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USING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AS A TOOL FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND HARMONIOUS PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

SANUSI BERNICE (PhD)
sanusib@run.edu.ng
Department of Mass Communication
Redeemer's University Ede, Osun State

&
ADELEKE-SOLA DUPE SEKINAT
adelekesoladupe@gmail.com
+23480132333233
Department of Mass Communication
Redeemer's University Ede, Osun State

&
ILESANMI OLUWASANMI SAMUEL
Ilesanmikmi@gmail.com
+2347088898999
Department of Mass Communication
Redeemer's University Ede, Osun State

ABSTRACT

This study assessed the use of corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a tool for effective community relations and harmonious peaceful coexistence, using Osun State Polytechnic Iree as a focus. The study examined the Concept of Community Relations, Corporate Social Responsibilities and its constituents, among others. The study was hinged on the Stakeholder's Theory as justification, whilethe qualitative research design which entails the use of in-depth interview was employed as methodology. Furthermore, the study population comprised of dwellers of Iree community which is the host environment of the institution of focus, as 15 informants/participants were purposively picked. The study further used primary source of data to obtain firsthand information from the selected key informants through the interview guide/protocol, while data gathered were presented through coding and thematic analytical techniques. Thus, findings showed that philantrophy, provision of employment opportunities and participation in traditional festivals in the community were the form of CSR projects of Osun State Polytechnic Iree. Also, it was found that these CSR programmes are subjected to periodic review based on available of funds and needs of the community, in order to further enhance the quality of the programme. However, it was offered as part of recommendations that representatives of the community should be inculcated into the governing council of the institution, so that *they can have a sense of belonging as a critical stakeholder in the continuous existence of the institution.*

Keywords: Community Relations, CSR, Stakeholders, Philantrophy, Programmes,

Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept which has attained authority in business reporting. Every corporation has the policy concerning CSR and produces a reporton an annual basis specifying its activities. The comprehensive definition of CSR is concerned with what is and what should be the relationship between global corporations, governments of countries, and individual citizens(Li, Amlani, &Bertels, 2014). There should be establishment of the relationship between a corporation and the local society in which it is located or operates. According to Touitou and Ambassador Brikins (2019), the central principle of social responsibility is the social contract between all the stakeholders and the society, which is an imperative requirement of the civil society. It is vital to extent social responsibility beyond the present members of the society.

Furthermore, Social responsibility in simple terms is referred to the responsibility towards the future and the forthcoming members of the society (Crowther& Aras, 2008).However, every organization aims at achieving good reputation, image, growth, increase in turn over, assets and ultimately makes profit. All these actually depend on the goodwill and ability to carry along their stakeholders (Aikins &Adu-Oppong, 2015). According to Ojo and Onaopepo (2020), irrespective of the size and location of an organisation, effective relationship with stakeholders is a necessity if such organization wants to continue in operation. This effective relationship can be sustained through corporate social responsibility (CSR) which is needed to be carried out by organisations from time to time. CSR according to Singh and Misra (2020) can be categorized into three (3) dimensions: those at the level of employee, level of customers and level of community. Thus, the one at the level of community is regarded as Corporate Community Involvement (Amini & Bianco, 2017; Singh & Misra, 2020).

According to Ojo and Onaopepo (2020) CSR is embarked upon by business firms to give their environment/community of operations a sense of belonging through implementation of programmes and projects that are beneficial to such environment. Moreover, non-commercial organizations such as tertiary institutions in the process of building cordial relationship with the environment that hosts them, do embarked on intervention programmes that can be beneficial to such host environment. This is done though their respective public relations units or other similar nomenclature which are saddled with the role of creating favourable image for the institution (Aikins &Adu-Oppong, 2015).

However, CSRprogrammes are considered a necessary component in a business organization, particularly a tertiary institution. In many institutions, executing CSRprogrammes is a major challenge because of paucity of funds, less attention from the management, zero budgeting among others. Research has proven that managements in various tertiary institutions neither recognize nor interested in corporate social responsibility in whatever forms, owing to the fact that they don’t want to spend funds on anything that will not yield financial returns (Asemah, Okpanachi&Olumuji, 2013). Therefore, this study seeks to assess the use of corporate social responsibility(CSR) in

Osun State Polytechnic Iree, and how it has impacted on residents in Iree community which is the host environment of the institution.

