



Corporate social responsibility programmes and civic engagement among residents in Asaba, Delta State

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Abstract

The growing importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a driver of sustainable community development triggered this research, particularly its role in fostering civic engagement. The study aimed to evaluate the relationship between CSR initiatives and civic engagement in Asaba, an urban area known for its socio-economic diversity. Specific objectives included assessing residents' awareness and participation in CSR programs, analyzing socio-demographic factors influencing civic engagement, and examining the impact of CSR on environmental civility and volunteering behaviors. To achieve these objectives, data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire distributed to 200 residents. The data were analyzed using SPSS, employing descriptive and correlational statistics to uncover patterns and relationships. Key findings revealed a significant positive correlation between awareness and participation in CSR programs and levels of civic engagement. Additionally, perceived community development through CSR was found to enhance civic engagement. Income emerged as a significant factor influencing civic engagement, while age, gender, and education showed no notable effects. Based on these findings, the study recommends that policymakers and organizations design inclusive and accessible CSR initiatives tailored to diverse socio-economic groups. Efforts should be made to increase public awareness about the benefits of CSR and address economic barriers to participation. By doing so, CSR programs can further enhance civic engagement and contribute to building more cohesive and equitable communities.

Keywords: Civic Engagement, Community Development, Corporate Social Responsibility, Effective Intervention

1. Introduction

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR), in the last two decades, has gained prominence as organizations increasingly recognize their role in contributing to the well-being and development of the communities in which they operate as pointed out in Agashe, Yadav, Dhanshetti, & Pargoankar (2024). This paradigm shift underscores a broader understanding of corporate citizenship, emphasizing ethical practices, societal engagement, and the pursuit of shared value (Edwards, 2015). From its roots in philanthropy and corporate charity, CSR has evolved into a multifaceted approach that encompasses initiatives aimed at

addressing social, environmental, and economic challenges while fostering sustainable community development (Fedotova, Bocharova & Rachwał-Mueller, 2023).

At the heart of CSR lies the notion of civic engagement, which plays a pivotal role in building resilient and thriving communities (Nimani, Zeqiraj & Spahija, 2022). Civic engagement encompasses a spectrum of activities, ranging from active participation in community decision-making processes to volunteerism and environmental stewardship. These activities not only contribute to the social fabric of communities but also promote social



cohesion, inclusivity, and collective action for positive change (Doda & Albania, 2015). However, despite its significance, civic engagement remains a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, influenced by various socio-demographic factors and contextual dynamics. Civic engagement activities are associated with socio-demographic factors such as age, education, gender, and income.

However, there is a lack of nuanced understanding of civic engagement within the African context, particularly in post-colonial societies like Nigeria (Ajaps & Obiagu, 2021). While civic engagement is essential for building civil society, the remnants of colonial governance structures and the predominant power vested in state apparatuses pose significant challenges (Idemudia, 2010). The existing power dynamics often limit the autonomy of non-state actors, hindering their ability to challenge oppressive administrations and participate meaningfully in governance processes (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006). This underscores the need for a focused examination of civic engagement practices within the Nigerian context to understand how individuals contribute to building civil society and addressing governance challenges.

Moreover, the socio-demographic characteristics of individuals significantly influence their engagement in civic activities (Ajaps & Obiagu, 2021). Understanding these patterns is crucial for developing targeted strategies to enhance civic participation and overcome barriers to community involvement. For instance, factors such as gender, age, education, income, location, and ethnicity may influence the extent of civic engagement among residents in Asaba, Delta State (Igbinedion & Ovbiagele, 2012). Thus, identifying these factors and their impact on community participation is essential for designing effective interventions and enhancing the inclusivity of civic engagement initiatives. Ultimately, the

research sought to contribute to the enhancement of civic engagement practices and the empowerment of residents to actively participate in shaping their communities' future.

Against this backdrop, this research sought to explore the impact of corporate social responsibility programmes on civic engagement among residents in Asaba, Delta. Situated in the vibrant urban landscape of Delta State, Asaba represents a microcosm of the socio-economic diversity and cultural richness that characterizes one of Nigeria's fastest developing cities. By focusing on this specific locality, the study aims to delve into the interplay between CSR initiatives and civic participation within an urban context, shedding light on the effectiveness of such programmes in promoting community engagement and social stability.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to;

1. assess the awareness and participation of residents in corporate social responsibility programmes in Asaba, Delta State.
2. identify patterns in community participation for enhancing inclusivity in Asaba, Delta State
3. evaluate the impact of demographic factors and civic engagement among residents in Asaba, Delta State.

Research Hypotheses

The study intends to test a number of hypotheses.

1. There is no significant relationship between awareness in corporate social responsibility programmes and the level of civic engagement among residents in Asaba, Delta State.
2. There is no significant relationship between community social responsibility programmes and civic engagement among residents in Asaba, Delta State.



