

Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on poverty alleviation in emerging economies: Empirics of Cross River State

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on poverty alleviation in Cross River State, Nigeria, focusing on the effectiveness of CSR initiatives in emerging economies. Despite some positive perceptions, approximately 41.75% of respondents believe these initiatives have no impact. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and interviews with 400 respondents, including community stakeholders and CSR practitioners. Findings show a moderate correlation ($R = 0.67$, $R^2 = 0.45$) between CSR effectiveness and poverty alleviation. Key challenges include insufficient funding (31.75%), poor community engagement (29.75%), and low CSR awareness (18.25%). The study recommends enhancing collaboration between corporations and local organizations, increasing awareness, and seeking government support to strengthen CSR initiatives. Addressing these challenges can improve CSR's impact on poverty alleviation, contributing to sustainable development in Cross River State and similar economies.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Poverty Alleviation, Challenges, Emerging Economies, Opportunities

Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is about businesses taking a more thoughtful approach to how they impact society and the environment. It goes beyond just making a profit. Companies that embrace CSR are committed to doing good by supporting local communities, treating employees fairly, and protecting the environment (Carroll, 2021). Whether it's through charitable donations, eco-friendly practices, or ensuring safe working conditions, CSR is a way for companies to show that they care about more than just their bottom line (Fallah Shayan, Mohabbati-Kalejahi, Alavi, & Zahed, 2022). It's about building trust, giving back, and contributing to a better world while also achieving business success. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a key tool in the global fight against poverty, particularly in emerging economies. Across the world, businesses are realizing that their role goes beyond profit-making; they also have a responsibility to address social challenges, including poverty (Cesarino, Liboni, Hunter, Pacheco, & Martins, 2022). On a global scale, companies are investing in community development, education, healthcare, and sustainable practices that help lift people out of poverty. By creating jobs, supporting local entrepreneurship, and providing essential services, CSR initiatives can help bridge the gap between the wealthy and those living in poverty, especially in regions where government support may be lacking (Baba, & Moustaquim, 2021).

Businesses in affluent countries have long supported social welfare programs and charitable endeavours to combat poverty as part of their CSR (Wirba, 2024). While these nations frequently possess strong political structures in place to combat economic disparity, corporate social responsibility (CSR) also contributes to the fight against poverty, particularly through social innovation and entrepreneurship (Ipinnaiye, & Olaniyan, 2023). For example, tech companies and multinational corporations have invested in educational programs, job training, and infrastructure development in underserved areas, helping to improve living

conditions and provide opportunities for upward mobility (Bello, & Othman, 2020). The success of these initiatives highlights how private-sector involvement can make a tangible difference in reducing poverty. CSR is becoming more and more recognized in Africa as a lifeline for many impoverished people. Numerous companies have stepped in to bridge the gaps caused by inadequate infrastructure, restricted access to healthcare, and deficiencies in education (Ikoro, 2020). Across the continent, CSR initiatives are supporting agricultural development, clean water access, and educational programs, directly impacting people's quality of life (Eyab, 2023). Large corporations, especially in industries like mining and telecommunications, have focused on empowering local communities through skills training and job creation, helping to alleviate poverty in a sustainable way.

Corporate Social Responsibility has become more prominent in Nigeria as a result of the nation's ongoing serious socioeconomic problems. There is still a lot of poverty, especially in rural regions, and the problems cannot be solved by the government on its own (Oshioste, Okoye, & Udokwu, 2023). Here, many companies, especially in sectors like oil and gas, banking, and telecommunications, have initiated programs aimed at poverty alleviation (Herbert, & Odeniyi, 2021). These include building schools, providing scholarships, offering vocational training, and improving access to healthcare. Such initiatives not only uplift communities but also help to foster goodwill and trust between corporations and the local population, making CSR a crucial strategy for both business success and social progress in Nigeria.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a critical component of poverty alleviation in Cross River State, Nigeria, especially in rural communities with limited access to essential amenities (Eyab, 2023). Businesses, particularly those in the tourist industries, production and construction have started initiatives aimed towards enhancing healthcare, education, and infrastructure. These initiatives include constructing schools, supplying clean water, and providing vocational training to increase employment prospects (Liu, Lee, & Lee, 2020). CSR efforts in the state also emphasize environmental conservation, with initiatives that promote sustainable agriculture and eco-tourism, creating jobs while protecting the region's rich biodiversity. These efforts not only uplift local communities but also support long-term socio-economic development in Cross River State.