Problem Statement

Considering the fact that researchers in the aspect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) have discovered various methods and strategies are employed by businesses to carry along people in their host environments by providing amenities that will assist in making meaning from their lives (Ekenna&Mabawonku, 2013). This implies that business organizations, especially tertiary institutions, must ensure people of their host communities are involved and subsequently engaged in her various programmes and action plans. The importance of host environment in the smooth operations of the tertiary institution it hosts cannot be overemphasized. It is, therefore, difficult for any tertiary institution in Nigeria to survive without involving the necessary stakeholders, especially the host community in her action plans, programmes and policies. Moreover, despite various research on corporate social responsibility and it various forms (See: Asemah, Okpanachi&Olumuji, 2013; Usman & Amran, 2015; Aikins &Adu-Oppong, 2015; Nwoba&Udoikah, 2016; Amini & Bianco, 2017; Touitou & Ambassador Brikins, 2019; Hassan, 2019; Ojo &Onaopepo, 2020; Singh &Misrah, 2020; Nwakpa, Orji-Egwu & Elem, 2022), there still seems to be a gap on the use of corporate social responsibility by tertiary institutions in Nigeria to engage the host environments in their mission and vision statement, as what could be responsible for this remain unknown. This study therefore, aims at assessing the use of corporate social responsibility as a tool for effective community relations and harmonious peaceful coexistence among residents of Iree community which is the host community of Osun State Polytechnic.

Study Objectives

The aim of this study is to assess the use of corporate social responsibilityas a tool for effective community relations and harmonious peaceful coexistence among residents of Iree community which is the host community of Osun State Polytechnic. However, the study seeks to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To identify the nature of corporate social responsibilityprogrammes made available to dwellers of Iree community by Osun State Polytechnic.
2. To examine the quality of corporate social responsibilityprogrammesmade available to dwellers of Iree community by Osun State Polytechnic.
3. To assess the various measures put in place by Osun State Polytechnic to foster cordial relationship with dwellers of Iree community.

Review of Literature

Community Relations

Community Relations cannot be defined without firstly understanding the two concepts that it is made up of. The term ‘Community’ is used in two major ways, Ajibade and Alabi (2017) sees it as a collection of people bounded together based on geographical location, and as a collection of people with common interests, aspirations or beliefs regardless of their geographical location. Relations as enunciated by Smith (2012), entails all form of interaction and mutuality between two or more people, for the purpose of influencing one another. Thus, community relations entail all form of relationship that will assist an individual or entity to integrate well with one another in their immediate environment (Aymeric, 2011). Also, Sanni (2019) defines community relations as interactions that an individual, organization or group establish with the people constituting the environment where it is situated; to foster mutual understanding, trust and garner supports. Similarly, Akinwunmi (2013, p.115) emphasizes that "when an individual or group accept its civic responsibilities and take an active interest in the wellbeing of the community, then it gains a number of long term benefits in terms of support, loyalty and goodwill.

Thus, effective community relations can be achieved when an organization recognizes its interdependence with other institutions. When the management in an organization recognizes the many ways they can impact on the local community and the extent of reciprocal dependence, it will help to establish social balance. According to Mitroff and Harrington (2006), good community relation assists organizations in securing its needs from the community while it also provides what the community expects. Also, it helps to secure the company's investments, increase sales of products, the value of stocks, and improve the general operating climate of business. Community relations are not about window dressing; rather, it is about protecting the host community. As Baskin (2007) points out, even the staff of the organization would be productive when proper community relations strategies are put in place. Considering the fact that most of the staff of any organization may want to live in an environment that is proxy to their place of work, any improper or inconsiderate attitude displayed by the management can endanger their lives.

Aspects of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

There are various types of corporate social responsibility programs and these have been stated as follows: (Asemah, Okpanach i& Edegoh, 2013).

Employee Health and Wellness: Employees are regarded to be the organization's greatest assets. Organizations need to be socially responsible to their employees. The endurance of the employees is maintained by the decisions that they make regarding their living conditions. On the other hand, the organizations are required to make available the devices and the standards, which may enable the employees to adopt or maintain healthy lifestyles. Benefits, incentives, suitable working conditions are some of the provisions that the organizations are required to make available for their employees to promote their health and wellbeing. In manufacturing organizations, it is vital to make sure that machines and other kinds of equipment are safe to use.

