

# **The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives on Community Development in Cameroon**

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## **Abstract**

The origin of CSR can be traced back to the 1950s and 1960s, when scholars and activists began questioning the social and environmental impacts of corporate activities. Influential figures such as Howard R. Bowen, known as the “father of CSR,” highlighted the social responsibilities of businesses in his book “Social Responsibilities of the Businessman” published in 1953<sup>1</sup>. He argued that, companies should consider the interest of stakeholders, including employees, customers, communities, and the environment. Throughout the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, CSR gained increasing attention due to several factors. The impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives on community development in Cameroon is an important and complex issue that warrants further investigation. While many businesses in Cameroon engage in CSR activities, the effectiveness and long-term impact of these initiatives on community development outcomes remain unclear, consequently bringing in a need to examine the extent to which CSR initiatives contribute to community development in Cameroon. Businesses find it hard to engage, involve, and build trust with relevant stakeholders, including community members, local organizations, and government agencies which are all crucial for the success of CSR initiatives which positively impact community development. As an addendum to this is the fact that understanding local customs, traditions, and power dynamics is essential for making CSR initiatives that are culturally sensitive and socially acceptable. Failure by businesses to take into consideration these factors when drafting

initiatives can lead to them becoming ineffective and even detrimental to the community's development. A deep dive into a cross section of verified literature in this area by employing the analytical techniques method confirmed the worry that CSR requires much attention in the local business environment to help facilitate businesses and resolve business disputes rapidly. Building stronger and better communities requires a collective effort from businesses, governments, and individuals. Corporate social responsibility plays a pivotal role in this process by enabling companies to leverage their resources, expertise, and influence for the greater good.

**Keywords:** CSR, Community Development, Dispute Resolution, Alternative Means, Impact

### **Background to the Study**

With the advent of globalization, industrialization, and privatization, at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become one of the most influential areas in the academic world and real life practices. It is not a modern phenomenon and certainly not something that can be accredited to more economically developed or less economically developed countries<sup>ii</sup> The concept of corporate social responsibility emerged in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century as a response to the growing recognition of the social, environmental, and ethical impacts of business activities. Thus, CSR refers to the voluntary initiatives and actions undertaken by companies to go beyond their legal obligations and contribute positively to the society. The concept of helping the poor and disadvantage was cited in much of the ancient Indian literature<sup>iii</sup>. This idea was also supported by many religious laws in history. It finds a specific mention in the verdict word 'Danam', which reflects the social philosophy of those days to help the needy members of the society<sup>iv</sup>. The renowned Indian philosophers like Kautilya, in his book "Arthashastra" clearly mentions about the king's responsibility and duty towards the welfare of the people like care giving, protection of the helpless and weak, the aged, and the members of the families of the deceased soldiers and workers, and even pre-Christian era philosophers in the West also preached and promoted about ethical principles while doing business.<sup>v</sup> The concept of CSR emerged from the idea that businesses have responsibilities that go beyond solely maximizing profits for their shareholders. It recognizes

that companies have a broader role to play in addressing social and environmental challenges and promoting sustainable development.

Apart from being a long standing practice, the imperative for CSR lies in the fact that it accords the organization the legitimacy to function in an environment so that they can continue to receive the resource inputs with which to expedite their operations and remain afloat<sup>vi</sup>. The concept of CSR suggest that companies are meant to be aloof, careless, or insensitive about their activities as they relate to other persons not directly involved in the running of the firm. The negative consequences of the operations of many organizations have drawn the attention of stakeholders and calls have been made for firms to become responsible for members of the communities that host their functions<sup>vii</sup>. The origin of CSR can be traced back to the 1950s and 1960s, when scholars and activists began questioning the social and environmental impacts of corporate activities. Influential figures such as Howard R. Bowen, known as the “father of CSR,” highlighted the social responsibilities of businesses in his book “ Social Responsibilities of the Businessman” published in 1953<sup>viii</sup>. He argued that, companies should consider the interest of stakeholders, including employees, customers, communities, and the environment. Throughout the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, CSR gained increasing attention due to several factors. The civil rights movement, environmental movements, and labour rights activism brought social and environmental issues to the forefront of public consciousness, promoting businesses to respond to societal expectations. This led to the adoption of various codes of conduct, industry standards, and voluntary initiatives aimed at promoting responsible business practices<sup>ix</sup>.

