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Exxonmobil and Community Development: an Evaluation of its Corporate Social Responsibilities to Host Communities in Akwa Ibom State

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ABSTRACT

Multinational oil companies are expected to be socially responsible to their workers, communities and other stakeholders through their social activities, even at the expense of their immediate profit. In line with the above, ExxonMobil has claimed to have invested millions of dollars in community development projects within the host communities since her inception. The host communities on the hand claimed that the company has reneged on its corporate social responsibilities to them. The main objective of this work is to assess ExxonMobil efforts in discharging its corporate social responsibilities (CSR) in oil producing communities of Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria. To achieve the objective of the study, survey and descriptive research design were adopted. Data were drawn from both primary and secondary sources. Accordingly, stakeholder theory of CSR was used as theoretical framework. The major finding of the study revealed among others that ExxonMobil had not significantly engaged in health care and skill acquisition programme in its host communities in Akwa Ibom State due to poor implementation of corporate social laws as well as the complicity of the Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) and the Exxon Mobil officials in the implementation of corporate social projects and programmes within the host communities. Based on the findings, the study recommended among others that the government should put a legal framework on ground that will make Corporate Social Responsibility mandatory as against the practice currently in vogue where Corporate Social Responsibility is discretionary. This will make the oil and other multinational companies operating in Nigeria to take CSR as a serious business rather than what is obtainable.

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Introduction

Globally, there is a strong advocacy that multinational companies should be at the fore front in alleviating poverty as well as encouraging community development projects and programmes through their corporate social activities in communities in which they operate especially in developing countries. This, no doubt, is as a result of government's inability to provide the needed amenities and supports required from them by the citizenry. This alteration in the balance of responsibilities that was presumed to be government's responsibilities in the society has made multinational firms to become powerful political authority and assumed public responsibility as against their original objective of profit making (Eweje, 2011).

Corporate Social Responsibility is perceived as a purposeful attempt by business firm to act in a way that encourages the interest of its shareholders and the society in general (Welweit, 2008 and Adeyanju, 2012). It is the business practice that requires multinational firms to carry out their activities and operations in a manner that is morally, ethically, legally as well as environmental friendly with the aim of developing the host communities even at the expense of their immediate profit (Osuagwu, Onyebuchi and Eze, 2013). Accordingly, in a bid to contribute to community development Multinational Companies operating in developed countries have given succor to their host communities. For example, in developing countries with a special reference to USA, multinational companies in communication sector, such as IBM, INTEL to be mention but a few have assisted in boosting the police force, especially the under staffed department with data gathering and processing through the donation and installation of CCTV cameras with video processing abilities in some parts of the country where they have high incidents of crime and criminality (Nwoba and Udoikah, 2017). To achieve such goal, Intel has carried out initiative to educate local communities on how to use the technology to control crime as well as to detect who committed the crime (Nwoba and Udoikah, 2017).

Similarly, in Nigeria, some multinational companies, both in the oil and non-oil sectors have made some impacts in their host communities through infrastructure development, educational support programmes, economic empowerment programmes, rehabilitation of school structures, rural market and hospitals among others (Ojo, 2012). For example, in the area of combating crime for sustainable development, the Telecommunication Company "Mobile Telephone Network" (MTN) in particular for years through its corporate social activities played a strategic role in crime fighting and community development efforts; by donating free cell phones and electronic gadgets to security agencies in Nigeria. Furthermore, in the educational sector, the multinational communication company has awarded series of scholarships to Nigerian youths in the tertiary institutions through MTN Foundation School Connect (Baumgartner, 2014). In addition, the Telecommunication company in Nigeria and its associates have embarked on some rural infrastructural projects such as the rehabilitation of primary and secondary school buildings, drilling of borehole water, job creation, donation of transformers among others (Eweje, 2011).