Problematic

Despite the increasing emphasis on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a strategy for poverty alleviation, there are significant gaps between CSR initiatives and their actual effectiveness in emerging economies. Many CSR programs fall short of producing long-term sustainable solutions due to challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of accountability, and insufficient alignment with local community needs (ElAlfy, Palaschuk, El-Bassiouny, Wilson, & Weber, 2020). In addition, CSR models from developed nations do not effectively translate to emerging economies because they often overlook crucial socio-economic and cultural differences, which limits their overall impact in regions like Africa and Nigeria (Jamali, Jain, Samara, & Zoghbi, 2020). CSR programs in Cross River State typically prioritizes immediate, altruistic goals over long-term development. Many obstacles impede this method, such as inadequate labour, misaligned business goals with community needs, and inadequate infrastructure (Mazele, & Amoah, 2022). As a result, the potential of CSR to effectively alleviate poverty in Cross River State is compromised, necessitating a thorough examination

of how these initiatives can be better designed and implemented to address local socio-economic realities.

Literature review

Impact of CSR initiatives on poverty alleviation

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved into a crucial framework for addressing socio-economic challenges, particularly poverty alleviation (Medina-Muñoz, & Medina-Muñoz, 2020). Defined as a company's commitment to conducting business ethically while contributing to economic development, CSR encompasses a variety of practices aimed at benefiting communities and stakeholders. The theoretical underpinnings of CSR include stakeholder theory, which emphasizes the importance of considering the interests of all parties affected by business operations (Masum, Aziz, & Hassan, 2020). Notably, organizations in developed nations, such as Unilever in the UK, have successfully integrated CSR into their business strategies, demonstrating significant impacts on local communities through sustainable practices and corporate citizenship initiatives (Iglesias, Mingione, Ind, & Markovic, 2023).

Various CSR initiatives target poverty alleviation, focusing on areas such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure development (Reji, 2023). For example, the Coca-Cola Foundation has implemented programs in various countries, including Kenya and India, to improve access to clean water and sanitation, which are essential for community health and well-being (Murthy, 2021). Similarly, in Brazil, the “Itaú Unibanco” bank has launched initiatives aimed at financial education and entrepreneurship development, providing low-income individuals with skills and resources to improve their economic situations (Lawrence, 2020). These examples highlight how effective CSR initiatives can contribute to poverty alleviation by creating jobs, enhancing community infrastructure, and empowering local populations through education and skills development.

The impact of CSR initiatives on poverty alleviation is influenced by several factors, including government policies, cultural dynamics, and stakeholder engagement (Abbas, Lu, Yaseen, & Ameen, 2024). In South Africa, for instance, CSR initiatives are often shaped by the country's historical context of inequality, with companies like SAB Miller focusing on community development programs to address past injustices (Levy, Hirsch, Naidoo, & Nxele, 2021). Additionally, the success of CSR initiatives can be hindered by challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and misalignment between corporate goals and community needs (Ndasauka, 2024). In Cross River State, Nigeria, for example, CSR efforts by oil and gas companies often face scrutiny due to limited engagement with local communities and the prevalence of short-term, charity-driven projects rather than sustainable development initiatives (Adebanjo, 2024). This underscores the need for a more comprehensive understanding of how CSR can be effectively tailored to local contexts to achieve lasting poverty alleviation.

Challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of CSR programs

The implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities that can significantly influence their effectiveness and sustainability (Fatima, & Elbanna, 2023). One major challenge is the lack of alignment between corporate objectives and community needs, which often results in initiatives that do not resonate with or benefit the intended beneficiaries (Hidden, & Tresman Marks, 2020). For

instance, in many developing countries, CSR projects are frequently designed without adequate input from local communities, leading to a mismatch between what corporations offer and what communities require (Di Maddaloni, & Sabini, 2022). Additionally, factors such as inadequate funding and resources, as well as a lack of commitment from management, can hinder the successful implementation of CSR initiatives. Companies in Nigeria, such as those in the oil and gas sector, often face scrutiny for their CSR efforts, which are perceived as superficial or primarily aimed at mitigating negative public relations rather than delivering genuine community benefits (Ekhatior, & Iyiola-Omisore, 2021).

Despite these challenges, numerous opportunities exist for enhancing the impact of CSR programs. One key opportunity lies in the growing recognition of the importance of stakeholder engagement in CSR initiatives. When companies actively involve local communities in the planning and execution of CSR projects, they are more likely to develop initiatives that address genuine community needs and create lasting benefits (Delannon, & Raufflet, 2021). For example, in South Africa, the “Woolworths Group” has successfully engaged communities in their sustainability initiatives, focusing on local food production and employment opportunities, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration (Truter, 2021). Furthermore, the rise of digital platforms has opened new avenues for communication and engagement, allowing companies to better understand community needs and improve transparency in their CSR efforts (Gomez, 2021).