In the 1970s and 1980s, CSR became more institutionalized as companies established dedicated departments or positions to oversee CSR activities. The term “Corporate Social Responsibility” itself gained popularity during this period, replacing earlier terms such as “corporate social performance” and “social responsible business.”<sup>x</sup> The 1990s and early 2000s witnessed a significant shift in the understanding of CSR. The concept expanded to include not only philanthropic activities, but also integration of social and environmental considerations into core business strategies<sup>xi</sup>. This approach, known as “strategic CSR”, emphasizes on the alignment of business goals with societal needs and environmental sustainability<sup>xii</sup>. Today, CSR has become a mainstream business practice, with many companies recognizing its

importance for reputation management, risk mitigation, and long-term profitability. It encompasses a wide range of activities, including ethical sourcing, environmental sustainability, community engagement, employee wellbeing, diversity and inclusions, and philanthropy.

Community development is a process where community members take collective action on issues that are important to them. This might be done with or without the support of a community development professional or agency. Community development is intended to empower community members and create stronger and more connected communities<sup>xiii</sup>.

Community development can also be understood as a process that aims to improve the social, economic, and environmental well-being of a specific community or group of communities. It involves empowering community members to take collective action, build capacity, and create sustainable solutions to address local challenges and enhance quality of life. Community development is a holistic approach grounded in principles of empowerment, human rights, inclusion, social justice, self-determination and collective action (Kenny & Connors, 2017). Community development considers community members to be experts in their lives and communities, and values community knowledge and wisdom.<sup>xiv</sup> Community development programs are led by community members at every stage – from deciding on issues to selecting and implementing actions, and evaluation. Community development has an explicit focus on the redistribution of power to address the causes of inequality and disadvantage<sup>xv</sup>. There are potential outcomes at both individual and community levels. Children and families directly involved in community development initiatives may benefit from an increase in skills, knowledge, empowerment and self-efficacy and experience enhanced social inclusion and community connectedness (Kenny & Connors, 2017)<sup>xvi</sup>. As community members are empowered and develop as leaders, they can begin to challenge and improve conditions that are resulting in their disempowerment or negatively impacting their wellbeing (Ife, 2016)<sup>xvii</sup>.

At a community level, community development initiatives are likely to achieve long-term outcomes such as stronger and more cohesive communities, evidenced by changes in social capital, civic engagement, social cohesion, community safety and improved health (Haldane et al., 2019)<sup>xviii</sup>.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Cameroon has gained significant attention in recent years as both local and international businesses recognize the importance of contributing to the well-being of communities and addressing social and environmental challenges. While CSR practices vary across companies, sectors, and regions, there has been a growing recognition of the need for responsible business practices in the country. In Cameroon, CSR initiatives have been influenced by various factors. One of the key drivers is the growing awareness of social and environmental issues within the country is CSR. Challenges such as poverty, lack of access to education and healthcare, environmental degradation, and social inequality have highlighted the need for businesses to play a role in addressing these issues. Additionally, Cameroon's rich biodiversity, including its rainforests and unique wildlife, has emphasized the importance of environmental conservation and sustainable development. Government policies and regulations have also played a role in shaping CSR practices in Cameroon. The government has introduced measures to encourage responsible business conduct, such as the creation of the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms and the establishment of the Ministry of Environment, Protection of Nature, and Sustainable Development. Companies operating in the country are expected to comply with these regulations and integrate CSR into their operations. International frameworks and initiatives have also influenced CSR practices in Cameroon.