Multinational oil companies operating in the country need to be socially responsible by enshrining in their policies the responsibility of providing social services and projects to the host communities with the aim of addressing environmental

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degradation problem and creating a healthy climate and atmosphere for their operations. The reason for this is to create an environment capable of fostering sustainable economic growth as well as strengthening the relationship between the oil companies and the host communities, thereby ensuring peace along with high productivity (Blowfield and Frynas, 2005; Ojo, 2012). For example, Con Oil Nigeria Limited, through its corporate social activities has engaged in community development programmes to salvage the social wellbeing of the people within her host communities. Verifiably, the referred company's area of CSR includes Health, safety, environment, local content, community development, community relations and synergized relationship with governmental organizations (Conoil, 2017).

In addition, Chevron operating in Ilaje Local government of Ondo State through NNPC/CNL Joint Venture has reached 400 communities, executed approximately 600 projects and empowered 600,000 people (Chevron, 2017). In the area of poverty reduction and improvement in the general wellbeing of the people within the host communities, some multinational oil giants like Shell, Agip, Total and Cisco, among others through their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) have provided jobs to the inhabitants of their host communities, issued out low interest loans and grants to interested persons for business startups in Rivers, Delta and Bayelsa States, thereby directly reducing unemployment among the poor (Onodugo, 2012).

Unlike any other multinational oil companies operating in Nigeria, the ExxonMobil has claimed to engage in series of community development projects and programmes as part of its corporate social action and responsibility. Accordingly, the company's area of CSR includes rural electrification, skill acquisition programmes, building and rehabilitations of schools, town halls, markets, hospitals among others (ExxonMobil, 2022). However, regardless of the company's claims of promotion and commitment to community development programmes within and outside her area of operation, the host communities in Akwa Ibom State are still grappling with abject poverty; with little or no sustainable infrastructural developmental projects, despite the state's contribution to the nation's economic development (Ebong, 2018). The practice of Corporate Social Responsibilities is still undermined and rarely enforced as ExxonMobil is accelerating on double standards by their operation which is contrary to what is obtainable in their home country. Most of the projects and programmes executed by ExxonMobil do not commensurate with the level of environmental pollution and degradation caused by their operations in the area. Even when they have provided social amenities, they do so only to facilitate their continuous exploitation and exploration of the host communities in Akwa Ibom State as evident in the constructions and grading of access road in Mkpanak and Atabrikang that only links to her oil and gas field and not actually to develop the host communities as claimed (Akpan, 2016; Archibong, 2019).

Research Objectives

The objective of this work are:

- i. To examine whether ExxonMobil is significantly engaged in health care intervention programme in its host communities in Akwa Ibom State.

- ii. To investigate whether ExxonMobil has supported skill acquisition programme in its host communities in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Methodology

To answer that above raised questions, the study adopted both survey and descriptive research designs. This included the use of both qualitative and quantitative mechanism of data collection and analysis. The primary source of information included face to face interview and questionnaires, while the secondary source included journals, text books, ExxonMobil Community News Handbook, government bulletins among others. Data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods with the aid of contents analysis and Focus Group Discussion in order to draw meaningful research conclusion. This method was useful in this study because it helped the researchers to communicate new features or trends to their respondents. Accordingly using simple random sampling technique, six (6) Oil Producing Local Government Areas in Akwa Ibom State were selected for the study. Two villages were purposively selected from each Local Government Areas for administration of questionnaire and interview bringing it to a total number of twelve (12). These are Ikot Ekop, and Ikot Akata (Mkpat Enin L.G.A), Egbughu, and Ifiat (Mbo L.G.A), Atabrikang, and Iwukpum (Ibena L.G.A), Awa and Ikot Akpatek (Onna L.G.A), Esit Urua, and Ikot Udota (Eket L.G.A), Okoroete and Udumunne (Eastern Obolo L.G.A). The major reason for selecting these Local Government Areas is that they are core oil producing local government areas within the state and the inhabitant of this locality are majorly affected by the operations and the activities of ExxonMobil in Akwa Ibom State. Interview was conducted and their responses were used in the final analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analyses were adopted in analyzing all the research questions raised by the study with the aid of content analysis and Focus Group Discussion. This no doubt played a vital role in the evaluation of data and the subsequent achievement of results..