3. There is no significant relationship between socio-demographic factors and civic engagement among residents in Asaba, Delta State.

2. Literature Review

In this section, a review of related studies on CSR was performed to better contextualize the study in the context of the objectives.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility is often hailed as a transformative tool for promoting, environmental sustainability, social and economic development (Niehm, Swinney & Miller, 2008; Hoi, Wu & Zhang, 2018). However, while CSR can significantly benefit urban areas, its true impact and effectiveness remain debatable. Proponents argue that CSR can improve the quality of life in urban communities by addressing critical issues such as education and healthcare, while also stimulating local economies through job creation and investment (Besser & Miller, 2001; Peake et al., 2017). These benefits, they claim, not only uplift communities but also build trust, enhancing a company's reputation and fostering customer loyalty.

Conversely, critics contend that CSR programmes often fall short in urban settings due to the complex and deeply entrenched social issues these communities face. Addressing problems like homelessness or environmental degradation demands long-term, multifaceted solutions that many CSR initiatives lack (Olney, 1995). Furthermore, the risk of tokenistic or short-term CSR efforts can lead to skepticism and distrust among urban residents, especially when businesses fail to align CSR with their core values (Besser, 1998; Rudito, Famiola & Anggahegari, 2022). Resource limitations further challenge the viability of effective CSR, making it essential for businesses to prioritize efforts and form strategic partnerships (Deigh et al., 2016; Peake et al., 2017). Thus, while

CSR holds potential, its limitations must be critically examined.

Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is widely recognized as a cornerstone of democratic governance, empowering citizens to influence decisions that shape their communities (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2017). Proponents argue that it fosters social cohesion, improves public services, and enhances a sense of belonging, driving individuals to contribute to societal development (Lin, 2015). Forms of civic engagement such as volunteering, political participation, and activism are seen as vital in shaping responsive and inclusive societies, ensuring that the voices of the people are heard and acted upon (Gerston, 2014; Rudolph & Horibe, 2016).

However, critics contend that civic engagement is not equally accessible to all. Socio-economic disparities play a significant role in determining participation levels, with individuals of higher education and income more likely to engage due to better access to resources and information (Shaker, 2014). Cultural norms and robust social networks further influence engagement, often leaving marginalized groups less involved (Hope & Jagers, 2014; Martens & Hobbs, 2015). Moreover, psychological barriers like powerlessness and disillusionment hinder participation, particularly among those who feel disconnected from political systems (Harding et al., 2015).

Additionally, the effectiveness of civic engagement is contingent on institutional support. Without accessible public institutions and transparent civic organizations, participation remains limited. Thus, while civic engagement has transformative potential, its impact is undermined by systemic barriers that must be addressed to ensure true inclusivity.

Community Participation

Community participation, vital for democratic governance and sustainable development, should not be viewed as a



passive process but as a dynamic force that empowers individuals to shape their communities. Critics may argue that participation can be tokenistic, with individuals merely informed about decisions without meaningful influence (Simplican et al., 2015). However, true engagement moves beyond mere information-sharing to collaboration and empowerment, where community members take ownership of decisions that affect their lives (Anton & Lawrence, 2014).

Skeptics may point to formal participation structures, such as advisory boards, as insufficient, arguing they are often dominated by elites and exclude marginalized voices. Yet, informal participation, through grassroots movements and activism, provides a more inclusive and responsive platform for addressing local issues (Baldus, Voorhees & Calantone, 2015; Li & Hunter, 2015). Barriers to participation, including lack of awareness, resources, and skills, do exist. Some contend that these barriers disproportionately affect lower socio-economic groups, creating an uneven playing field. However, with targeted education and capacity-building, these challenges can be mitigated (Kehm, Davey & Nanney, 2015).

Moreover, while apathy and mistrust toward institutions are real concerns, fostering trust through transparent decision-making processes can motivate greater civic engagement (Simplican et al., 2015). Ultimately, overcoming these barriers is essential for cultivating a more equitable and resilient society.

Underpinning Theories

Two theoretical perspectives are used to underpin the current study. These theories are the triple bottom line theory and structural-functionalism theory.

Triple Bottom Line Theory

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Theory originated in the mid-1990s, and its key proponents are John Elkington and the

consultancy firm he founded, Sustainability. John Elkington introduced the concept of the Triple Bottom Line in his 1994 book, "Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business." Elkington, a British sustainability expert, argued that businesses should focus not only on financial performance but also on their social and environmental impacts (Žak, 2015). The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Theory challenges the conventional focus on financial profit as the sole measure of a company's success, advocating instead for a balance between economic, social, and environmental performance (Ratna & Hasanah, 2019). Critics may argue that profitability should remain the priority, but TBL contends that businesses must also consider their social and environmental impacts. Socially, TBL emphasizes the importance of fair labor practices, community engagement, and contributing to societal well-being (Hussain, Rigoni & Orij, 2018). Environmentally, it highlights the need for sustainable resource management and reducing ecological footprints.