Environmental Integrity: Corporate social responsibility possesses the commitment to protect and improve the environmental conditions for the benefit of the individuals. The individuals are living in an environment and each one desires that the environment should be clean. Clean and pollution free environment is vital for enhancing the lives of the individuals. Through actions such as, but not limited to, making use of energy efficient properties, causing a decline in thebelief and investing in substitute energy and clean air technology.

Environmental responsibility covers precautionary approaches to prevent or minimiseunfavourable influences, support for inventiveness, stimulatinglarger environmental responsibility, developing and diffusing environmentally friendly technologies and similar areas.

Ethical Responsibilities: Ethical responsibilities are the responsibilities that anorganizationposition on itself because its owners possess the viewpoint that it is the right thing to do; not because they have an obligation to do so. Ethical responsibilities could include being ecologicallypleasant, paying fair wages or declining to implement business transactions with the overbearing countries. Ethical CSR requires integrating responsible preparations that minimise the detrimental effects of business operations. There are many ways for organisations to implement the ethical business practices; these include minimising environmental pollution from industrialized services and providing healthcare benefits to the employees.

Legal Responsibilities: Anorganization's legal responsibilities are the necessities that are positioned on it by the law. Next to making sure that organisation is cost-effective, and lucrative, it is vital to make sure that it follows all the laws. It is regarded to be the most important responsibility, according to the theory of corporate social responsibility. Legal responsibilities can range from securities regulations to labour law, environmental law and even criminal law. Mainly legal responsibilities include, formulation of rules and laws that are necessary to maintain discipline within the organization. Individuals are required to restrainfrom getting involved in any kinds of conflicts and disputes and adequately follow the rules and regulations within the organizations.

Philanthropic Responsibilities:Philanthropic responsibilities are the responsibilities that go above and beyond what is required and what the company believes is appropriate. They involve implementation of the efforts of benefiting the society. Their first and foremost area is formulation of measures that may prove to be beneficial to the society. The various kinds of services include, donating services to host the communities, getting involved in the projects that may assist the environment, or donating money to charitable causes. In some cases, it also serves as an advertising agency by giving funds, goods or services. Strategic motives are considered to be more of the business investment, where the contributions of the organizations are more focused towards enhancement of productivity.

Economic Responsibilities: Economic responsibilities are considered to be the primary responsibilities of the organizations. The main objectives of the organization are, generating productivity, meeting the needs and the requirements of the clients and enhancing profit. Within the organization, there are number of individuals who work, their retention within the organization is dependent upon profitability, if the organization does not make money then it will not last for long, therefore, profitability and productivity are regarded to be the two strengths that assist in retaining the organization. The other aspects that come under economic responsibilities are, integrity, corporate governance, economic development of the community, transparency, prevention of bribery and corruption, payments of national and local authorities, use of local suppliers, and recruitment of local labour.

Theoretical Justification: Stakeholder's Theory

The concept "Stakeholder" was first used in 1963 in an internal memorandum at theStanford Research Institute. According to its first usage, stakeholders are groups whosesupport the organisation needs so as to remain in existence. The concept was developedinto a theory and championed by Edward Freeman in the 1980s. Freeman and Reed in 1983 later wrote on the comparison between stockholder andstakeholder, and Freeman (1984) provides more details on the theory.The stakeholder theory states that a corporation has stakeholders who are generally thegroups and individuals that benefit from, or are harmed by the corporation's actions. The rights of these parties can either be violated or respected by the corporation (Hartman,2005). The stakeholder theory identifies the groups and individuals relative to acorporation. It also describes as well as recommends methods by which the interests ofeach party can be catered for by the management of the corporation (Freeman & Reed,1983). The theory is one of the classical theories in public relations.As Philips (2004) observes, the question of who is and who is not a stakeholder has beendiscussed for years. Some of the questions that appear relevant to a properconceptualization include whether stakeholder status be a reserved right forconstituencies having close relationship with the organization? Whether the status be seento apply broadly to all groups that can affect or be affected by the organization? Or, whether activists, competitors, natural environment, or even the media be classified asstakeholders? In answering these questions, Freeman and Reed (1983) explainthat the narrow definition only includes the groups that are vital to the survival andsuccess of the organisation, while the wide or broad definition accommodates all groupsthat can affect or be affected by the actions of the corporation.

