

EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERISM: AN UNDERUTILIZED COMPONENT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Society expects business organizations to help solve some of its challenges through discretionary business practices and contributions of business resources. Although, these expectations often referred to as corporate social responsibility is absolutely important to organizational survival as well as operations, employee volunteerism, an aspect of corporate social responsibility wherein employees volunteer skills, time, knowledge, physical energy as well as expertise freely to community services resulting positive organizational outcomes like employees' self-esteem, happiness, customers' loyalty, trust, brand equity as well as firms' public image, have yet to be fully explored in Nigeria. This, study examines employee's practice of volunteerism in Nigerian business organizations. Findings from literature reveals that most business organizations in Nigeria often engage in other aspects of corporate social responsibility programmes while volunteering activities fully supported by employers is truly neglected, thus denying community (society), businesses, employees and other beneficiaries, the benefits associated with volunteering.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, employee volunteerism, economic responsibility, ethical responsibility, discretionary responsibility, legal responsibility

INTRODUCTION

Organizational survival and sustenance in the 21st century competitive environment requires continuous assessment, firm's fulfillment of mission and realization of set objectives. Although, organizations set several objectives (profitability, survival, growth, efficiency, market share, good public image and so on) contrive strategies to achieve them, pursuing predetermined objectives requires acknowledging the negative social-economic as well as environmental consequences of firms' operations. Organizations often release particles, substances and gases into the air, water and soil through their operations, most of which have a devastating effects on the environment as well as on human and aquatic lives.

Unarguably, society pays heavily for industrial pollutions generated by business operations as a result of the increase in demand for goods and services for consumption, occasion by population increase and urbanization. As reported, globally about seven million deaths occur yearly as a result of air pollution (Lelieveld et al., 2020). Thus, the need for businesses to be responsible in offsetting the negative impacts of their operations on society. In other words, it is necessary for organizations to incorporate socially responsible programmes into their operations for long-term survival and sustenance ability. World summit on sustainability identified business involvement as critical, in alleviating poverty and achieving sustainable development (Helg, 2007).

Although, the responsibility of addressing social problems rest within the domain of government, society expect business organizations to help solve social problems as they pursue their traditional economic objectives. Steiner and Steiner as cited in Nwaeke (2005) state that businesses are mandated to fulfil social obligations in order to maintain harmonious relationship with communities. This expectation is often met through corporate society responsibility (CSR) – ethical corporate activities aimed at supporting communities. Kotler and Lee as cited in Hunjet et al. (2020) view CSR as business commitment aimed at

enhancing community well-being through discretionary practices and contribution of corporate resources. In other words, it entails the responsibility expected from business organizations in preventing operations capable of causing harm to social asset as well as protecting and improving them (asset).

In the past however, organizations operated under the classical economic ideology, as they tend to focus more on market capitalism, with self-interest as the basis for business motivation. Although, market capitalism is still pervasive around the globe as the dominant guiding principle of business operations, ethical theories of broader responsibility according to Nwaeke (2005), have rendered some of its practices irrelevant. Thus, necessitating the use of corporate powers and influences for broader social purpose, instead of the sole purpose of profit maximization.

Beginning from the 19th century, corporate power and resources have been used for charitable and paternalistic contribution to society. Notably, corporate giants like Carnegie, Girard, Rockefeller and Ford in America within the later period of the 19th century to the 20th century have given so much of their wealth to educational and charity institutions as well as to recreational and health needs of workers. This trend may be seen to have flowed from Carnegie's (1889) statement that all personal wealth that surpasses what is needed for survival of one's family should be seen as a trust fund meant for distribution and should be employed for societal benefits.

Charitable contribution and stewardship programs championed by business magnates and managers in the late 20th century were seen as the hallmark of CSR. However, Post et al. as cited in Nwaeke (2005) view corporate philanthropy and employee volunteerism as the modern form of CSR. Philanthropy is rooted in the Greek words "philien" and "anthropos" characterizes love for mankind. From the perspective of business organization, philanthropy is seen as a phenomenon that relates the business sector with the social sector in terms of giving back to the society.

Corporate philanthropy denotes monetary donations made explicitly by business differentiating them from donations made by individuals as an act of moral virtue (Pratici et al., 2020). However, philanthropy in today's business practice assumes strategic perspective, as it extends beyond cash donations to include employee volunteer programs and long-term partnerships with recipients. Employee volunteerism is a form of corporate giving in which employees give or contribute their time, knowledge and expertise, in collaboration with a local non-profit making organization to render social services.