Proponents of TBL, like John Elkington, assert that integrating these three dimensions creates a more holistic approach to business performance (Shim et al., 2021). In the context of CSR initiatives, TBL suggests that economic, social, and environmental benefits are interconnected. For example, CSR efforts that improve local economic opportunities can increase community engagement. Similarly, initiatives that enhance social trust or environmental sustainability can encourage greater civic participation. Critics might argue this triple focus is overly ambitious, yet TBL proponents maintain that true sustainability requires businesses to account for their broader societal and environmental impact alongside financial success.



Structural-Functionalism Theory

Structural-functionalism, a sociological framework developed by Émile Durkheim between 1930 and 1960s, and later expanded by Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton, views society as a system of interconnected structures that maintain social stability (Treviño, 2017). Durkheim emphasized how institutions work together to sustain societal equilibrium (Candea, 2018). Parsons advanced this idea by analyzing social systems and the role of institutions in preserving order (Treviño, 2017). Merton refined the theory, introducing manifest and latent functions, showing that institutions have both intended and unintended effects, contributing to either stability or change (Candea, 2018).

Structural-functionalism theory understands society as a complex system where various components work together to maintain stability and social order (Dew, 2014). Society is viewed as composed of institutions, roles, and norms that contribute to overall equilibrium. Social institutions, including family, education, religion, and economy, are analyzed based on their functions that help maintain societal order (Delaney, 2016). The theory emphasizes social equilibrium, requiring harmonious functioning of society's parts to sustain stability (Wellstead, Howlett & Rayner, 2017). When disruptions occur, structural-functionalism examines how society adapts and restores balance (Izadi et al., 2020). Robert K. Merton later introduced manifest and latent functions, distinguishing intended observable consequences from unintended outcomes, aiding the understanding of social impacts (Izadi et al., 2020). The theory also underscores the importance of social norms and values in guiding behavior and ensuring adherence to societal expectations (Wellstead, Howlett, & Rayner, 2017). In this context, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives are seen as vital components that enhance community

stability and cohesion, fulfilling roles like improving well-being and fostering trust (Cornwell & Laumann, 2016). Effective CSR initiatives contribute to social equilibrium and encourage civic participation, ultimately leading to increased engagement.

3. Methodology

This study used a cross-sectional research design to evaluate the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes on civic engagement among residents in Asaba, Delta State. The cross-sectional design was chosen for its effectiveness in providing a snapshot of relationships between variables at a specific point in time, aligning well with the study's objectives. The target population comprised residents aged 18 and above who had lived in Asaba for at least five years and were familiar with local CSR programmes. This population was chosen to ensure respondents had adequate exposure to CSR activities, thereby enhancing the reliability of responses.

Due to the absence of comprehensive residential records, the purposive sampling method was employed to identify eligible participants. This method was justified as it allowed the researcher to focus on individuals most likely to provide relevant and informed responses, given the specific research focus. From an initial pool of 412 eligible residents, a sample size of approximately 200 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane's formula, ensuring a sufficient and representative sample while maintaining practicality in data collection.

Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire designed to capture key variables. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: Socio-demographic characteristics, to gather background information. Awareness and participation in CSR programmes, to assess exposure and involvement. Perceptions of community development, to



evaluate the perceived impact of CSR activities. Civic engagement activities, focusing on volunteerism and community participation.

The instrument comprised 20 carefully structured items, developed based on existing literature and pre-tested to ensure clarity and reliability. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software

version 27. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize population characteristics. Correlational analysis was conducted to test the study’s hypotheses, providing insights into the relationships between CSR programmes, civic engagement, and socio-demographic factors.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Frequency (N=200)	Percentage (%)
Age Brackets		
18-30 years	60	30
31-42 years	100	50
43 and above	40	20
Cumulative Frequency (CF)	200	100
Gender		
Male	90	45
Female	110	55
CF	200	100
Education Level		
Secondary Education	80	40
Tertiary Education	100	50
University/Postgraduate	20	10
CF	200	100
Income Range (Naira)		
Less than 50,000	50	25
50,000 - 100,000	70	35
100,001 - 150,000	50	25
Above 150,000	30	15
CF	200	100

Table 1 presents a descriptive analysis of the demographic characteristics of the 200 respondents. In terms of age, the majority fall within the 31-42 years bracket (50%). Gender distribution shows a higher representation of females (55%). Regarding education, most of the respondents had formal education. Income

distribution reveals that majority of respondents earn income.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

There is a significant relationship between awareness in corporate social responsibility and the level of civic engagement among residents in Asaba, Delta State.