Still in an attempt to identify who the stakeholders should be, Dougherty (1992) and Ray(1999) classify them into four groups; enabling publics, functional publics, normativepublics and diffused publics. Also, Stephens, Malone & Bailey (2005) explain thatenabling publics provide leadership for the organization and also control the resourcesthat allow it to exist and among them are shareholders, regulatory bodies and boards ofdirectors. The functional publics are those who exchange inputs in an organization foroutputs such as the employees, unions, suppliers and customers who provide labour ormake use of the organization's products and services. Normative publics are those withshared values or similar problems such as trade unions and professional societies. Thelast group is referred to as the diffused publics, which emerge when externalconsequences result from an organization's activities; these include the media,residents, and the community, among others.

According to Donaldo and Preston (cited in Anaeto, Onabajo&Osifeso, 2009), the stakeholder's theory rests on the following basic assumptions:

1) A corporation or organization should have a model that guides their operations.

2) There should be a framework for investigating the links betweenconventional firm performance and the practice of stakeholder management.

3) Stakeholders areidentified by their interests and all stakeholders are considered to be intrinsicallyvaluable.

4) Attitudes, structures, practices, as well as simultaneous attention should be given to the interest of all legitimate stakeholders.

5) The existence of an organisation depends on its ability to create value and acceptableoutcomes for different groups of stakeholders (Jones, 2004).

Stakeholders are generallymotivated to participate in an organisation if the inducements they receive exceed thevalue of the contributions they are required to make. Different stakeholders use theorganisation simultaneously to achieve their goals. It is pertinent to note, however, thatthe viability of the organisation and its ability to accomplish its missions of maintaining cordial relationship among its stakeholders (publics) depends mainly on its level of contributions to the society through various corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects.

Methodology

A qualitative research design was adopted to collect detailed insights into how corporate social responsibilities (CSR) is used by the authority of Osun State Polytechnic in fostering effective community relations and harmonious peaceful coexistence with dwellers of Iree community. Considering the potential shortcomings of quantitative research methods for a study that requires an in-depth investigation involving information-rich sources that facilitate broader perspectives from observations made, the use of a qualitative approach is seen as realistic. According to Creswell (2017), interview questions provide detailed and in-depth insights into the topic under research and collect the behaviours, feelings and attitudes of participants. The focus of this study demands a holistic understanding of how CSR works in business environments with inductive reasoning from specific to more general terms (Charmaz, 2016; Rowley, 2016).

Also, in determining the study design and formulating instrument for collecting information, several important decisions were made, as the researcher focused on dwellers in Iree community which hosts the Osun State Polytechnic. This population has experienced the various activities and programmes of the institution in the last 30 years of establishment. Thus, the researcher seeks to explore more and deepen people's understanding of the experience of community dwellers on corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes available in their community, using the qualitative approach as the most appropriate way to achieve this.

Therefore, the study was carried out among purposively selected informants in Iree community which is situated in Boripe local government area of Osun State. The community boasts of 36,872 inhabitants with farming, trading and commercial activities as the main occupation of its inhabitants (Clement, 2022). Moreover, a total of 15 informants between the ages of 41 and 70, comprising oftwelve males and three females who are adults were selected for the interview.All the informants were assured of the confidentiality of the study. Adequate information was also provided to each of them on the rationale for the study.

Data Analysis/Findings

Based on each of the study objectives, three themes emerged. And these themes were further discussed based on informants/participants views:

Theme One: Nature of CSRProgrammes Available in Iree Community

The Nature of Corporate SocialResponsibility (CSR) available in Iree community entails the aspect or types that are implemented in the community by Osun State Polytechnic. Based on the data obtained, the following were found to be the CSR types initiated in the community by the institution: (i) philantrophy (ii) employment opportunities (iii) participation in festivals (iv) developmental projects (v) establishment of community relations committee.