Employee volunteerism plays crucial role in the support of societal wellbeing as well as in the lives of employees and organizations. Paco and Nave (2013) argue that volunteerism provides new sources of expertise and energy required to solve diverse issues affecting societies and also promote corporate citizenship. Also, organizations achieve strategic objectives, enhance relationship with relevant stakeholders and their reputation through volunteerism. In other words, workforce volunteerism enhances public perception about an organization and improves its operations. For instance, firms who encourage employee volunteering program enjoy loyalty of consumers and increase sales of product. It enhances employees' skills, competences and can become cost-effective substitute for skills-development programmes (Vaidyanathan, 2008).

Volunteering relieve employees from work related stress and enhances their self-confidence and self-worth. Studies indicates that older employees above fifty years of age who regularly engage on volunteering have little chances of developing high blood pressure (Carnegie Mellon University, nd). Although, employee volunteerism is significant to organizations, employees and communities, the positive effects of volunteerism according to Singer (2022) depends on the extent to which the volunteer program is supported by employers.

Globally, there is much expectation from society and employees on employers to provide solutions to social issues and enhance living conditions of inhabitants in their host communities through volunteerism - financial incentives, provisions for special leave, special rewards, or other means of direct support.

Although, employees motive for volunteering may differ considerably, as it can be intrinsic or social-oriented (like opportunities to collaborate with peers and friends in rendering social services) or extrinsic or career-oriented (wherein volunteers prefer activities linked to skill development like doing consulting or mentoring).

However, Gatignon-Turnau and Mignonac (2015) opined that employees' feeling of support by organizations in executing pro-social motives, reinforce emotional reciprocity to the organization. Notably, organizations' contributions to employees' volunteerism differ across countries. In the United States, employees' volunteerism has become a vital part of organizations' business plans over the last three decades, as organizations consistently educate employees about volunteering as a way of contributing to society (Bhinekawati et al., 2020). Buttressing this point, Hilding (2012) estimated that 90 per cent of USA companies encourage employee volunteerism, due to a desire to accommodate human rights and environmental issues in their CSR programs.

Similarly, study indicate that about eighty per cent of organizations, in a survey of one-hundred and five organizations in 53 European Union countries supports or make available employees volunteering programmes for their workforce (Bhinekawati et al., 2020). Accordingly, employees' volunteerism benefits organizations, employees and communities in these countries and assist employers achieve sustainability objectives. Specifically, in United Kingdom, employee's volunteering practice has been encouraged by the government, as estimates in 2018 indicates that employers allowed about eleven million employees participate in volunteering activities (Benefacto, 2018).

In Asia, volunteering have witnessed tremendous support, as reports from Federation of Korean Industries (2018) indicates that over 50% of employees actively partake in volunteering activities, mainly supported by more than 70% of the firms in Korea. Additionally, volunteering has become an important part of organizations plans in Australia, as it is seen as a means of contributing to society as well as tool for motivating employees. Corroborating, an estimate of about 24% of Australian workforce accepts employment offers from firms willing to provide them with volunteering activities (Volunteering Australia, 2015).

In spite of the growing acceptance of the significance employee volunteering practices around the world, most organizations in Africa are yet to fully incorporate the practice of employee's volunteerism. Individuals in Africa, privately volunteer to render services to families and communities, and not through the support of employers, except few multinational firms who initiate and implement employee's volunteering activities in South Africa (Bhinekawati et al., 2020). As observed, employee volunteerism as an aspect of CSR is not fully supported and implemented by employers in Nigeria, thus, depriving employees, business organizations and communities at large, the benefits associated with it. This study examined employee volunteer activities in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

CSR is traceable to the rise of corporations and their expanding influence on society, although, its foundation had been rooted in religious values from time immemorial. Substantiating, the Holy books (Bible and Qu'ran), as revealed by Teck et al. (2019), contain religious enhancement on business ethics, indicating the divine origin of CSR. However, the 20th century (precisely 1950s and 1960s) marked the early years of the modern CSR, though the concept has gone through various phases of development since then. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed intense academic research on CSR, as scholars concentrated more on the social level of analysis with practical implications.