The United Nations Global Compact, for example, provides guidance and principles for businesses to align their operations with human rights, labour standards, environmental protection, and anti-corruption measures<sup>xix</sup>. Many companies in Cameroon have embraced these principles and incorporated them into their CSR strategies. In terms of CSR focus areas, companies in Cameroon have undertaken various initiatives. These include infrastructure development, such as building schools, hospitals, and community centres, to improve access to education and healthcare. Other initiatives focus on vocational training and skills development to enhance employment opportunities and empower individuals. Environmental conservation and sustainability have also gained prominence, with companies supporting initiatives such as reforestation, waste management, and renewable energy projects. Collaboration and partnerships between businesses, communities, and government entities has been a key factor to driving CSR in Cameroon. Engaging local communities and stakeholders

in the decision-making process ensures that CSR initiatives align with their needs and aspirations. Collaborative efforts also amplify the impact of CSR by combining resources, expertise, and networks to address complex, social, and environmental challenges. Despite a significant progress, challenges remain in the implementation of CSR in Cameroon. Limited resources, lack of awareness, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms present obstacles to effective implementation of CSR practices. There is a need for increased capacity building, transparency, and accountability to ensure that CSR initiatives have a meaningful and sustainable impact on community development in the country. Overall, CSR in Cameroon is evolving as businesses recognize their role in contributing to community development and addressing social and environmental issues.

With continued commitment and collaboration, CSR practices have the potential to drive positive change and contribute to the sustainable development of Cameroon.

### **Research Problem**

The impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives on community development in Cameroon is an important and complex issue that warrants further investigation. While many businesses in Cameroon engage in CSR activities, the effectiveness and long-term impact of these initiatives on community development outcomes remain unclear, consequently bringing in a need to examine the extent to which CSR initiatives contribute to community development in Cameroon, identifying the factors that influence their effectiveness, and the challenges businesses may face when implementing these CSR initiatives in order to improve community development in Cameroon. The proper implementation of CSR activities requires that businesses are not just motivated by economic gains, or need for a reputation, but that they are intentional in positively affecting the lives and living conditions of members of the host community. With the involvement and assistance of the community stakeholders, organizations are not just expected to invest in charities, but to distribute their resources for infrastructural development, basic life amenities, and cultural activities to their host community. Such

intervention would be reflected in the lives and economic status of the families and individuals of the host community.

In Cameroon however, though there have been a few successes on businesses that successfully impacted community development positively through CSR initiatives, they are quite few in number. Businesses find it hard to engage, involve, and build trust with relevant stakeholders, including community members, local organizations, and government agencies which are all crucial for the success of CSR initiatives which positively impact community development.

Adding to this is the fact that understanding local customs, traditions, and power dynamics is essential for making CSR initiatives that are culturally sensitive and socially acceptable. Failure by businesses to take into consideration these factors when drafting initiatives can lead to them becoming ineffective and even detrimental to the community's development. Accruing to this is the fact that a majority of businesses implement CSR initiatives only to the extent they feel obligated to or believe that they would benefit from it, and most of the infrastructural and socio-economic projects said to impact the community are left uncompleted for years<sup>xx</sup>.

The degradation of land, pollution of water which is considered the main source of livelihood for citizens and the contamination of air have worsened the quality of the health of people as well as the sustainability of the natural ecosystem. Many remote areas in Cameroon that are said to be the host communities for these businesses lack the basic necessities like portable drinking water, and education which is a right to life. This means these businesses barely adhere to environmental, public health, or human right standards in their relationships with the host communities. These businesses continue to distort development rather than fostering development using their resources and network.

If this is not addressed, the ineffective implementation of CSR initiatives that have a positive impact on community development would lead to a threat in the lives of those in the communities due to a lack of environmental sustainability. This would result in people not being able to meet with basic needs of food and water, and the standards of living would drop due to an increment in socio-economic issues such as poverty, price inflation, theft, prostitution and poor student behaviour due to irresponsible parenting and poor education.

## **Research Question**

To what extent does corporate social responsibility (CSR) contribute to community development in Cameroon?

## **Literature Review**

### ***Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Community Development in Bayelsa State***

ANITA EYERINEBI-EBI O.D, MAY NWOYE, CROSS OGOHI D., exploits the main essence of CSR which is to improve the welfare of the members of the society. The proper implementation of CSR initiatives entail that organizations are not just driven by the quest for economic gain or good reputation, but that they are deliberate with positively affecting the lives of the members of their host communities. The authors state that the main objective of the study is to determine the impact CSR on host community development in Bayelsa state, Nigeria. The work adopts a survey design method and a structured questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents. Meanwhile, this research using Cameroon as a case study seeks to demonstrate the relationship between CSR initiatives and community development outcomes in Cameroon. It encompasses various dimensions that can be explored to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of CSR on communities in Cameroon, bringing out the challenges faced by the businesses in establishing CSR initiatives on the host communities, and challenges these host communities and stakeholders face with these organizations and businesses.