Review of Conceptual Literature

Multi-National Corporations (MNCs)

There is no watertight definition of what constitutes a multinational corporation; however, scholars and researchers in international business have attempted to provide some sort of definitions. Prominent among scholars who has taken upon themselves to conceptualize Multinational Corporation are Vernon: Vernon (1979), who emerged the leading scholar in the field of multinational corporations. To him, the concept “multinational corporations” symbolizes a bunch of joint business firms that have branches in different parts of the world that are connected through common possession, drawn upon a common pool of resources, and reacted to a common and regular strategy. Collaboratively, Hill (2005), defines multinational corporations as business firms with productive plant and activities in many countries with the head in the home country. Towing Hill opinion, Osuagwu, Onyebuchi and Eze (2013), see multinational corporations as a corporation that has worldwide spread with a large entity. Similarly, Olanrewaju (2014), define Multinational Corporation to mean a firm with a coordinating production plant across national boundaries through Foreign Direct Investment. In the word of Spero and Hart, (2003), Multinational Corporation (MNC) is business firm that upholds straight reserve and investment overseas and maintain a value added investment in more

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than one country. By so doing, they send wrap up of asset, talent, technology, and marketing skills to carry out production in foreign countries. However, these companies are seen as non-state actors who play a significant role in politics, economic and social development of the developing and underdeveloped countries of the world as they have a huge economic and political strength and influence in any of the third world county in which they carry out their operation.

Corporate Social Responsibility; The Contending Views

The definition of corporate social responsibility will be drawn from three view points; the traditional, the activist and the moderate view. Accordingly, the traditional school is founded on the notion that the business of business is business. Hence, business is a self-interest economic pursuit with the avowed goal of profit making in a competitive environment. This school of thought contends that there is only one social responsibility of business, which is to use its resources for profit maximization. This is because, business firms are not well equipped to handle social activities as its practice distracts businesses from their basic economic role of profit maximization. In line with the above stated views, Bernstein (2020), maintained that the practice of CSR dilutes the primary objective of businesses as it requires businesses to sacrifice some of their profits in order to serve all stakeholders. The argument of this school is founded on the notion that: business is business. A leading advocate of this view, Friedman (1970), underlines the primacy of profit making or drive by business. Levitt (1958) further posits that it is unethical and undemocratic for business firms to assume the responsibility of social issues because they are not trained to do so, and any attempt to delve into social issues would lead to 'dire' consequences.

However, critics do not only see corporate social responsibility as a “subversive doctrine” and a “misguided virtue” but also as a costly venture. This led to the coinage of the “business case” which has increasingly become a formidable corner stone of securing business commitment to corporate social responsibility. The business case suggested that business acceptance of social responsibility invariably results in a win-win situation for both business and its stakeholders. As a result, “business case” has successfully moved corporate social responsibility from the realm of altruism or morality to the realm of rational economic decision making (Egbon, Idemudia, and Amaeshi, 2018). Hence, why most organizations embarked on social activities is as a result of public outcries which threaten profit maximization and the wellbeing of shareholders.

The Activist view on other hand is captured by Hester (1975), to explain the place of business in the development of the society. The arguments of this school call for direct action by business beyond its traditional scope of profit making. It is believed that every organization has a wider range of responsibilities that extend beyond production of goods and services at a profit. This is because they have natural or artificial personalities who are members of the society and by obligation expected to be responsibly involved in community development and substance programmes (Dangana, 2012). Accordingly, the proponent is of this school of thought view that business should serve the society in the contemporary world. Hence, business should follow lines of action that will achieve socially significant goals determined not only by political processes and legislations, but also morally informed self-

initiative (Hester,1975). This describes a shift in philosophy from unfettered self-interest to selfless pursuits that promotes social interest. Collaboratively, for business firms to have a healthy climate in which to function in the future, then it is in their long-term self-interest to be socially responsible. Generally, effective implementation of corporate social responsibility strategies brings benefits to both the host communities and the corporation concerned (Ehikioya, 2009).