Carroll (2008) argue scholars in the 1950s and 1960s adapted and changed their behaviour about deliberation on CSR, with few corporate actions extending beyond philanthropic activities. Bowen (1953) regarded as the father of modern CSR believes that corporate giants during the 1950's wielded so much

power and influence on society, thus, requires changes in their decisions to incorporate or consider business impacts on society, due to his fears on workforce oppression and exploitation. This ushered the notion of defining specific rules for business organizations in fulfilling their social responsibilities.

Bowen (1953) views social responsibility as “the obligations of businessmen to pursue policies, make decisions, or follow lines of action that are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society”. Although, this conceptualization of social responsibility set the tone, it did not capture the concept of corporation in its explanation, rather emphasis was made on businessmen (businessmen in the context of Bowen’s explanation simply referred to individuals and executives of large organizations).

However, little difference exist between social responsibility and CSR. While social responsibility dwells on personal ethical conducts, which are usually unstructured, ad hoc and unsystematic (Roland et al., 2010); CSR is a structured and collectively designed exercise having legal or institutionalized rules and regulations required to ensure corporations’ commitment to act in a socially responsible manner. This, narrower perspective on Bowen’s model (mainly dwelling on social responsibility), becomes inadequate in explaining CSR.

Subsequently, the 1970s witnessed a shift on scholars’ perspective on social responsibility, as they began making a more powerful attempt to describe and design approaches to implant social responsibility in corporations. Scholars like Holmes (1978), Eilbert and Paret (1973) emphasized socially responsible activities (like ethics in advertising, minority protection, product defects, pollution control and support for education) required of corporations. Like other constructs in organizational and social studies that are fraught with definitional debates, CSR since christened, had plethora of definitions, as scholars and practitioners offer different perspectives in explaining the construct.

The lack of unified definition is mainly attributed to its interchangeability with other related constructs (corporate citizenship, ethical corporation, corporate governance, corporate sustainability, socially responsible investment and corporate accountability) in terms of usage; and the expansion of its practices in meeting growing social demand as well as pressing development challenges (Arsić et al., 2017). However, for Carroll (1979), CSR comprise economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations that society have on organizations at a given point in time. This definition advance four basic elements (economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary) which can be used to ascertain firms’ commitment to CSR.

The economic component spanned jobs, wages and services. In other words, businesses exist to provide goods and services to society. Before making such provision however, it is important to make profit for shareholders, pay employees an appropriate wage, pay business taxes and meet all other financial obligation. The legal component emphasize compliance with legal provisions and operating within rules and regulations. The ethical aspect emphasize morality as well as avoiding what will cause harm to stakeholders (employees, stockholders, consumers, the environment, and others); while the discretionary component emphasize optional philanthropic contributions.

The philanthropic aspect emphasize good corporate citizenship and tasks organizations voluntarily enhance the quality of life for individuals in society. Akreimi et al. (2018) view CSR as actions and policies undertaken by firms in reaction to specific issues that require enhancing well-being of stakeholders in relation to the triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental performance. To Li (2021), CSR is the sum of obligations (economic, legal and moral responsibilities) undertaken by organizations for the society at large.

Although, definitions abound, scholars and practitioners over the years, have put forward diverse dimensions in attempts to explicate the concept of CSR. Most notable among them is the Pyramid Model (Carroll, 1991), stakeholder’s perspective (Freeman, 1984), and the Mixed Approach (Dahlsrud, 2006; Sarkar & Searcy, 2016). The Pyramid Model of CSR consist economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic

responsibilities; while the stakeholder's perspective took a holistic view of the stakeholders of a corporation including traditional stakeholders (shareholders, customers, employees, and suppliers), and a wide web of stakeholder interests that span corporations' boundaries, and to which the firms must ensure a duty of care. Jamali (2008) noted six critical stakeholders (employees, customers, investors, suppliers, the community and the environment) and proposed encouraging employees' participation in communities' projects. Dahlsrud (2010) analyzed CSR using environmental responsibility, economic responsibility, social responsibility, shareholder responsibility and voluntary charitable responsibility.

Based on scholarly analysis, Sarkar and Searcy (2016) proposed CSR to include responsibility to shareholder's interest, economic responsibility, sustainable development responsibility, voluntary public welfare and charity responsibility, moral responsibility and social responsibility. Although, several dimensions exist in explaining CSR, most emphasize volunteerism subsumed in philanthropic and charitable contribution to society (Arsić et al., 2017).

