussion. The interview method was used to obtain information from Lafarge's Community Relations Manager, Mfamosing Plant, the Village Heads/Community Leaders and Youth Leaders; while the questionnaire and group discussion were employed to gather information from members of the selected host communities in Akamkpa and Akpabuyo Local government Areas. Two communities – Akansoko and Akwa Ikot-Effanga – were selected in Akpabuyo; while Abiati, Mfamosing and Mbobui communities were chosen from Akamkpa LGA. Akamkpa is reputed as the largest LGA in Cross River State with 149 communities organised into ten political wards ((AKAM-LEEDS 2, 2013, p. 2). All the communities selected for the study were basically agrarian in nature.

The 2006 National Population Census figure for Akamkpa LGA was 149,317 and Akpabuyo recorded a total population size of 272,262. And based on the estimated population figure declared in the Cross River State Statistical Year Book 2011 in line with the 2006 National Population Census figure, the estimated population of Akamkpa and Akpabuyo for the year 2011 was put at 173,585 and 315,622 respectively (Cross River State Bureau of Statistics, 2011, p. 7). Also, using the estimated population growth rate of 2.83, the population of Akpobuyo LGA for 2015 was put at 352,148; and the average community population was estimated at 2000 persons per community

(AKPAB-LEEDS 2, 2013, p. 9).

From this estimated population, a sample of 200 respondents was drawn across the five communities using the simple random sampling technique. Data obtained by means of the questionnaire instrument were analysed using the descriptive statistical tools; while the explanation building technique was employed in data analysis and discussion for information obtained through the interview and group discussion methods.

Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 200 copies of questionnaire were distributed to the respondents across the five communities; out of which 168 copies were completed and returned. Data presentation, analysis and discussion were carried out based on the information collected through questionnaire, interview and the group discussion.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by community of resident

| Communities | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------|------------|------------|
| Abiati | 28 | 16.6 |
| Akansoko | 40 | 23.9 |
| Akwa Ikot-Effanga | 28 | 16.6 |
| Mbobui | 26 | 15.5 |
| Mfamosing | 46 | 27.4 |
| Total | 168 | 100 |

Source: Field Research 2018

Table 1 shows the number of respondent from each community. In the table, respondents from Mfamosing dominated with 46, representing 27.3 percent; while Mbobui had 26 (15.5%), which is the least figure in the table.

Table 2: Knowledge of Company's Development Projects

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Yes | 72 | 42.9 |
| No | 32 | 19.0 |
| Indifferent | 64 | 38.1 |
| Total | 168 | 100 |

Source: Field Research 2018

Table 2 shows that 72 (42.9%) respondents answered in the affirmative that they were aware of what Lafarge Africa Limited was doing for their community in terms of development project. Thirty-two (19.0%) responded in the negative; while 64 (38.1%) respondents were indifferent.

Table 3: Type of Project Carried Out

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|------------|
|----------|-----------|------------|

| | | |
|------------------|------------|------------|
| Empowerment | 36 | 21.4 |
| Health | 8 | 4.8 |
| Education | 64 | 38.1 |
| Water Supply | 38 | 22.6 |
| Road Maintenance | 14 | 8.3 |
| Others | 8 | 4.8 |
| Total | 168 | 100 |

Source: Field Research 2018

In Table 3, educationally related projects dominate the categories of projects executed by the company across the four communities. A total of 64 respondents, representing 38.1 percent stated that the company had invested more in educational programme in their communities than in any other projects.

Table 4: Relevance of Projects

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Yes | 68 | 40.5 |
| No | 24 | 14.3 |
| Indifferent | 76 | 45.2 |
| Total | 168 | 100 |

Source: Field Research 2018

In the table above, 68 respondents (40.5) from the five communities expressed the view that the projects executed by the company were relevant to the sustainable development of their communities. Twenty-four respondents (14.3%) replied in the negative; while a majority of them, numbering 76 people (45.2 percent) neither said Yes or No.