To Dangana (2012), the CSR practice has the potentials of improving effective community relations, thus leading to enduring peace especially in the post amnesty era, win new businesses, increase customer retention, develop relationships with suppliers, make an organization an employer of choice, differentiate an organization from its competitors, improve business reputation, reduce risk, and provide access to investment and funding opportunities, enhance long-term shareholder value by reducing employee turnover and absenteeism; and reducing the costs of complying with environmental regulations; and attracting tax benefits; as well as enhancing business efficiencies (Dangana, 2012). In the same vein, Bernstein (2020) argued that in order to have a conflict free environment for smooth operations, the public believes businesses are expected to be responsible to their workers, communities and other stakeholders, even if it may require companies to sacrifice some immediate profit in doing so. This is because prorating is more practical and less costly than reacting to social problems once they have surfaced. Corporate Social Responsibility is seen as the extension of a firm into a new dimension which acknowledge solving the broad problems of society and the physical environment.

Finally, the Moderate view falls in-between the two extreme poles discussed above. In the words of Diebold (1970) a leading advocate of this view.

The right way to bring about the required switch in production to social properties is for the government to establish incentives and constraints in such a way that profit is made doing what society most need to be done in a manner that society finds acceptable (cited in Backman, 1973:4).

This position, in essence, describes the marriage of profit-making motive with attainment of agreed upon social goals. On this score, Backman has this to say: “Actually, the role of business has never been at the extremes of ignoring completely its social responsibility or of being guided completely by that goal”. Davis (1973) provides a flexible approach to corporate social responsibility practices. According to him, business enterprises hold social contracts with society and their existence depends solely on legitimacy within society; if a business enterprise fails to interact with society, then it fails to exist. In summary, the theory argues that in addition to traditional concerns for organizational efficiency and profit-making, business should promote honesty and safety; eliminate within the limits of possibility, those environmentally degrading fall-outs from their activities; and be responsive to the changing needs of the society.

Drivers of Firms Corporate Social Responsibilities

i. Defending public image

One of the drivers of firm CSR is to defend the business image in the society. Accordingly, if companies behave improperly, they can be got at through the court of international public opinion. According to Prof. Michael Porter of the Harvard

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Business School, CSR stand as all defensive effort in which companies primarily react to deal with the critics and the pressure from activists through execution of projects and programmes for the benefits of the host communities (Bernstein 2000).

ii. **Attracting investors**

Companies that proactively engage with sustainable development agenda and its advocate in the investment world should generate support, interest and understanding among investors. This will ultimately ascribe a premium to share price. CSR makes companies attractive to both mainstream investors and to the fast growing ethical-investment sector. Many investors now believe that social and environmental risk management improves a company's market value in the long term (Davis, 1973).

iii. **Permission to operate**

Corporate Social Responsibility has, of late become a vital component in companies' effort to gain approval for projects carrying significant political and social risks.

iv. **Lobbying against regulations**

One of the key functions of CSR is to enable further deregulations by pointing to the involvement of business in ethical and sustainable activities and to indicate that multi-stakeholder dialogue with civil society obviates the need for binding regulation. Companies' voluntary measures can help improve private-sector behavior. But voluntary activity is no substitute for regulation and there is evidence that companies that espouse voluntary approaches to meeting social and environmental standards are also involved in resisting external regulation, especially by government.

Porter and Kramer (2006), added four broad reasons why companies should embrace CSR as part of their business policies and strategies. To them these are; moral aspects, sustainability, social license to operate, and reputation (Porter and Kramer, 2006). The moral aspect has to deal with 'doing the right thing'. One of the ways businesses apply morality as CSR is for instance, honestly reporting its financial statements as well as obeying environmental laws (Eweje, 2011).

Community Development

Community development on the other hand has been variously conceptualized. To Materrita-Cascantea and Brennan (2012), community development is the continuous process of enhancing the community's developmental stride through collective efforts by the members of the community themselves or an external body, be it government or private entity. Similarly, Azzopardi (2011), defines it as a process of engagement through which the community themselves come together as a team to improve their living standard. Accordingly, Ottong and Bassey (2009), maintained that community development entails overall transformation of local areas with the aimed of enhancing the excellence standard and quality of life within a particular community. It is an integrated process which constitutes economic, political, social and spiritual emancipation and development of the less developed

parts of the society, thereby helping people to realize their full potentials and economic independence.

