

Multinational Corporations and Corporate Social Responsibility: An Investigation of Shell and Its Relationship with Their Host Communities in Nigeria

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Abstract: Organizations exist to meet set objectives. In order to achieve those set objectives, bearing in mind that organizations do not exist in a vacuum but rather in a society, the relationship between the organization and its social milieu must be cordial and this can be achieved through good corporate social responsibilities. This paper analysed Shell's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) so as to ascertain if it has in any manner, affected its relationship with its host communities in Nigeria. Adopting Carrol's CSR theory, Stakeholders theory and Triple Bottom Line theory as its framework of analysis, the paper employed content analysis in analysing data sourced from secondary sources of data generation. The paper revealed that Shell has indeed impacted positively on the Nigerian economy and its host communities in the Niger Delta. Notwithstanding this, there is still intermittent conflicts occasioned by the degradation of the environments by Shell's activities and also, the fact that Shell's SCR benefit a few while the majority still depend on the environment for sustenance. Against this backdrop, the paper recommends inter-alia that Shell should prioritize working on the causes of oil-spillage, such that affect the livelihood and social milieu of the Niger Delta region.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Multinational Corporations, SPDC.

1. Introduction

Business organisations operate not in a vacuum, but rather in an environment and their activities may have directly or indirectly negative and/or positive effects on their operational environment. These organisations are accountable to itself, its stakeholders and the public – Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The aim of CSR is to give back to society, take part in philanthropic causes and provide social value. Multinational corporations are increasingly turning to CSR to make a difference and build a positive brand around their business. They usually dispense CSR to their host communities through efficient and effective wastes and pollution reduction processes, provision of portable water, electricity, hospitals, scholarships, economic empowerments and donation to good causes (Hopkins and Crowe, 2003).

Among the many multinational corporations operating in Nigeria is Shell corporation. Their business activities in Nigeria include, Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDC), Shell Nigeria Exploration and Production Company (SNEPCO), Shell Nigeria Gas (SNG) and Nigeria LNG (NLNG) (Shell, n.d.). The company has had its presence in Nigeria since its foundation by Royal Dutch/Shell Group in 1936 and has been involved in onshore and offshore exploration and production of oil and natural gas (Shell, 2011 cited in Alaran, 2019, p. 2). Its operations spread out within Niger Delta, Nigeria and constituting the Group's international supply chain comprising 6000km of flow pipeline networks and stations, oil fields and production wells, gas plants, and two major export terminals (Shell, 2012 cited in Alaran, 2019, p. 3). Shell as a multinational company has recorded a lot of exploits in their CSR efforts in recent years to the extent that they bagged an excellence award on CSR at the 2020 edition of the Nigerian International Petroleum Summit (NIPS) in Abuja on the 10th of February, 2020 (Majorwaves, 2020). However, there still exist intermittent conflicts between the company and its host communities. Could it be that there are some places they are not getting it right or that the host communities are just not satisfied with their CSR efforts? This becomes imperative for a study of this nature to understand and provide plausible solutions to this ugly situation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Importance of CSR for Multinational Corporations

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can also be called corporate conscience, corporate citizenship or sustainable responsible business and is generally understood as a way through which a company achieves a balance of economic, environmental and social imperatives (Dartey-BaahI and Amponsah-Tawiah, 2011). It is a pathway to

positive and sustainable engagement of business-stakeholders in general and its host community in particular, especially when the operations of such enterprise have a way of negatively impacting the environment or other interests of such a community (Lugard, 2014). All stakeholders of a company benefit from CSR activities but the company itself benefits even more. It helps build a good reputation for the company in more ways than one. Chan (2014) paid attention to specifics:

1. A company that indulges in active CSR is seen as a good corporate citizen as it supports good causes and protects the environment
2. It is used to weigh how a company is governed.
3. A company with good CSR care about their employees and as such, help increase employees' satisfaction and morale, lower turnover rate, attract more talent, ensure workplace safety, and establish excellent work relations with employees.
4. A good CSR ensures for steady and sustainable development of the company
5. Incorporating good CSR strategies helps in limiting disagreements among stakeholder groups,
6. Ultimately, good CSR activities help reduce risks and maximise profits.