Table 5: Communities’ priority areas for CSR interventions

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Employment | 86 | 51.2 |
| Portable water | 36 | 21.4 |
| Healthcare facilities | 12 | 7.1 |
| Road | 18 | 10.7 |
| Scholarship | 16 | 9.5 |
| Total | 168 | 100 |

Source: Field Research 2018

Data presented in Table 5 indicates that majority of the respondents, numbering 86 (51.2%) want the company to provide employment for their people. Next in the list of priority is provision of portable water, which 21.4 percent of the total response.

Table 6: Respondents rating of the company’s CSR projects

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Very Good | 0 | 0 |
| Good | 22 | 13.1 |
| Poor | 64 | 38.1 |
| Very Poor | 82 | 48.8 |
| Total | 168 | 100 |

Source: Field Research 2017

In Table 6, over 48 percent of the respondents rated Lafarge’s CSR project ‘Very Poor’. Just a few of them gave the project a pass mark.

Discussion of Findings

Discussion of findings was carried out by providing answers to the research questions, using responses generated from the respondents using the instruments of interview, questionnaire and group discussion.

Research Question One

What are the CSR and community development priority areas of Lafarge Africa Plc to members of selected host communities in Cross River State?

Lafarge’s CSR priority areas for community development projects focus on five portfolios of Health and Safety, Economic Empowerment/Employability skills, Shelter, Education and Infrastructural support. The educational initiative for instance caters for such educational needs of pupils and students at the junior secondary school levels. Also, educational programmes like Lafarge Africa National Literacy Competition and Book on Wheels (BOW) initiative are geared toward boosting literacy in the society. The youth empowerment programmes is executed under the company’s Technical Apprenticeship/Employability Programme for young secondary leavers aimed training young school leavers in various vocational skills that empower them to start a sustainable future career, including training of artisan in block production and alternative uses of cement bags.

Findings revealed that the company has executed some projects under these key areas across the five selected communities as projects and programmes under Health and safety, education, empowerment and infrastructural supports were visible in some of the selected communities. The following projects were noticeable in Akansoko – construction and fencing of Akansoko community market, complete renovation of a four classroom block, provision of twelve (12) tables and chairs as well as the supply of 100 desks to teachers and pupils of Government Primary School, Akansoko.

In Mfamosing community, the company also renovated a four classroom block

and supplied a number of tables, chairs and desks for teachers and pupils in Government Primary School, Mfamosing. Also, the construction of Mfamosing Town Hall was carried out by the company. Similarly, the company constructed, furnished and fenced a Residential Lodge for Youth Corp Members in Akwa Ikot-Effanga to alleviate Corp Members' accommodation challenges and address the nagging problem of the teachers' shortage in the community school, especially in Science subjects' areas. The accommodation facilities were meant to encourage the Corp Members posted to the community to stay and contribute their quota to the development of the communities.

Furthermore, there was an ongoing road construction project in Abiati community, although the project was still at its preliminary stage. The Company also provided solar borehole to Mbobui community and assisted the people to construct a lodge for serving Youth Corp Members in the Community Primary School. Other projects implemented include: donation of safety gadgets like the crash helmet, reflector vests, cash donation to commercial motorcycle riders (Okada) in the communities; provision of road safety awareness education in schools and provision of scholarship for secondary and tertiary education students in some of the communities. More so, the company embarked on free eye screening, cataract treatment, inter-community roads rehabilitation and the construction of 20 kilometres evacuation road from Mfomosing in Akamkpa to Odukpani LGA, among other.

The data presented in tables two (2) and three (3) corroborate the above claims. The respondents acknowledged that the company had carried out projects in the areas of Health, Empowerment, Education, Water supply, Road maintenance and other community development projects. In fact, all the projects listed above were also seen by the researchers on their visit to the communities.

Research Question Two

How have these projects executed by the company met the yearnings of the people in terms of sustainable community development?

In Table 4, sixty eight (68) respondents, representing 40.5 percent of the total respondents across the five selected host communities, affirmed that the projects executed by the company were significant to the sustainable development of their communities; although 24 (14.3%) of them responded in the negative and 76 respondents, representing 45.2 percent were indifferent, meaning they responded neither in the affirmative nor in the negative. In Table 10, the respondents enumerated their needs priority and their expectations from the company to include: employment, portable water supply, provision of healthcare facilities, among others. From the table, over fifty percent of the respondents want employment. This is followed by the need for portable water, healthcare faculties, road construction and maintenance.