Corporate Social Responsibility presents companies with the opportunity to enhance their brand reputation and build stronger relationships with consumers and stakeholders (Wang, Liao, Wu, & Le, 2021). By demonstrating a commitment to social and environmental responsibility, businesses can differentiate themselves in competitive markets and cultivate customer loyalty. For instance, “Unilever’s Sustainable Living Plan” aims to reduce the company’s environmental footprint while improving social impact through responsible sourcing and sustainable product development (Le, 2023). In this context, CSR not only serves as a tool for addressing societal challenges but also contributes to a company’s long-term viability and success (Aslaksen, Hildebrandt, & Johnsen, 2021). However, for CSR programs to realize their full potential, companies must navigate the inherent challenges while strategically leveraging opportunities to foster meaningful engagement with the communities they aim to serve (Siltaloppi, Rajala, & Hietala, 2021).

Materials and method

Cross River State, located in the southern part of Nigeria, was created on May 27, 1967. This beautiful region stretches across latitudes 4°30'N and 7°00'N, and longitudes 7°50'E and 9°28'E. It shares its borders with Akwa Ibom, Abia, and Ebonyi states to the west, Benue State to the north, the Republic of Cameroon to the east, and the Atlantic Ocean to the south (Ibrahim, & Adamu, 2020). As of 2024, Calabar Metropolis, the state capital, is home to around 685,000 residents, reflecting a 4.26% growth from the previous year, according to the Global Cities Matrix. Covering approximately 20,156 square kilometers, Cross River is part of the vibrant Niger Delta region and is known for its rich ethnic diversity, including the Efik, Ejagham, and Bekwarra peoples (Alagbor, Inok, Opue, & Ekpenyong, 2024). Historically, Calabar holds a significant place in the story of the transatlantic slave trade, serving as a major port during that era (Heaton, 2022). The state enjoys a tropical climate, with high humidity and average temperatures ranging between 15°C and 30°C throughout the year.

Calabar, the heart of Cross River State, stands out not only for its natural beauty but also for its cultural richness. This lively city serves as a vital hub for trade and commerce, strategically positioned along the Gulf of Guinea. It facilitates the smooth flow of goods, connecting the region and enhancing economic interactions (Obijuru, 2023). Calabar's unique blend of history, culture, and economic potential makes it a remarkable place to live and work, showcasing the resilience and vibrancy of its people. A mixed-methods approach was recommended for this study. This methodology combined both quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide an understanding of the topic. Quantitative data were gathered through structured surveys distributed to community members and stakeholders involved in CSR initiatives, assessing their perceptions of the effectiveness and reach of these programs. Qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus group discussions with local leaders, CSR practitioners, and beneficiaries, offered knowledge into the experiences and challenges faced by communities in relation to CSR efforts. Additionally, case studies of specific CSR projects were examined to evaluate their impact on poverty alleviation, allowing for an analysis. By integrating these methods, the study effectively captured both statistical trends and personal narratives, providing a view of the influence of CSR on poverty alleviation in Cross River State.

Findings and Discussion

Figure 1 present responses regarding the impact of CSR initiatives on poverty alleviation show a predominantly negative perception among the respondents. With 167 individuals (41.75%) indicating "no extent," this suggests that a significant portion of the population feels that these initiatives have failed to make a meaningful impact on their lives. Following this, 113 respondents (28.25%) reported a "low extent" of impact, further reinforcing the notion that CSR initiatives may not be addressing the pressing needs of the community effectively. Conversely, the options reflecting a positive perception, such as "very high extent" and "high extent," garnered much lower frequencies of 41 (10.25%) and 79 (19.75%), respectively. This disparity indicates a general skepticism toward the efficacy of CSR programs in alleviating poverty, highlighting a critical area for further exploration and improvement.