2.2 Shell as a Multinational Corporation and Its CSR Programmes for Its Host Communities

Shell operates in the Niger Delta region which is located in Southern Nigeria. It comprises of nine states namely: Akwa-Ibom, Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Edo, Abia, Imo and Ondo States (Obialo, 2019). Shell has contributed greatly in the economic growth of Nigeria because, oil, which they deal on is the mainstay of the country's economy. Apart from focusing on profit-making, which is the topmost priority of every organisation, Shell is expected to consider the plight of their stakeholders and particularly for this study, their host communities. The corporation has of course, invested a lot in the development of their host communities as seen in some of their CSR reports. Shell (2008, 2009, 2010, 2012) cited in (Lugard, 2014, p. 166-167) provided some of Shell's CSR efforts that concerns the host communities thus:

- In 2013 and 2012 respectively, the sum of \$104.1 million \$103.2 was spent by the company as its contribution to community development projects. Shell's CSR is centred around their three global strategic themes of enterprise development, road safety and energy access, and on locally tailored programmes covering community development, disaster relief, education, health and biodiversity.
- In 2011, Shell's community investment amounted to \$76.3 million which was directly invested by SPDC and SNEPCo towards addressing social and economic development challenges in the region in the following areas: education, community health, enterprise development for youths and women, and community-driven development initiatives via the Global Memorandum of Understanding (GMOU) between SPDC and communities.
- In 2008, SPDC and the joint venture partners contributed directly a further \$84 million (Shell's share of \$25.2 million) to community development projects, many of which were undertaken in partnership with other organizations or government and international agencies.
- In 2007, the SPDC joint venture contributed another \$68million to community development projects, many of which were delivered in partnership with government agencies, companies, local and international NGOs, and the UNDP. In 2006, it introduced Global Memoranda of Understanding (GMOUs) to improve its relations with communities which has helped a great deal in fostering better business-community relations.
- In 2003, Shell spent \$60 million on community development to generate employment and calm "restive youth". Shell also offers sabbaticals and student internships at their offices in Port Harcourt to "introduce new concepts in underground evaluation techniques using the latest technologies."

In more recent years, Alaran (2019) confirmed among others that:

- In 2016, SPDC and its JV partners donated a modern public library to the Port Harcourt literary society equipped with books, internet access and reliable power supply. SPDC JV is said to have contributed \$5 million for the library.
- Also, in 2017, they invested \$5.2 million in scholarships.

- Through the liveWIRE programme, Shell has trained 6,780 Niger Delta youths in enterprise development and provided business start-up grants to 3,493 in 2017. Also, two beneficiaries of the programme received merit awards of \$5,000 each in recognition of their innovative ideas.
- In 2017, SNEPCO in partnership with three UK universities (University of Birmingham, Newcastle University and Plymouth University), launched its first Post Graduate Scholarship Award programme for qualifying applicants nationwide to further their education in courses that are relevant to oil and gas industry.

All the above stated CSR efforts and more have been recorded by Shell for their host communities. These are a lot for the eyes to behold but one would still be wondering why their actions still cause an uproar in these communities who all these are meant for. This paper went further to unveil the reason(s) behind this unfriendly relationship between Shell and its host communities.

2.3 Major Concerns of Communities in the Niger Delta

According to (Amodu, 2012), one of the major popularity of Niger Delta is the frequent conflicts associated with oil production in the region. However, the Niger Delta area, prior to the activities of oil and gas, had abundant and diverse natural resources, good agricultural land coupled with flourishing oil palm trees, rubber trees and other economic crops. The forest was extensive with all kinds of animals and plant species (Osanjo, 1998). This caused most of the inhabitants of this region to be heavily dependent on the environment for livelihood through fishing and farming (Uzoagu, 2015).

In the advent of oil companies in the Niger Delta, the disposition of the host communities was positive because it raised the hopes of the indigenes in respect to the long awaited development (Saiyou, 2006). These hopes began to wither when the source of their livelihood (farming) began to dwindle rapidly due to the activities of these supposed messiahs. Since this sad discoveries, they have been “engulfed in crisis of instability such as protest against environmental degradation, palpable poverty, lack of basic social amenities and employment opportunities. The communities have charged the oil companies of insensitivity centred on the problems occasioned by oil spillages such as, the clean-up of spilled oil, delay in assessment of impacted areas and failure to pay compensation for damaged economic crops and fish ponds. In many instances, the grievances have turned into outright antagonism, leading to abduction of company officials, sabotage of company properties and violence against companies” (Palowei et al., 2014, p. 48). Egbe and Paki (2011, p.129), “the presence of SPDC in a community spell doom arising from the countless oil spillages, and gas flares that renders the environment desolate with devastating consequences on the local economies”, particularly, the farmland and rivers. With this as a constant phenomenon, Shell became an integral part of the Niger Delta Conflict instead of been a solution to the already existing problems like poverty and unemployment (WAC Global Services, 2003).