From the foregoing, it becomes glaring that satisfying the yearnings and aspirations of any group of people is very difficult because, as Economists will say: human needs are insatiable. In this instance, it is very difficult for any company to fully meet the high cravings of members of its host communities in terms of sustainable

development. However, it is possible to attain certain acceptable level of satisfaction, where greater percentage of the target populace could benefit from the project, especially when the people themselves are involve in the planning and implementation processes. According to the definition proffered by the Brundtland Commission of 1987, “Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”, (WCED, 1987, p. 41). In other words, the key to sustainable development is development that meets the present and future social, economic and environmental needs of the people.

Using the above parametres, therefore, we shall proceed to assess the sustainability of Lafarge’s community development projects. Considering the educational initiatives, for instance, the head teachers and class teachers of the two primary schools visited in Akansoko and Mfamosing expressed great delight with the assistance rendered by Lafarge in respect to the renovation of classroom blocks and provision of learning equipment to the pupils. According to one of them, “the pupils used to sit on bare floor under licking roofs to learn, but through the intervention of Lafarge, the problem has been addressed”. Such interventions therefore can be seen as investing in the bright educational future of the pupil; and by extension, helping to build a bright future for them as education is considered as a great legacy one can bequeath to the children, who are the future leaders. Other interventions like scholarships, skills acquisition training, market construction as well as road construction and rehabilitation can boost the economic and social activities in the communities. These are also sustainable projects because they help create wealth and employment.

However, projects like cash donations and award of contracts to a few wealthy and privileged individuals in the name of empowerment by the company only amounts to enriching these few individuals at the expense of the entire members of the community, who are highly impoverished. An instance was given of a situation whereby the company (Lafarge) donates one or two live cattle to each community annually as Christmas bonanza. According to some of the respondents, the gesture is rather ridiculous as it is needless; and of course, unsustainable. As stated by one of the respondents in Mbubui community: “we don’t need cows from Lafarge to celebrate Christmas. What we need is real development. How many people would be to get the cow meat? Usually, people end up fighting over it”. Consequently, when asked to rate the community development programme of Lafarge, over 70 percent of the respondents scored them very low as 38 percent score the project “Poor” and another 48.8 percent scored them “Very Poor”, indicating the people’s dissatisfaction with the company’s CSR initiatives. The information is displayed in table six (6).

Research Question Three

What communication strategies are adopted by Lafarge Africa Plc at all levels of projects planning and implementation?

According to Lafarge’s Community Relations Manager in charge of Mfamosing

Plant in Cross River State, the company had employed a lot of community relations and communication strategies in dealing with various stakeholders at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. She stated that “at the primary committee level is the host communities, the local government comes at the secondary committee level (comprising of representatives of traditional rulers’ council); and at the tertiary committee level is the state government being represented by relevant ministries, departments and agencies.” She further explained that the company relates with the people through the Community Relations Committee (CRC) at the community level, which membership comprises of representatives of all the host communities in the two Local Government Areas. Members of the committee meet with company’s representatives from time to time to draw up project needs assessment and come up with the community development action plan to determine the priority areas based on the CSR priority areas of the company.

The Community Relations Committee serves as a link between the company and the host communities. It is at this level that the company gets to know the priority needs of the communities and attempts to meet them. Also, the company representative stated that as part of its inclusive policy, it usually engages the services of indigenous contractor to execute most of its community development projects. In doing this, the company empowers the indigenous contractors; and by extension, generates indirect employment for indigenes that would be engaged by the contractors.

Research Question Four

How effective is Lafarge’s CSR communication approaches in terms of stimulating inclusive and sustainable community development initiative?

Based on the picture painted above concerning the CSR communication strategies of Lafarge, the initiative is supposed to be participatory and inclusive in approach because the company’s Community Relations Manager asserted the company involves a wide range of stakeholders in the planning and execution of its CSR programmes. However, in actual sense there seems to be a yawning disconnect between the company and the people in terms of implementation of development initiatives. Majority of the respondents contacted expressed great displeasure with the CSR initiatives of the company. Even though there appear to be a general consensus among the people that the company was doing its utmost to meet some key development needs of the people, they also expressed reservation with the company’s approach. The respondents cited an instance whereby monies meant for the execution of projects in the community end up in the private pockets of a few individuals in the community, who parade themselves before the company’s management as the people’s representatives or as the community leaders.