Employee's volunteerism

Daily, individuals render assistance to others who they may not have met previously and are not anticipating anything in return or reward for such help. This act of kindness is known as volunteering. The concept of volunteering originated around the 17th century from the French "voluntaire" meaning "offering oneself for service". Volunteerism is viewed as the act of rendering free labor in community service or supporting a not-for-profit organization. It is seen as free and deliberate activities undertaken by individuals over time, without expecting any reward, and often through formal organizations, or conducted on behalf of causes or individuals who desire help (Liu et al., 2017).

In other words, volunteerism is an organized unpaid investment of one's time and skills for the benefit of others. Volunteering is rooted in altruism, a principle and moral practice concerned with welfare and happiness of others' quality of life, though, not every act of volunteering is considered altruistic and not every altruistic act is volunteering. Volunteerism span diverse fields of human endeavor and is considered a critical aspect of CSR that benefit the volunteers, organizations, communities and beneficiaries.

As observed, volunteering programmes have attracted attention in business organization, as firms deliberately support and organize opportunities for employees to volunteer their time and skills in rendering services to community. This act according to Plewa et al. (2015), include promoting the community's need for volunteers within the firm, organizing team volunteering projects, providing matching funds for employees devoting time to volunteer projects, recognizing and awarding employee participation in volunteer program. Employee volunteer programs are one aspect of a corporation's community involvement and social responsibility initiatives.

Licandro (2023) view employee volunteering as formal and informal policies and practices supported by an employer, and that encourage and assist employees to contribute their time and skills in community service activities. Similarly, it is seen as active support through various means in which employees volunteer with a charitable organization (Licandro, 2023). Volunteer activities can be in the form of using employees' professional knowledge and skills for counselling, training, tutoring, and membership social organization. It can also be in the form of time and physical effort use in cleaning public spaces, performing physical tasks to help others, painting, collecting and delivering goods, organizing parties for and interacting with children in orphanage, etc.

Employee volunteerism contributes positively to organizational performance. It has significant impact on workplace attitudes like job satisfaction, organizational identification, commitment, and turnover intentions and workplace behaviors such as task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and teambuilding (Gatignon-Turnau & Mignonac, 2015; Im et al., 2017; Rodell et al., 2017). Volunteering provide employees with a sense of organizational identification that allows organizational members to positively perceive their organization.

Also, volunteering gives employees sense of meaning in their work and motivate them to go beyond the boundaries of their job description and engage in citizenship behavior. Volunteering activities afford employees with variety of skillset and knowledge capable of influencing their job positively, as participation in community service develop workers' knowledge and cultural, social and economic related issues. More so, volunteering create and promote good public image for organizations, and result in customers' loyalty, trust, brand equity, reputation etc. Studies indicate that volunteerism leads to positive psychological states (enhanced self-esteem, excitement, enthusiasm, happiness, and positive emotions (Im et al., 2018).

Employee Volunteering in Nigeria

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and one of the continent's leading economies. The economy of the country is made up of diverse sets of businesses as well as organizations, found within various industries and sectors (primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary sectors). While the primary sector produces raw materials and food used in other sectors like crude oil, coal, palm oil, natural gas, varieties of crops (cocoa, coffee, cashew nuts, cassava, rubber just to mention but few; the secondary sector engages in manufacturing activities like production of clothing, shoe, household items, machinery and other high quality goods. The tertiary sector provides services like health care, education, hotel and tourism, financial, transportation as well as communication and so on, while the quaternary sector is concerned with technology, research and development.

Over 41 million micro-enterprises, 71,300 small sized and 1800 medium-sized enterprises operates in Nigeria (Sasu, 2022), and some large-scale enterprises. These enterprises operate in various industries - agricultural, entertainment, construction, hospitality and tourism, oil and gas, consumer goods, utility, information and communication, education, healthcare and banking, and are seen to have absorbed most of the country's workforce and has made veritable contributions to the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). In spite of these contribution, few employers encourage and implement employees volunteering practice.

The banking industry in Nigeria consist twenty-four commercial banks, Central Bank of Nigeria, twenty micro-finance banks, six merchant banks, six development financial institutions, five discount houses, six holding companies, three non-interest banks (JAIZ Bank Plc., Lotus Bank Ltd., & TAJ), and others (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2022). Reports indicate that, employees of some commercial banks (First Bank Plc. Access Bank Plc., Keystone Bank Ltd., Guaranty Trust Bank Plc., Union Bank) in the past few years had actively participated in volunteer activities in Nigeria. These activities include: Union Bank's initiative tagged "It Start with U", First Bank's activities tagged "Youth Empowerment Series and SPARK, FutureFirst Programme", "The Keystone Women Empowerment Programme", Access Bank's "The Take Tomorrow Initiative", GT Bank's "Orange Heart Initiative" (Idowu, 2022; INDEPENDENT, 2023). Although, the Banking industry is observed to have been supporting employee volunteering programme, however, volunteering programme is considerable low and not consistent, considering the number of business organizations in the industry.