Maimunah (2009), defined community development as initiative undertaken by community with support from the external body such as the government or its agents, business firms, NGOs among others to empower the people with the necessary infrastructure and skill needed to effect change within the community. Externally, government and business firms in an effort to develop a particular community initiates programmes and projects that will be of benefits to the community as well as their stakeholders. The essence of engaging in such act is to build a strong political power as well as to ensure effective utilization of the resources available for the benefit of all in the society.

Models of Community Development

To Tom and Amadu (2014), Community Development Model can be divided into two: organic and inorganic development models. These are explained has postulated below:

i. Organic Development Model:

Organic model of community development is natural and community driven. The assumption behind this model is that community is a natural process and as old as mankind. By definition, the organic nature of community development is an innate process through which the people themselves galvanized strategies and ideas to embark on community driven projects and programme without the assistant of the government or its agents. By so doing, the communities no doubt provide themselves the needed modern facilities such as roads, water, schools, hospitals, electricity, bridges, market, and town halls among others through a communal sponsorship (Tom and Amadu, 2014). Historically, this practice has been in existence in the history of mankind for decades. As noted by Umoh (1985) in Tom and Amadu (2014), today there are thousands of communities' development projects and programmes executed in Akwa Ibom State as a result of collective actions or inactions of the members of the community with the sole aim of improving the living condition of the inhabitants of those community.

ii. Mechanistic. Model

Organic or Mechanistic model of community development depends solely on the values and principles of external support towards community development. Accordingly, unlike organic development, mechanistic type of community development is generated from outside by the external agents to the community. However, there are two basic types of the external efforts towards development, these are public and private efforts. The public type of community development are the one stirred and sponsored by the state actors through their authorize agencies and ministries. By so doing, projects and programmes are planned, funded, executed and managed by the government themselves. While the private type of community development is characterized by sponsorship from the private individual, unions, corporate bodies as well as philanthropy that pool their resources together to enhance community infrastructural and economic development within a specific community. In collaboration with the above view, one cannot be wrong to say that in today's society, many development projects such as building of schools,

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hospitals, industries, markets, housing, roads, rural electrification in most community in Akwa Ibom State come from the mechanistic type of community development.

Theoretical Frameworks

In order to give this work a scientific base, stakeholder theory of corporate social responsibility developed in 1984 by Edward Freeman was adopted as a theoretical framework. The theory explains the nexus that exist between businesses and their customers, suppliers, employees, investors as well as the host communities at large. The major assumption of the theory is that firms, if not all have a large and integrated group of stakeholder which they are obligated to. By so doing, their obligations and responsibilities should rather go beyond satisfying the interest of their shareholders (profit making). The theory emphasizes that apart from shareholders, there are numerous agent that are interested in firm actions and decision in which their interest should not be jeopardize. The theory sees stakeholder as individuals or group of persons who are either harmed by or benefited from the corporation activities and operations, or whose right have been violated or have to be respected by the corporation (Freeman, 1984; Jensen, 2001; Hosmer, 2011; Trevino and Nelson, 2011).

Accordingly, businesses including multinational firms are expected to follow the regulatory frameworks and to adhere to relevant normative principles that are expected by the society, by embarking on severe and compulsory corporate social activities. This is because, the continuous demands for sustainable business practice from the stakeholder community can force industries to develop a sustainable business model with the aim to remain in existence and gathered momentum to gain the competitive edge. Thus, neglect of firm's corporate social action within the host communities may result in unfriendly and conflict prone environment which may hinder the smooth operations of firms as well as business existence. Indisputably, without doubt, this explains the essence to which multinational corporations are engaged in humanitarian gestures in order to be seen as agents of development in any society in which they operate (Maguire, 2009).