They also mentioned situations whereby job openings in the company or scholarships and other privileges meant to benefit members of the communities were either sold out to non-indigenes or shared among family members of few privileged

people in the communities. The people also accused the so-called indigenous contractors of carrying out substandard projects and they indicted some community leaders of connivance with some dubious company officials to embezzle monies meant for community development projects. More so, the respondents query the idea of using members of the community as contract staff instead of engaging them full time. Similarly, the respondents expressed complete lack of confidence in the members of the Community Relations Committee (CRC), who are supposed to maintain a productive link between the company and their communities. The people accused them of gross misrepresentation.

Therefore, they were of the opinion that they would prefer a situation whereby representatives of the company would directly meet with them at least quarterly at a general community assembly to discuss issues bothering on the development of the communities rather than acting on the opinion of a few privileged members of the community. They observed that such meetings are needed to enable people to negotiate with the company and come up with sustainable development initiatives. Also in doing so, the company would be able to douse unnecessary tension caused by its inability to meet up with the unreasonable demands and expectations of the people, as well as, quell the spate of agitation and violence launched against its operations. Being the foremost company in that part of Nigeria, the people usually have very high expectation of what the company would do or is supposed to do for member of the community. Often time, they resort to violence and other forceful means to get the company to accede to their demands. This is one major challenge the company has been grappling with over time. For instance, the people believe that it is the sole responsibility of the company to provide jobs, address major development issues in their communities or provide the basic social amenities for the communities. Such expectations are undoubtedly far beyond the financial capacity of any profit making business entity. It is therefore believed that effective bottom-up communication approach is required to address such social impasse and create mutually beneficial relationship between Lafarge and the host communities.

Effective communication is germane to the success of any given CSR initiative or programme. The extent to which any given CSR development initiative succeeds depends largely on the nature of communication approach being adopted. According to Scarlett (2011, p. 11), “A disconnect in communication between CSR initiatives and public awareness will impede any potential benefit to a company; so, it is important to intelligently and strategically communicate this to the public”. Most laudable projects fail principally due to the fact that planners fail to *communicate with* the people as against *communicating to* them. In the words of Moemeka (2000, p. 6), “... it is impossible for development effort to succeed in any society if development agents fail to actively involve the target audience; if they only worked for the people, without working with the people.” In other words, for development programmes to be sustainable, it must be participatory and all-inclusive. Both the donors and the

beneficiaries must be actively involved in the planning in implementation process.

Conclusion

This study focuses on the Corporate Social Responsibility and community development programmes of Lafarge Africa Plc in Akamkpa and Akpabuoyo Local Government Areas of Cross River State against the backdrop of sustainable development. The major objectives of the study were to determine the relevance of Lafarge's CSR programmes to sustainable development of the host communities, as well as, examine the CSR communication strategies of the company.

Findings from available projects executed by Lafarge in the five communities revealed that Lafarge Africa Plc has contributed immensely to the advancement of the host communities socio-economically through its CSR initiatives. The company has taken up major responsibilities, which were hitherto in the domain of government. Apart from embarking on individual support initiatives like provision of scholarship, financial support and empowerment through skill acquisition training, as well as medical interventions, the company has executed major projects like road construction and rehabilitation, construction and fencing of a community market, renovation of classroom blocks, provision of sitting and learning facilities to schools and water supply through drilling of boreholes, among others. In fact, the company took up the responsibility rehabilitating all the major link roads across the five communities, as well as the construction of the 20 kilometres Mfamosing-Odukpani access road. The people expressed great delight about the tremendous contributions of the company to the development of their communities.