The information and communication industry is another critical component of the Nigerian economy that play key role to the nation's growth. Report indicates that there are more than eighteen (18) active firms in the information and communication industry, including Globacom, MTN, Airtel Nig., Dataflex, Google Nig., Main One, Zinox, InterSwitch Ltd., 9Mobile Nig., Paystack, Oracle, IBM Nig., Galaxy Backbone (Enobong, 2023). MTN Nig. have actively and consistently been participating in employees volunteering programmes, among which is the recent "21 Days of Y'ello Care initiative". Similarly, "Airtel Nigeria relaunch Volunteer Scheme", 9 Mobile's Career Counseling Initiative, InterSwitch Mentorship Masterclass. Although, these initiatives by employees of the various firms contribute to the lives of beneficiaries, volunteers, communities as well as employers (companies), employee volunteering activities in the sector seems to be low considering the number of firms operating in the industry.

The food and beverage industry in Nigeria consist more than fifteen companies including Nestle Nigeria Plc., Cocoa-Cola Company, Dangote Group, Unilever Nigeria, Dufil Prima Foods, UAC Foods, Dansa

Foods Limited, Honeywell Foods, PEPSICO, Tyson Foods, Rite Foods Limited, Leventis Foods, Cadbury, Deli Foods, Beloxi Company among others (Mfonobong, 2021). However, few employee volunteering initiatives like Nestle Cares, Coca-Cola System' Employee Volunteer Scheme", "The Dangote Way" are observed to be the most consistent programme within the sector. Thus, not much employer supported employee volunteering programmes are carried out on yearly basis in the past ten (10) years in the sector.

The oil and gas industry in Nigeria which consist of mainly multinational companies like Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), ExxonMobile Nigeria, Total Nigeria, etc. do embark on various CSR programmes in form of philanthropic and social investment in the area of healthcare, education, road construction, water supply, electricity, donations, road and bridge construction and rehabilitation, partnership on microfinance scheme, skill acquisition workshops and others, most especially in their host communities in the Niger Delta region (Mamudu et al., 2021). As observed, employees volunteering initiatives and programmes is quite few and not often seen as a regular activity or aspect of the firms' CSR practice within Nigerian oil and gas industry.

Furthermore, the education, construction, consumer goods and entertainment industries have several active organizations that engage in CSR. However, most employers in these industries neither support nor are consistent in their support for employees volunteering programmes in spite of numerous benefits associated to communities, employees, organizations and beneficiaries. For instance, reports indicate that Nigeria has 264 universities comprising federal universities, state universities and private-owned universities (Punch, 2023). Although, these tertiary institutions often engage in other aspects of CSR, volunteering activities initiated by staff and supported by the various institutions in their host communities on a regular basis is quite low, as lecturers and administrative staff are often occupied with academic activities (task) related to their job.

Similarly, the construction industry in Nigeria, houses more than sixty active firms (both multinational and national companies). Most notable among whom include: Julius Berger Nigeria Plc., China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation, El-Alan Construction Company, Dantata and Sawoe Construction Company Limited, Monier Construction Company Nigeria Limited SETRACO Nigeria Limited, Reynolds Construction Company, Arab Contractors Nigeria Limited, etc. Most of these companies had shown commitments in fulfilling various CSR programmes in their host communities, however, aside their primary duty and areas of operations, little is known about employee volunteering programmes on a consistent basis in these organizations.

CONCLUSION

Business organizations are expected to conduct economic and commercial activities in a manner that prevents damages to social assets while ensuring adequate protection and improvement on social assets. These expectations require that firms be economically, legally, ethically responsible to society as well as engage in voluntary public welfare service and philanthropic giving. While most business organizations in Nigeria are committed in fulfilling their corporate social responsibility, the practice of volunteerism fully supported by employers in which employees volunteer to contribute their skill, knowledge and time in community services is quite low. Thus, the need for organizations in Nigeria to emphasize and strengthen employee volunteering practice in their CSR programmes, for the benefit of employees, organizations and the community at large.

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