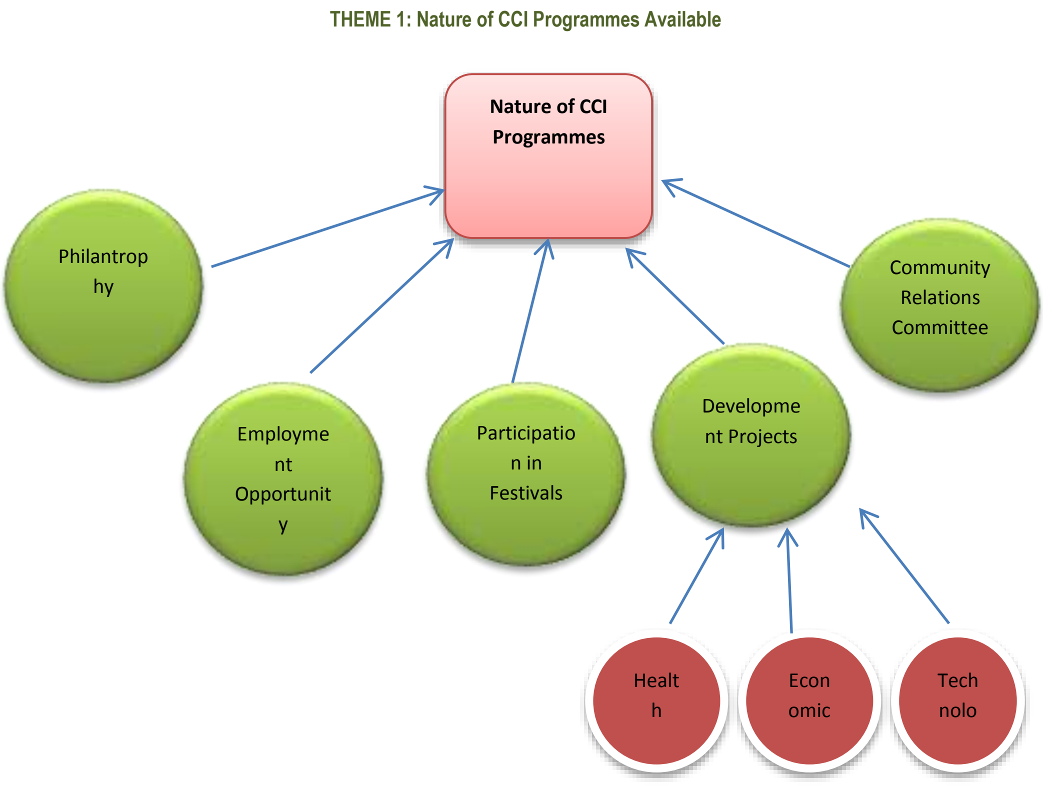

Figure 1: CSRProgrammes of OSPOLY

Theme Two: Quality of CSRProgrammes Available in Iree Community

The quality of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)programmes available in Iree community discusses the factors that warrant availability and implementation of these CSRprogrammes in the community. Based on the data obtained, the following were found to be the factors that determine the quality of CSRprogrammes that are implemented in the community: (i) periodic review (ii) availability of funds (iii) available vacancies (iv) needs (v) budgetary provisions.

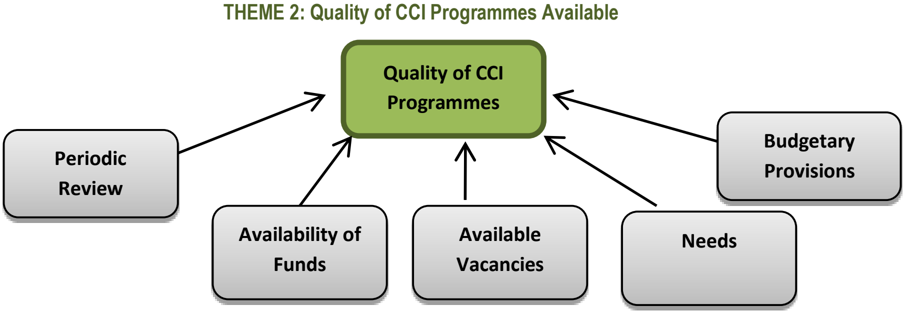

Figure 2: Quality of CSRProgrammes of OSPOLY

Theme Three: Measures to foster Cordial Relationship

This examines the various measures put in place by the authorities of Osun State Polytechnic, in order to foster cordial relationship with the host environment (Iree community). Based on the data obtained, the following were found to be the measures put in place by the institution from time to time: (i) donations and buildings (ii) good road network (iii) regular town hall meeting (iv) establishment of community relations unit (v) establishment of centre to cater for community development.