### ***Community Development and Corporate Social Responsibility in Ebonyi State: An Investigative Study of Selected Mining Firms and Communities***

This study examines the activities of mining firms in Ebonyi state on the development of their host communities. This study is anchored on Edward Freeman's stakeholder's theory of 1948. It adopted a descriptive survey design with a variety of qualitative research methods, discussing the role of CSR initiatives in community development.



This author also analyses the competences required by CSR managers in order to have a better understanding of the practical aspects of CSR. This paper recommends the effective partnership between managers of mining corporations and community leaders as the basic measure to solve the lingering problem between mining corporations and their host communities. However, this research using Cameroon as a case study seeks to demonstrate the relationship between CSR initiatives and community development outcomes in Cameroon. It encompasses various dimensions that can be explored to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of CSR on communities in Cameroon, bringing out the challenges faced by the businesses in establishing CSR initiatives on the host communities, and challenges these host communities and stakeholders face with these organizations and businesses.

***Corporate Social Responsibility Practices in the Top Ten Indian Companies and its Impact on Community Development***

This study contemporary CSR practices in literature. The author describes the basic purpose and aim of this paper are to investigate and describe the broad categories of CSR practices of the top 10 Indian companies in their host communities, and their responses towards the surrounding community development environment.

This study also tries to build the relation between CSR practices and their impact on community development and the well-being of a community. The author adopted a secondary source of data that is used to analyse the data based on archival data sources, showing how CSR practices positively influence and impact community development and well-being. Meanwhile, this research using Cameroon as a case study seeks to demonstrate the relationship between CSR initiatives and community development outcomes in Cameroon.

It encompasses various dimensions that can be explored to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of CSR on communities in Cameroon, bringing out the challenges faced by the businesses in establishing CSR initiatives on the host communities, and challenges these host communities and stakeholders face with these organizations and businesses.

## **Research Methodology**

### ***The Doctrinal/Bench Methods***

This is a research method that involves using already existing data<sup>xxi</sup>. Existing data is summarised to increase the overall effectiveness of the research work<sup>xxii</sup>. Secondary data is collected by someone other than the actual user. This simply means that information is already available and someone analyses it. Researchers leverage secondary data analysis in an attempt to answer a new research question, or to examine an alternative perspective on the original question of the previous study<sup>xxiii</sup>. The Secondary research method includes;<sup>xxiv</sup>

The consultation of documents from online sources and other means, reading of books, articles, journals, dissertations, thesis, and laws to later on analyse them.

There is also the consultation of useful internet websites, watching of news and reading newspapers, and the visitation of libraries and documentations. This study will make use of the secondary research method, and every article, book or journal read and every consultation done is what is relevant to this study.

## **The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Community Development in Cameroon**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives can have a significant impact on community development in Cameroon. Corporate social responsibility empowers companies to positively impact society while driving their own success<sup>xxv</sup>. By investing in philanthropy, ethical practices, employee engagement, and environmental sustainability, businesses can contribute to the betterment of communities and create a brighter future for all<sup>xxvi</sup>. When companies operating in Cameroon integrate CSR practices into their business operations, they can contribute to the social, economic, and environmental well-being of local communities. Below are some ways in which CSR can impact community development in Cameroon both positively and negatively:

***Positive Impacts of CSR on Community Development in Cameroon:***

1. Social Development; CSR initiatives can contribute to social development in Cameroon by supporting education, healthcare, and social welfare programs that benefit local communities. Companies that invest in community development projects can help improve access to essential services and enhance the quality of life for residents.

2. Economic Empowerment; CSR activities that focus on economic empowerment, such as job creation, skills training, and support for small businesses, can stimulate economic growth and reduce poverty in Cameroon. By providing employment opportunities and supporting entrepreneurship, companies can contribute to sustainable economic development in the region.

3. Environmental Sustainability; CSR programs that promote environmental sustainability can help protect Cameroon's natural resources and ecosystems. Companies that implement eco-friendly practices, conservation projects, and renewable energy initiatives can contribute to environmental conservation and sustainable development in the country.