Table 2: Awareness/Participation in CSR and Civic Engagement

Variables	Civic Engagement (r)	p-value	Decision
Awareness/Participation in CSR	.35	< 0.01	Accepted

The results reveal a significant positive relationship between awareness and participation in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and civic engagement ($r(200) = .35, p < .01$). This means that greater awareness of CSR among residents is linked to an increase in their participation in civic duties. The

formulated hypothesis was therefore accepted.

Hypothesis 2

There is a significant relationship between perceived community development through social responsibility programs and the level of civic engagement among residents in Asaba, Delta State.

Table 3: Perceived Community Development and Civic Engagement

Variables	Civic Engagement (r)	p-value	Decision
Perceived Community Development	.52	< 0.01	Accepted

The analysis showed a significant positive relationship between perceived community development and civic engagement ($r(200) = .52, p < .01$). This indicates that when residents perceive higher levels of community development through CSR programs, their civic engagement levels

also increase. The hypothesis was therefore accepted.

Hypothesis 3

There is a significant relationship between socio-demographic factors and the level of civic engagement among residents in Asaba, Delta State.

Table 4: Socio-Demographic Factors and Civic Engagement

Variables	Civic Engagement (r)	p-value	Decision
Age	.00	> 0.05	Not Significant
Gender	-.10	> 0.05	Not Significant
Education	-.07	> 0.05	Not Significant
Ethnic Affiliation	-.03	> 0.05	Not Significant
Income	.35	< 0.01	Significant

The findings indicate that most socio-demographic factors, including age, gender, education, and ethnic affiliation, had no significant relationship with civic engagement among residents. However, income was significantly related to civic engagement ($r(200) = .35, p < .01$), suggesting that higher income is associated with increased civic participation. The hypothesis was partially accepted.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis of the data reveals significant relationships among the variables related to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and civic engagement in Asaba, Delta State. Hypothesis 1, which posited a significant relationship between awareness and

participation in CSR programmes and civic engagement, was supported. The findings indicate a strong correlation ($r(200) = .35, p < .01$) between these factors, suggesting that increased awareness and active participation in CSR initiatives correspond to higher levels of civic engagement among residents. This aligns with the conclusions of previous studies, which emphasize the importance of CSR awareness in fostering civic responsibilities (Adeyemi & Aderogba-Oti, 2022; Obiagu & Ajaps, 2022).

Hypothesis 2 also received support, as the analysis demonstrated a significant relationship between perceived community development resulting from CSR

programmes and civic engagement ($r(200) = .52, p < .01$). This suggests that when residents perceive improvements in their community attributable to CSR initiatives, their levels of civic engagement rise correspondingly. These results echo findings in prior literature, reinforcing the notion that community development influences civic participation (Ajaps & Obiagu, 2021; Okafor, 2023).

In contrast, Hypothesis 3, which examined the relationship between socio-demographic factors and civic engagement, revealed that variables such as age ($r(200) = .00, p > .05$), gender ($r(200) = -.10, p > .05$), education ($r(200) = -.07, p > .05$), and ethnic affiliation ($r(200) = -.03, p > .05$) did not significantly correlate with civic engagement. This indicates that these socio-demographic factors do not influence civic engagement levels in this community. However, income was significantly related to civic engagement ($r(200) = .35, p < .01$), suggesting that higher income levels are associated with greater participation in civic activities. This finding partially supports the hypothesis regarding socio-demographic factors and underscores the importance of economic status in civic engagement, corroborating previous studies that highlight income as a critical factor (Abikoye et al., 2018; Mohammed et al., 2023).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that CSR programs are pivotal in driving civic engagement among residents in Asaba, Delta State. Awareness and active participation in CSR activities, along with perceptions of community development through these programs, emerged as significant factors enhancing civic involvement. Among socio-demographic factors, only income showed a notable influence, while age, gender, education, and ethnic affiliation had no significant impact. These findings highlight the importance of CSR initiatives

in fostering civic participation and provide valuable guidance for policymakers and community leaders focused on sustainable community development.

Based on the findings from the study, the following recommendations are suggested for policy review and execution:

1. Policymakers and community leaders should develop CSR initiatives that address the unique needs of their communities and ensure broad-based participation. Organizations must invest in raising awareness about their CSR activities and clearly demonstrate the tangible benefits these programmes bring to the community.
2. Organizations should create CSR programmes that cater to residents across different income levels, ensuring that economic barriers do not hinder civic participation. Inclusive CSR initiatives will help in engaging a wider segment of the community, promoting equity and active involvement.
3. There is also a need to regularly evaluate and adapt CSR programmes based on community feedback to meet evolving needs effectively. Foster strong partnerships between the private sector, government, and civil society to leverage CSR programmes for building resilient, engaged, and thriving communities.

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