In the light of the above theory, Exxon Mobil is expected to act as a corporate citizen by providing the social needs of the host communities who serve as stakeholders as part of their corporate social responsibility requirement by providing social and economic facilities to cushion the effects of their operations on the environment. This have been seen in the area of road intervention, provision of portable water, construction and rehabilitation of hospitals, provision of health facilities, construction and rehabilitation of class room blocks in public schools, rural electrification, construction of skill acquisition centers, provision of modern palm oil processing machine as well as fish preservation facilities among others in selected host communities in Akwa Ibom State.

Exxon Mobil and Healthcare intervention programme in Akwa Ibom State

In the area of health care, it has been argued that ExxonMobil for years has embarked on series of partnership in order to ensure effective health sector reform within the host communities of Akwa Ibom State. This, no doubt, has been seen in areas such as health facilities rehabilitation, donation of drugs, health kits,

construction and revamping of primary health centres, among others in Eket, Onna, Ibeno, Mbo, Mkpato Enin as well as Ikot Abasi local government Area. The essence of such intervention is to curb the rate of health challenges faced by the inhabitants of the host communities as a result of their operations within the region (MPNCN, 2012).

Furthermore, the company has shown an ongoing commitment to community health services for sustainable development through strategic collaborations. In the years 2011, 2015 and 2019 respectively, ExxonMobil has entered into impactful agreements with numerous health organizations including the Nwafor Nwana Foundation (NNF) to ensure that the inhabitants of the host communities have access to good health facilities. These collaborations were carefully designed to not only facilitate but also promote community health services across 14 communities situated within Akwa Ibom State. This partnership operates on the premise that while ExxonMobil provides the necessary funding, the Nwafor Nwana Foundation (NNF) takes the reins of project implementation on behalf of ExxonMobil. At the core of this collaborative effort lies a singular goal: the eradication of malaria and other related diseases that have long plagued these host communities. To realize the above stated goals and objectives, ExxonMobil has allocated funds that are channeled into a dedicated drug revolving account on a quarterly basis. This account is skillfully managed by the Community Health Committee (CHC) with the instrumental guidance of the non-governmental organization (NGO), Nwafor Nwana Foundation (NNF) (MPNCN, 2012). This strategic alliance exemplifies a holistic approach to community health, where both financial support and organizational expertise converge to make a tangible, lasting impact on the well-being of the communities involved.

In addition, the ExxonMobil's commitment to community health development extends beyond mere financial contributions. The company has proactively engaged with Medisend International to foster a biomedical training program of significant. This endeavor, initiated in 2010, has received substantial funding from the ExxonMobil Foundation. The program's focus is on equipping health technicians and engineers with specialized skills in repairing vital medical equipment essential to laboratory diagnostics and other critical hospital functions. Through this partnership, Medisend International orchestrates an invaluable six-month Biomedical Training Program held annually in Dallas, USA. This initiative is tailored to benefit career biomedical technicians from developing nations. Among the beneficiaries, a considerable number – 31 out of 43 individuals from the years 2007 to 2011 – hailed from the regions of Akwa Ibom, Rivers, and Cross River State, thereby underscoring the program's localized impact (NNPC/MPN, 2015). This collaborative effort showcases ExxonMobil's dedication to not only the immediate well-being of communities but also to fostering a sustainable legacy of expertise and improved healthcare infrastructure.

In collaboration with the above literature, responses from the Focus Group Discussion have affirmed that ExxonMobil contributed to its host community's development by constructing as well as renovating several health facilities, donated medical equipments and consumables in selected communities in Mbo, Ibeno and Eastern Obolo Local Government Areas as well as expanding immunization programme in the State. These programmes and projects are aimed at enhancing and promoting health quality among rural dwellers within the host communities in the

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state. (P10/FGD/Male/Mkpanak/ 21st June, 2022). More so, aside from building and rehabilitation of health facilities, ExxonMobil has promoted community health services for sustainable development in Akwa Ibom State by partnering with several health organizations one of which is the New Nigerian Foundation (NNF) in training local health personnel, supply of drugs, provision of potable water and the general upgrade of the community's primary health system within oil producing communities of Akwa Ibom (P11/FGD/Male/Mkpanak/ 21st June, 2022).