As at 2015, there were a total of 11 court cases involving different groups, with Shell as a co-defendant in all of them (Shell, 2017). The lawsuit the Bodo community in Rivers state filed against Shell in London High Court on 23 March 2012 over oil spills which occurred in 2008 and 2009 lingered till May 24 2018. They asked for compensation for losses suffered to their health, livelihoods and land which needed clean-up of oil pollution (Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, n.d.). On May 17, 2018, there was an oil leak on the Trans Ramos pipeline within Shell’s oilfield at Aghoro communities in Bayelsa and this caused a huge disagreement between shell and the host communities especially on determining the size of area affected by the spill (Premium Times, 2018). In 2017, the people of Belema and Ofuyama communities in Kula Kingdom, Akuku Toru Local Government Area, Rivers State went on a warpath with SPDC with Shell over alleged abandonment for over 37 years as well as destruction of economic life (Iheamnachor, 2017). Their concerns revolved around joblessness, suffering great illness with no health facility, lack of electricity and polluted water which should all be part of the CSR of Shell.

Based on this backdrop, one would observe that the major concern of the communities in the Niger Delta is to get their lives back; that which has been deprived them because of the activities of oil companies such as Shell. The philanthropy Shell offers might be good moves of CSR but they need to set their priorities right.

3. CSR Theories/Models

Three theories were used to better understand the direction of shell’s CSR:

- Carroll’s CSR Pyramid
- Stakeholder’s theory

- Triple Bottom Line Concept or theory

3.1 Carroll's CSR Pyramid

Carroll's (1991) theory which is one of most used and quoted models of CSR, is composed of four responsibilities that organisations must follow hierarchically (as seen in fig.1), in order to achieve their aims smoothly. These responsibilities include: philanthropic responsibilities, ethical responsibilities, legal responsibilities and economic responsibilities. Companies are expected to work on these responsibilities in order of importance. Dartey-BaahI and Amponsah-Tawiah (2011, p.127) gave the explanations of these responsibilities as follows:

The economic component which is at the base of the pyramid gives top priority to economic performance serving as the foundation of the other components of the pyramid. The thinking and position here is that a business has to be profitable, plan for the future and provide shareholders with sufficient and attractive returns. The legal component which is the second on the hierarchy expects businesses to comply with the laws and regulations of the society whilst pursuing profit within the framework of the law. The third hierarchy in Carroll's pyramid is the ethical responsibilities which are about how society expects businesses to embrace values and norms even if the values and norms might constitute a higher standard of performance than required by law. Furthermore, it involves avoiding questionable practices. At the top of the pyramid is philanthropic responsibility. The philanthropic responsibilities are those actions that society expects from a business to be a good corporate citizen. It involves giving back to the community and being a good corporate citizen through donations and active participation in charities or other community welfare programs.



Fig 1: Carroll's CSR Pyramid. Source: Carroll (1991)

This Carroll's pyramidal depiction of CSR was clearly done with American-type capitalistic societies in mind and it also played a role in Europe and interlink in some manner (Crane and Matten, 2016). However, some researchers argued that the flow according to Carroll's pyramid may not be applicable in African countries. According to Dartey-BaahI and Amponsah-Tawiah (2011), culture has its influence on CSR priorities. This is why Wayne (2010) cited in Brin and Nehme (2019) revisited the pyramid in developing countries as he observed that economic responsibility continues to get the most emphasis as in other nations of the world, but philanthropy is given the second highest priority followed by legal and then ethical responsibilities

3.2 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholders typically are defined as individuals, groups and organizations that have an interest in the processes and outcomes of the firm and upon whom the firm depends for the achievement of its goals (Harrison and Wicks, 2007 cited in Harrison et al., 2015, pp.859). The stakeholder theory was developed by Freeman (1984). Freeman described that a firm is a series of connections of stakeholders that the managers attempt to manage. Freeman (1984) opined that CSR is conceived as one that balances a multiplicity of interests, such that while striving for large profit for shareholders, it also takes into account other stakeholders' interests. In line with the foregoing, Harrison et al. (2015, pp. 861) explained that, "the bulk of the thinking on stakeholder theory has emanated from Western countries. This may be, in part, because of the predominance of the shareholder maximization perspective found in many popular Western business theories. That is, because shareholder primacy grew out of the West, stakeholder theory was necessary to provide a more balanced perspective on the objective of the corporation and how to manage it".