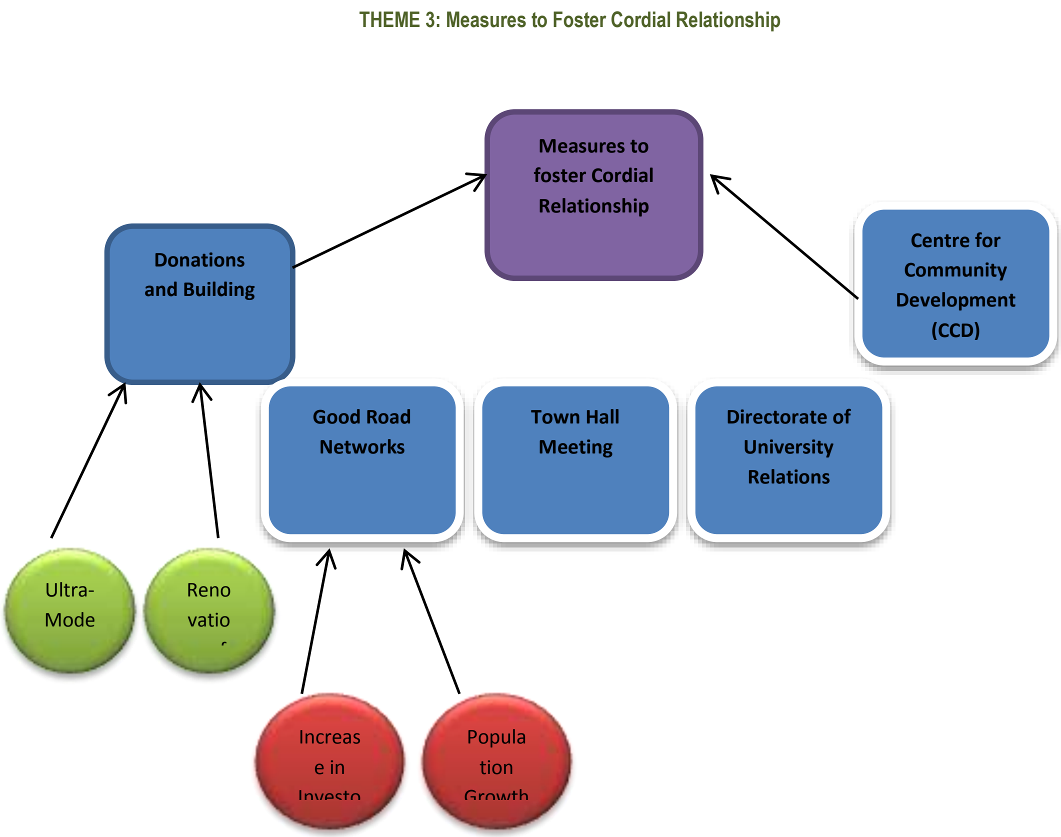

Figure 3: Measures to Foster Cordial Relatiosnship

Discussion of Findings

Nature of CSR Programmes

The theme investigated the nature of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes available in Iree community. The theme unraveled corporate social responsibility programmes available that are initiated by Osun State Polytechnic for the benefits of dwellers in Iree community. Moreover, five subthemes and two sub subthemes emerged from it. Based on these subthemes, philantrophical activity in terms of scholarship opportunities to deserving indigent students, provision of employment opportunities for some of the residents that are qualified, participation in community festivals through sponsorship of certain events, initiation of developmental projects in the health, economic and technological sector, as well as the establishment of community relation committee which comprised of selected members of the community and the management staff of the institution; were found as the nature of programmes that Osun State Polytechnic as organization has been doing for the host environment which is Iree community. Thus, this finding resonates with the position of Ojo and Onaopepo (2020) that corporate community engagements is a form of corporate social responsibility embarked upon by business firms to give their environment/community of operations a sense of belonging through implementation of programmes and projects that are beneficial to the environment that hosts the business. Furthermore, the finding is in tandem with that of Aikins and Adu-Oppong (2015) that non-commercial organizations such as tertiary institutions in the process of building cordial relationship with the environment that hosts them, do embarked on intervention programmes which are beneficial to such host environment. This according to them, is done though the respective public relations units or other similar nomenclature of the institution.