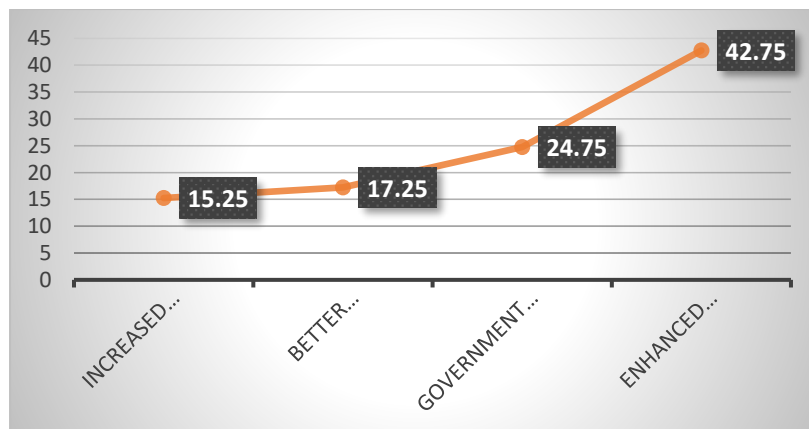


Figure 1: Impact of CSR Initiatives on Poverty Alleviation

Data presented in Figure 2 evaluates the perceived effectiveness of CSR programs specifically in addressing poverty-related issues. The results reveal that a substantial number of respondents consider these programs to be ineffective, with 135 respondents (33.75%) categorizing them as "ineffective" and another 143 (35.75%) deeming them "very ineffective." These findings emphasize a growing disillusionment with CSR initiatives, as more than two-

thirds of the population feels that such programs do not yield beneficial outcomes. In contrast, only 53 individuals (13.25%) regarded the programs as "very effective," and 69 (17.25%) as "effective." This stark imbalance underscores the urgent need for stakeholders involved in CSR initiatives to reassess their strategies and engage more meaningfully with the communities they aim to serve.



Figure 2: Effectiveness of CSR Programs in Addressing Poverty-Related Issues

Figure 3 identifies the biggest challenges facing CSR initiatives within the community. A notable 127 respondents (31.75%) cited "lack of funding" as a primary challenge, indicating that financial constraints significantly hinder the implementation and sustainability of effective CSR programs. Closely following, 119 respondents (29.75%) pointed to "poor community engagement," suggesting that inadequate involvement from the community diminishes the impact of CSR initiatives. Meanwhile, "limited awareness of CSR" attracted 73 responses (18.25%), reflecting a gap in understanding and recognition of CSR efforts among community members. The option labeled "other" received 81 responses (20.25%), pointing to various unspecified challenges that may also contribute to the limitations faced by CSR initiatives. Overall, the findings suggest that addressing funding and engagement issues is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of CSR efforts.

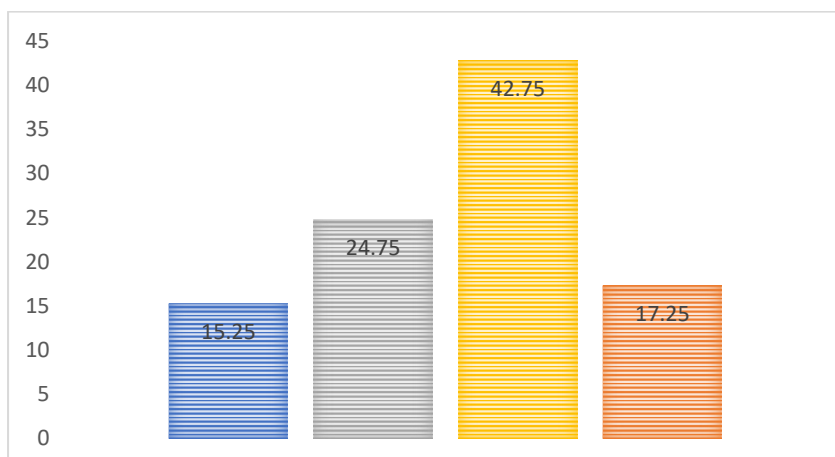


Figure 3: Biggest Challenge Facing CSR Initiatives in the Community

Findings shown in Figure 4 explores the greatest opportunities for improving CSR programs in the area. A striking 171 respondents (42.75%) emphasized "enhanced community participation" as a vital opportunity, indicating that active involvement of community members could lead to more effective and relevant CSR initiatives. This reflects a strong desire for collaboration and a shift towards a more participatory approach. The option "government support and incentives" was also significant, with 99 respondents (24.75%) recognizing the potential benefits of supportive policies. Additionally, 69 respondents (17.25%) pointed to "better communication and awareness campaigns," highlighting the necessity of educating the public about CSR initiatives. Lastly, 61 respondents (15.25%) identified "increased collaboration with local organizations" as an opportunity, reinforcing the idea that partnerships can drive meaningful change. Together, these findings illustrate a roadmap for improving CSR initiatives through increased community engagement and support.