Brin and Nehme (2019) opined that by incorporating the participation of stakeholders in the corporation's board of directors (at least one representative per stakeholder group), directors and leaders of such organisation can be more responsive. For example, by making host communities emotional stakeholders by ensuring their active engagement and participation in designing and framing CSR efforts that would minimize environmental pollution,

extend their human capacity training and deliver sustainable development (Lugard, 2014). Harrison et al. (2015) mentioned seven areas in which firms who buy the ideas of this theory attempt to create value for stakeholders thus:

- better stakeholder relationships
- stakeholder dialogue
- better work environment
- environmental preservation
- increased customer base
- local development and
- improved reputation

3.3 Triple Bottom Line Concept or Theory

The term “triple bottom line” (TBL) was coined by John Elkington in 1994 in an attempt to create a new language to express what was perceived as an inevitable expansion of existing corporate models, from purely economic values to economic values as a part of managing sustainable conduct (Mark-Herbert, et al., 2010). His idea was that sustainable results come from the three dimension of TBL and that companies must apply TBL in order to achieve continuous profits and long-term social and environmental projects. “Their performance in each category represents their perceived commitment to their stakeholders, the natural environment and their economic profits, respectively. It suggests that the relationship between the categories is not necessarily a trade-off where one must be conceded in order to achieve the other, but where a balance must be achieved in order to maximize the potential benefits in each category” (Dixon, 2014, p.1). Below is an illustration of the above explanation:

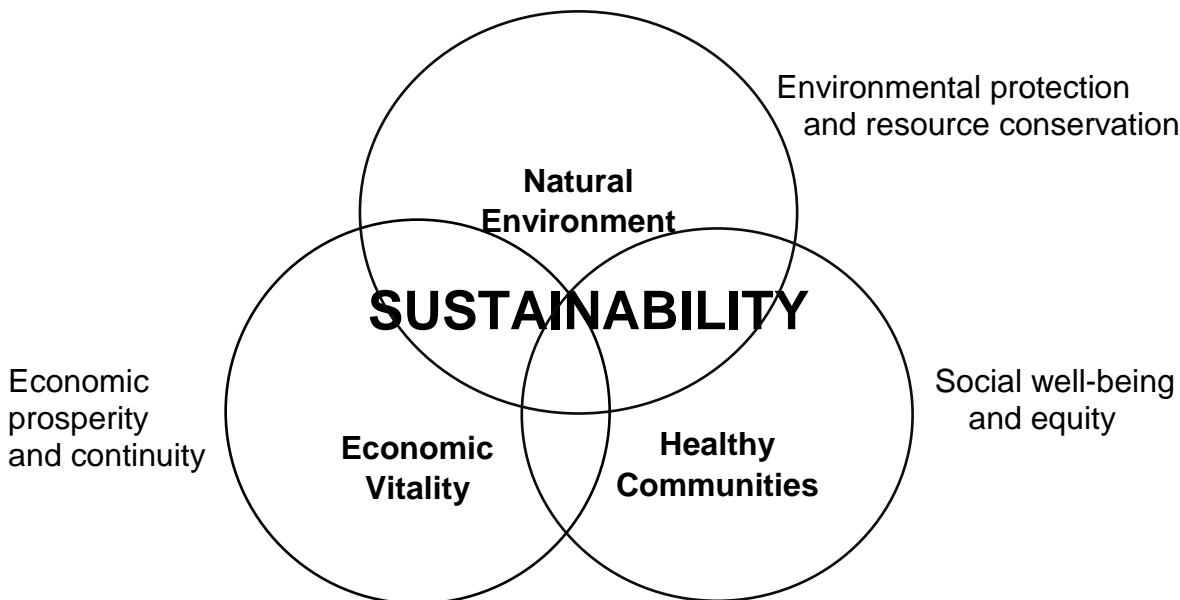


Fig. 2. The triple bottom line illustration from Elkington’s (1994) explanations

Source: Mark-Herbert, et al. (2010)

Some critics question its validity and practical usefulness. According to Norman and MacDonald (2004), the Triple Bottom Line theory is inherently misleading because of its inability to deliver its literal meaning. Also, Pava (2007, p. 108) argued that the theory “is used metaphorically to challenge conventional thinking that corporate performance can be assessed or summarized by any single indicator, such as net income; and that it serves as a reminder that corporate performance is multi-dimensional”. Nonetheless, many corporations and non-profit organizations have adopted the TBL sustainability framework to perform CSR projects (Dixon, 2014).

4. Assessing Shell’s CSR Efforts Through the Eyes of the Reviewed Theories

Multinational Corporations have a responsibility to give something back to the communities in which they operate as a form of social responsibility (Egbe and Paki, 2011, p.123). Shell as a multinational corporation could beat its chest with its head up high and proclaim that it has done so much to help its host communities as observed from the words of the former SPDC MD, Mutiu Sunmonu as reported by Alaran (2019, p.3), “In the past years, we were heavily involved in the provision of infrastructure in the communities. We are building roads, schools, clinics, and providing portable water. Though these are typical areas for government intervention, we stepped into the gap to help in improving the standard of living of local communities”. However, some researchers do not applaud its methods in its entirety.