4. Community Engagement; Engaging with local communities through CSR activities fosters positive relationships, trust, and collaboration between companies and residents. By listening to community needs, involving stakeholders in decision-making processes, and co-designing projects with community input, companies can ensure that their CSR efforts align with local priorities and contribute to meaningful community development outcomes.

5. Capacity Building; CSR programs in Cameroon can support capacity building initiatives that enhance the skills, knowledge, and capabilities of community members. This can include training programs, educational scholarships, vocational skills development, and entrepreneurship support to empower individuals and organizations to drive their own development and create sustainable solutions to local challenges.

***Negative Impacts of CSR on Community Development in Cameroon:***

1. Greenwashing<sup>xxvii</sup>; Some companies may engage in CSR activities primarily for marketing purposes without making a significant impact on community development. This practice,

known as greenwashing, can mislead stakeholders and divert resources away from genuine community development initiatives.

2. Dependency; In some cases, communities in Cameroon may become dependent on CSR initiatives provided by companies, leading to a reliance on external support rather than developing self-sustaining solutions. This dependency can hinder long-term community development and empowerment.

3. Lack of Transparency; Lack of transparency in CSR activities can lead to mistrust among community members and stakeholders. Companies that do not disclose information about their CSR initiatives or fail to engage with local communities in a transparent manner may face challenges in building positive relationships and achieving meaningful impact.

It is important for companies operating in Cameroon to implement CSR initiatives that are aligned with local needs, engage stakeholders in decision-making processes, and prioritize long-term sustainable development outcomes. By fostering genuine partnerships, promoting social inclusion, and addressing both the positive and negative impacts of CSR on community development, companies can contribute to positive change and create lasting benefits for communities in Cameroon.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Building stronger and better communities requires a collective effort from businesses, governments, and individuals. Corporate social responsibility plays a pivotal role in this process by enabling companies to leverage their resources, expertise, and influence for the greater good. When companies actively invest in the well-being of the communities they operate in, it fosters a sense of belonging, encourages economic growth, and improves the overall quality of life.

By focusing on education, healthcare, infrastructure development, and environmental conservation, businesses can address critical societal challenges and contribute to sustainable community development. Additionally, by collaborating with local stakeholders, including

government bodies, NGOs, and community leaders, companies can ensure their efforts align with the specific needs and aspirations of the communities they serve.

Building stronger communities is an ongoing endeavour that requires collaboration between businesses, governments, and individuals. Corporate social responsibility empowers companies to positively impact society while driving their own success. By investing in philanthropy, ethical practices, employee engagement, and environmental sustainability, businesses can contribute to the betterment of communities and create a brighter future for all<sup>xxviii</sup>.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> <https://uipress.uiowa.edu> , accessed 15/04/2024 Howard R. Bowen (1953), Social responsibility of the business man.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://lamintang.org>journal>ij-humans>article>view> accessed 14/04/2024, V. Bhukya, “Corporate Social Responsibility Practices in the Top Ten Indian Companies and Its Impact on Community Development”, *International Journal of Humanities, Management and Social Science*.

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<sup>viii</sup> <https://uipress.uiowa.edu> , accessed 15/04/2024 Howard R. Bowen (1953), Social responsibility of the business man.

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<sup>xii</sup> <https://www.researchgate.net> , accessed 15/04/2024.

<sup>xiii</sup> <https://aifs.gov.au>resources>resource-sheets>what-community-development> accessed April 15<sup>th</sup> 2024.

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- <sup>xxi</sup> <https://www.alchermer.com> , accessed 27/04/2024
- <sup>xxii</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>xxiii</sup> <https://www.alchermer.com> , accessed 27/04/2024
- <sup>xxiv</sup> <https://www.qualtrics.com> , accessed 27/04/2024
- <sup>xxv</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com> , accessed 27/04/2024
- <sup>xxvi</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com> , accessed 27/04/2024
- <sup>xxvii</sup> <https://www.investopedia.com> , accessed 28/04/2024, says it is the *process of conveying a false impression or misleading information about how a company's products are environmentally sound.*
- <sup>xxviii</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com> accessed, 28/04/2024.