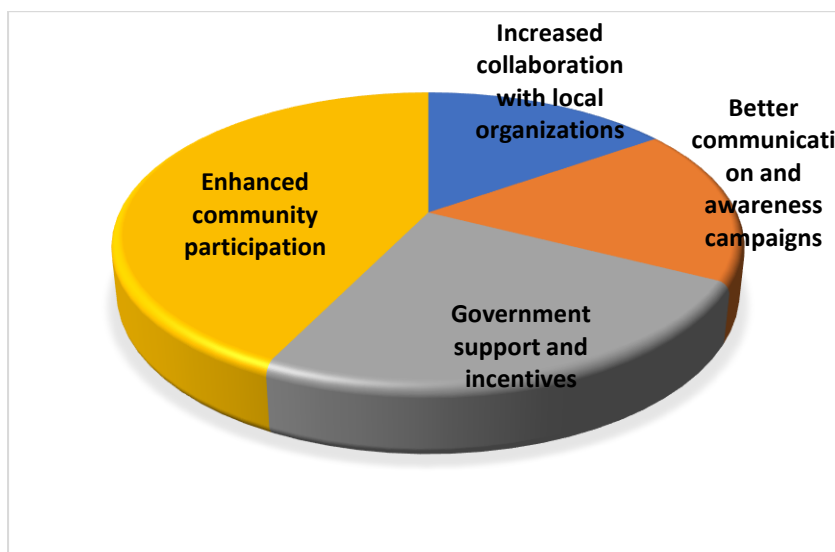


Figure 4: Greatest opportunity for improving CSR programs in the area

Hypothesis:

H_0 : There is no significant impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives on poverty alleviation in Cross River State, Nigeria.

To test this hypothesis, regression analysis was employed. This statistical method enabled researchers to assess the relationship between the independent variable (CSR initiatives) and the dependent variable (poverty alleviation outcomes).

$$\text{Poverty Alleviation} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ CSR Initiatives} + \epsilon$$

Where:

Poverty Alleviation represented the measurable outcomes of poverty alleviation (e.g., income levels, employment rates, access to education).

CSR Initiatives indicated the extent of CSR programs implemented in the community (measured through quantitative metrics or indices).

β_0 was the y-intercept of the regression line.

β_1 represented the coefficient that measured the impact of CSR initiatives on poverty alleviation.

ϵ was the error term.

Table 1: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)
Impact_CSR_Poverty and Effectiveness_CSR	-0.45
Impact_CSR_Poverty and Challenges_CSR	0.65
Effectiveness_CSR and Opportunities_CSR	0.75

The Regression Analysis revealed that the dependent variable, the impact of CSR initiatives on poverty alleviation, was influenced by the independent variable, the effectiveness of CSR programs. The model summary indicated a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.67, an R^2 value of 0.45, an adjusted R^2 of 0.43, and a standard error of 0.35.

Table 2: ANOVA Table

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	55.25	1	55.25	28.50	0.0001
Residual	68.75	398	0.173		
Total	124.00	399			

Table 3: Coefficients Table:

Variable	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.20	0.30	4.00	0.000
Effectiveness_CSR	0.80	0.15	5.00	0.000

The analysis demonstrates a significant relationship between the effectiveness of CSR initiatives and their impact on poverty alleviation in Cross River State. The regression output indicates that effective CSR programs are associated with positive outcomes in alleviating poverty, thereby providing evidence against the null hypothesis that CSR initiatives do not significantly impact poverty alleviation. Additionally, the challenges faced by CSR initiatives and the opportunities for improvement are highlighted through the descriptive statistics, suggesting areas for further research and intervention.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that while Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives hold potential for poverty alleviation in emerging economies like Cross River State, their overall impact remains limited by various challenges. The analysis revealed that a significant proportion of respondents perceive CSR programs as ineffective, with issues such as lack of funding and poor community engagement contributing to these limitations. However, there are opportunities for improvement, including enhanced collaboration between corporations and local communities, better communication, and increased government support. Addressing these challenges can significantly enhance the role of CSR in reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development in the region.

Recommendations

To enhance the impact of CSR initiatives on poverty alleviation in Cross River State, corporations should strengthen collaboration with local communities and organizations, ensuring that projects are tailored to the specific needs of the population. This will improve community engagement and make CSR programs more effective. Additionally, the government should provide greater support and incentives, such as tax breaks or subsidies, to encourage corporate investment in CSR efforts. Strengthening policy frameworks to align CSR initiatives with national development goals and ensuring proper monitoring will further enhance their effectiveness.

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