According to Lugard (2014), from Shell’s standpoint as can be gleaned from their reports, making financial provision for community development is all CSR entails, however, they need to prioritise their Corporate Environmental Responsibility (CER) as an organisation. Shell is an oil company and its activities constantly pollute the environment (land and water) but its CSR programme concerning its host communities focus more on philanthropy as proposed by Carroll’s model of CSR than of environmental protection as proposed by the Triple Bottom Line theory.

SPDC (2013) cited in Dinkpa and Russell (2016) stated that Shell has been using a “cluster development board” since 2006, which involves bringing together communities, state representatives, non-profit organizations, local government and Shell, in a decision making committee. Nonetheless, Uzoagu (2015) maintained that shell Nigeria has been working on a top-down approach to development because they focus on what they felt the communities lack on their perception of poverty within the communities. Her research which was domiciled in Port Harcourt, Rivers State showed that as 2015, Shell’s CSR efforts did not improve enough on the socio-economic development and socio-economic lives of the host communities. Similarly, Lugard (2014) observed that local communities have not been fully incorporated into deciding on the best initiatives for them and how to effectively frame, design and implement them to deliver sustainable results.

The Stakeholder theory stressed on the need to involve every stakeholder group in certain decision making. So, making CSR decisions that affect the host communities without understanding their plight through effective communication goes against everything the stakeholder theory stands for. The CSR programmes of Shell to their host communities was not exhausted in this paper, there are a lot more. However, one would not help but wonder why its relationship with its host communities is still unfriendly. One could quickly speculate based on the CSR programmes provided, the major reason for unrest in the Niger Delta and reviewed theories that the stakeholder theory is rarely or not adopted by Shell when it comes to CSR decisions involving their host communities.

The government has a job to protect its citizens and therefore they have a role to play in the practice of CSR by Shell and other oil companies. Ijaiya (2014, p. 70) opined that, “the situation in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria indicates a variance between practice and implementation of the components of CSR, it is not only companies that have abandoned their responsibilities as governments too have failed in its responsibility to provide a legal framework within which companies can effectively meet their obligations or be made to do so.”

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Shell has impacted positively on the Nigerian economy because the service they provide basically revolve around oil. The corporation has also made efforts to make impact in their host communities in the Niger Delta through several CSR programmes. These programmes aimed at making better the lives of local communities seem not to be enough. While Shell’s CSR focuses on philanthropy, its activities on daily bases degrade the environment and this has been the cause of the conflicts arising in the Niger Delta. The unfriendly relationship between Shell and its host communities despite the spending of billions of Dollars for sustainable development shows that there is a clash of interest. A few may have benefited from Shell’s benevolence but majority still depend on their environment (Land and water) which is constantly polluted to survive. Apart from making profits, Shell prioritises philanthropy and it shows a clear adoption of the Carroll’s CSR hierarchical pyramid and a less adoption of the stakeholder theory and the triple bottom line theory. If the host community as stakeholders are actively involved in CSR decisions, there would be some sort of agreement as to what is needed and thus, priorities would be set right. Also, the nature of Shell’s activities is of course, very unfriendly to the environment and this shows that they have failed in performing their environmental responsibilities which according to the triple bottom line theorist, is part of what is expected of every organisation if CSR is to be complete. Based on this backdrop, this paper concludes that the relationship of shell and its host communities is not very cordial. This might continue if the activities of shell continue to have significant negative

consequences on the environment but can be amended if shell incorporates steady environmental checks as one of their CSR priorities.

After a careful examination of available literature on shell's relationship with their host communities, especially as regards the company's CSR for the communities' benefit, the following recommendations were made:

1. Shell should prioritize working on the causes of oil spillage, such that affect the livelihood of people in the Niger Delta.
2. When adopting and developing CSR theories for sustainable development, the environment should be considered. It would be wrong to impose certain theories where it is hardly or entirely not compatible. For Shell, after considering the economic impact they have to make, the environment should be the next.
3. Shell should determine CSR activities by effective communication. The community's pressing need can only be determined by communication. Constant communication will also help strengthen the relationship of Shell and its host communities. It will help them minimize hostility because a hostile environment does not allow companies to thrive as they ought to. They should quit acting for the people and learn to act with the people.
4. The Nigerian government should play their part to make sure that these proposed CSR programmes are implemented. This is because, it is their responsibility to protect the lives and property of Nigerian citizens.

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