Qualities of CSRProgrammes

The theme identified the availability of corporate social responsibility programmes in Iree community and factors that necessitated its effective implementation. It further looked at the expectations of Osun State Polytechnic in making the community conducive for operations. Thus, it was found from the secondary data that laid down template which is based on periodic review, availability of funds for implementation, available vacancies, needs and wants, as well as budgetary provisions for initiation of projects are all the factors that necessitates the quality of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes that Osun State Polytechnic made available to the community. Thus, the findings agree with the views of Ojobor and Ewurum (2017) that effective implementation of quality and accessible projects in a business environment are a necessity for such business to continue to enjoy the support of the host community. Moreover, the finding negates the submission of Asemah, Okpanachi and Olumuji (2013) that in many institutions, executing CSRprogrammes is a major challenge because of paucity of funds, less attention from the management and zero budgeting, because some of the managements in various tertiary institutions neither recognize nor have interest in corporate social responsibility in whatever forms, owing to the fact that they don’t want to spend funds on anything that will not yield financial returns.

Measures to Foster Cordial Relationship

This theme emphasized on certain indices put in place by Osun State Polytechnic to foster cordial relationship with dwellers of Iree community. The objective is to examine these measures and their effectiveness in achieving the overall goal of the organisation. Thus, donations and building in the core areas of economy and education, provision of good road networks which have attracted investors and population growth, regular town hall meeting, establishment of community relations unit, as well as a centre for community development by the institution were the measures put in place to foster cordial relationship between the two entities. This finding is therefore consistent with the view of Touitou and Ambassador-Brikins (2019) that the goodwill and ability to properly manage stakeholders of an organisation is a recipe for achieving good reputation, image, growth, increasing turn over, assets and ultimately makes profit. Also, it resonates with the position of Misra (2020) that irrespective of the size and location of an organisation, effective relationship with stakeholders is a necessity for such organization to continue in operation, as cordial relationship can be sustained through some of the measures that may be initiated by organisations from time to time.

Conclusion

The essence of every research is to contribute to knowledge either by improving on existing knowledge or adding new knowledge. This research has achieved both. Firstly, the research improves on knowledge by emphasising the relevance of corporate social responsibility (CSR)programmes, thus explaining the need for organisationsto embark on it from time to time in their activities. Secondly, the research adds to knowledge by discovering the role of effective CSR programmes in fostering cordial relationship between organisations and stakeholders that are relevant to its success. However, this research notes the importance of stakeholders' engagements and relations through the CSR programmes in the continuity of every organisation. Secondly, the research discovers that measures for the implementation of CSR programmes must be put in place and communicated as and when due. Just as Osun State Polytechnic does for Iree community, the institution has it schedule of activities as regards CSR programmes implementation. This creates strong acceptability of the institution by dwellers of the host community. Thirdly, the research discovers that Osun State Polytechnic has a whole lot of CSR programmes which are ultimately aimed at giving their stakeholders, not just the host community alone; a sense of belonging through projects that are beneficial to them. Also, this research revealed the essence of non-commercial organizations such as tertiary institutions in the process of building harmonious coexistence with its host community.Finally, this research was substantiated through the Stakeholder's Management Theory.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following is recommended:

i. Authorities of Osun State Polytechnic should endeavour to give consideration to provision of employment opportunities for dwellers of Iree community as a critical Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme.
ii. Representatives of Iree community should be inculcated into the governing council of the Osun State Polytechnic, so as to have a sense of belonging as regards the affairs of the institution.
iii. Other aspect of Corporate Social Responsibilities aside from the aforementioned projects should be explored and priortised by authorities of Osun State Polytechnic.
iv. Entrepreneurial and trading opportunities should be provided on campus for dwellers of Iree community.
v. Students, staff and internal members of Osun State Polytechnic should also be orientated properly on the CSR programmes, as part of the stakeholders that must be carried along.

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