Nevertheless, it appears that Lafarge's CSR approach still partly trail the line of philanthropy or charitable donation as projects are selected and executed without due recourse to the opinion of the people. This is caused by some lapses in the communication approach adopted by the company – an approach whereby the company prefers to relate with few selected members of the community under the aegis of Community Relations Community (CRC); rather than dealing with the people directly. This practice vastly violates the tenets of Freeman's stakeholders' theory. According to Morsing and Schultz (2006, p. 324), "the emphasis on stakeholders' engagement has now been moved from a focus on stakeholders 'being managed by companies to the interaction that a company has with their stakeholders based on a rational and process oriented views.'" In other words, members of the host communities should be considered as part and parcel of the firm and their views and opinions should count. When this is done, the company will ultimately have less community relational issues to deal with.

Recommendation

Based on the above findings therefore, the researcher recommends that:

1. The company (Lafarge Africa Plc) should adopt a more participatory approach in determining the kind of development project to embark on based on critical

- needs of the people rather than singlehandedly select and implement the projects. In other words, for such projects to be sustainable, they must be relevant to the critical needs or yearnings of the people. To achieve this, the company should directly engage the people to ascertain what their priority needs are rather than embarking on ‘what they think the people need’.
2. The company should adopt a bottom-up communication strategy in their relationship with members of the host communities. In this approach, major decisions concerning community needs assessment as well as project selection emanate from the people. The company only plays the role of a facilitator by ‘leading from behind’ while the people themselves champion the course of their development. The culture of sinking huge amount of money into development projects and sitting back to watch it work has proven to be ineffective over time.
 3. Finally, the company needs to constantly engage the people in proactive communication processes and shun the traditional practice of fire brigade approach, which is meant to mend fences when things have gone out of control. Apart from reaching out to the people through different community representatives and committees, the company can organize quarterly/annual general or town hall meeting where its representatives can meet with a larger segment of members of the communities.

References

- Amaeshi, K. M., Adi, B. C., Ogbechie, C. & Amao, O. (2006). Corporate social responsibility in Nigeria: Western mimicry or indigenous practices? Retrieved from www.nnottingham.ac.uk/business/ICCSR/assets/researchpapers/39-2006.pdf
- Carroll, A. (2015). Corporate social responsibility: The centerpiece of competing and complementary frameworks. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2015.02.002>
- Daramola, A. C. (2008). *Fundamentals of professional public relations: A global overview*. Lagos: Molalek Printing Enterprises
- Ekpenyong, M., Urua, E. A., Udosen, E., & Udoh, E. (2011). Adaptable phone and syllable HMM-based Ibibio TTS systems. In *5th Language and Technology Conference (LTC), Poznan, Poland, Fundacja Uniwersytetu im. A. Mickiewicza* (pp. 355-360).
- Ekwok, L. & Ogri, E. U. (2018). Corporate social responsibility and sustainable development: A study of CSR programme of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) in Rivers State, Nigeria. In Asemah, E. S. & Popoola, M. (Eds.). *Corporate social responsibility and sustainable development in a changing world* (pp. 71-87). Ogun, Nigeria: Backock University Press

- Etta, E. E. (2009). A comparative analysis of Quine and Berkeley's notion of truth. *Sophia: An African Journal of Philosophy*, 12(1), 172-178.
- Etta, E. E. (2011). The Role Of Apriori, Empirical, Analytic And Synthetic In Philosophy Of Mathematics. *American Journal of Social Issues and Humanities*, 1(2), 82-94.
- Etta, E. E., Asira, A. E., & Asukwo, O. O. (2011). An Inquiry Into The Place Of Culture In Philosophy. *American Journal of Social Issues and Humanities*, 1(2), 159-173.
- Freeman, R. E. (2001). Stakeholder theory of the modern corporation. Retrieved from [http:// www.businessethics.qwriting.qc.cuny.edu/files.2012/01/Freeman](http://www.businessethics.qwriting.qc.cuny.edu/files.2012/01/Freeman)
- Government of Cross River State (2013). Akamkpa Local Economic Empowerment & Development Strategy 2 (AKAM-LEEDS 2, 2013 - 2016): Calabar
- Government of Cross River State (2013). Akpabuyo Local Economic Empowerment & Development Strategy (AKPAB-LEEDS 2): Calabar
- Government of Cross River State (2013). Cross River State Statistical Yearbook. Calabar: State Bureau of Statistics
- Harrison, J. S. & Wicks, A. C. (2013). Stakeholder theory, value and firm performance. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 23 (1), 97-124. DOI: 10.5840/beq20132314
- Hohnen, P. (2007). Corporate social responsibility: An implementation guide for business. Retrieved from http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2007/csr_guide.pdf
- Hopkins, M. J. (2016). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): The role of the private sectors. Retrieved from <http://www.csrfi.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/CSR-and-the-United-Nations-SDGs.pdf>
- Iwuchukwu, G. C. (2011). Dynamics of power relationship, English vs African languages: A cross current of a sort. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 2(3), 168.
- Iwuchukwu, G. C., & Okafor, M. (2017). Nigerian Pidgin in the 21st Century: Any Hope of surviving the Opposition from English, Nigerian Languages and Foreign Languages?. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 4(11).
- Iwuchukwu, G. C., Ineji, P. U., & Inyang, E. (2018). Language, Communication, Poverty Eradication and the Fadama Projects in Nigeria. *Global Journal of Social Sciences Studies*, 4(1), 1-12.
- Lafarge Holciim (2015) Building together: Lafarge Africa sustainable report 2015. Retrieved from http://www.lafarge.com.ng/LAFARGE_AFRICA_PLC_2015_SUSTAINABILITY_REPORT.pdf
- Moemeka, A. A. (2000). *Development communication: Strategies and method*. In Moemeka (Ed.) *Development communication action: Building understanding and creating partnership*. New-York: University Press
- Morsing, M. and Schultz, M. (2006). Corporate social responsibility communication:

- Stakeholder information, response & involvement strategies. *Journal of Business Ethics: A European review*, 15 (4), 323-338.
- Naseri, C. (2012). The story of Zacchaeus: Vindication or conversion?. *Nigerian Journal of Theology*, 26, 1-20.
- Naseri, C. (2017). UNDERSTANDING THE ANARTHROUS PREDICATE Υἱὸς Θεοῦ 'SON OF GOD' IN MARK 15: 39. *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*.
- Naseri, C. Christian Identity in the First Letter of Peter: An Exegesis of 1 Peter 2: 11.
- Naseri, C. N. (2016). Challenges of Bible/Liturgical Translations in Local Churches in Nigeria: A Case of the Efik Language group. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8(3).
- Naseri, C. N. M. (2013). Jesus as the Son of Man in the Gospels. *American Journal of Social Issues and Humanities*, 3(4), 189-199.
- Naseri, C. N. M. (2014). Jews Have no Dealings With Samaritans: A Study of Relations Between Jews and Samaritans at the Time of Jesus Christ. *Lwati: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 11(2), 75-88.
- Naseri, C. N. M. (2015). RELIGION AND TERRORISM: IDENTIFYING THE RELATIONSHIP.
- Network for Business Sustainability (NBS, 2010). Stakeholder engagement. Retrieved from <http://nbs.net/wp-content/uploads/primer-stakeholder-engagement-101124.pdf>
- Okon, A. I., Sunday, W. E., & Inyang, E. P. (2015). Determination of heavy metal contents in fluted pumpkin leaves (*telfairia occidentalis*) along roadsides in Calabar, Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal*, 11(33).
- Paine, K. D. (2009). Best practice in stakeholder communications, retrieved from http://www.ingeniumcommunications.com/wpcontent/uploads/downloads/2012/06/BestPractices_StakeholderCommunications.pdf
- Scarlett, A. (2011). Communicating corporate social responsibility: Challenges to companies with low company-cause fit. Retrieved from <http://www.american.edu/soc/communication/upload/Amy-Scarlett.pdf>
- Udosen, E. E. (2016). AGR in Ibibio. *Studies in Nigerian Linguistics*, 365.
- Udosen, E. E., & Akpan, O. U. (2007). 10. Borrowing & Language Development: The Case of Ibibio &. *English and Nigerian Languages*, (5), 113.
- World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2002). Corporate social responsibility: The WBCSD's journey. Retrieved from http://www.Cecode.org.co/descargas/publicaciones/publicaciones_wbcd/CSR-WBCSDsJourney.pdf
- World Commission on Environmental Development (1987). Report of the World Commission on Environmental Development: Our common future. Retrieved from <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>