Unlike every other health facility, ExxonMobil has donated series of health consumable items in large number such as mosquito nets, beds, syringes, drugs and thermometers among others to most primary health centers within the host communities of Mkpanak, Atabrikang in Ibeno Local government area of Akwa Ibom. To her, these drugs and other medical consumable have helped in mitigating the level of illness experienced by the host communities in Akwa Ibom State as a result of frequent oil exploration and production in the area (P15/FGD/Female/Mkpanak/ 21st June, 2022). It was also argued that during Covid 19 Pandemic, ExxonMobil provided protection kits for health workers as well as noncontact Thermometers to Akwa Ibom State government to help upscale the state's response capability to the pandemic. In addition, the company organized capacity building and training on EVD/ infectious disease control for healthcare workers in Akwa Ibom State and carried out public service announcements on Covid 19 Pandemic Prevention messages through radio broadcasting with the aim of curbing the rate of pandemic spread in Akwa Ibom State (P14/FGD/Male/Mkpanak/ 21st June, 2022).

ExxonMobil and Skill Acquisition / Business Support Programmes in Akwa Ibom State

In a determined effort to foster economic prosperity, alleviate poverty, and combat unemployment within the host communities, ExxonMobil has undertaken a noteworthy initiative. Over the course of several years, the company has proudly taken responsibility for sponsoring a comprehensive week-long training programme centered on business development. This initiative has been rolled out in each of the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State (Ibanga, 2018 and Adam's, 2021). The underlying objective of this initiative is not only to impart essential business skills but also to empower individuals with the tools they need to succeed in entrepreneurship.

The impact of this weekly programme is substantial, with well over 295 unemployed graduates having reaped the benefits thus far. The training curriculum is thoughtfully designed to encompass a spectrum of crucial aspects for running a thriving business. Topics covered within the program range from recognizing and seizing business opportunities to strategic sourcing methods, effective customer relationship management, meticulous planning, sound managerial practices, and the invaluable component of mentoring (ExxonMobil, 2022). By addressing such a comprehensive array of subjects, ExxonMobil has taken a holistic approach to empower individuals not only with theoretical knowledge but also with the practical skills necessary to navigate the challenging terrain of business development.

Furthermore, the depth of ExxonMobil's commitment to social investment becomes evident when examining its contributions over the past decade. An impressive

financial commitment of more than 250 million dollars has been dedicated to various social investment projects within its host state. These initiatives encompass vital sectors such as health, education, capacity-building, and essential infrastructure development. The ripple effects of these endeavors extend far beyond the immediate boundaries of Akwa Ibom State, as they impact millions of Nigerians, illustrating ExxonMobil's broader vision for sustainable national development (ExxonMobil, 2021). In essence, ExxonMobil's multifaceted efforts not only empower individuals with the skills to establish and manage successful businesses but also extend their impact to create widespread benefits across communities and the nation at large.

In a concerted effort to drive comprehensive community development and foster skill acquisition and business growth, ExxonMobil Nigeria has embarked on several impactful partnerships. One of these significant collaborations involves a strategic agricultural partnership between the Akwa Ibom State Government and Midland Rice of Arkansas, U.S.A. This visionary partnership has culminated in the establishment of the Ikom Rice Farm, situated in the village of Ikot Ebidang within Akwa Ibom State. The primary objective of this venture was to catalyze farming and agricultural activities across the state. To realize the ambitious goals of this program, Mobil Producing Nigeria, in a laudable display of commitment, independently contributed a substantial amount of 5.5 million U.S. dollars. Akwa Ibom State Government, equally invested in the project's realization by generously donating 4000 hectares of land. Meanwhile, USA's Midland Rice, with a commendable sense of responsibility, assumed the financial responsibilities of running and managing the project in its entirety (MPNCN, 2012). This collaborative endeavor was thoughtfully structured into three core components. Firstly, the establishment of the Farm Field School proved instrumental in providing local farmers with practical, hands-on training in modern and efficient farming techniques. Secondly, the Rice Milling Plant was established to bolster processing capabilities, thus ensuring the value chain's continuity. Lastly, the Agricultural Technology Center was conceived as a platform for transferring cutting-edge agricultural technology to the state, effectively catalyzing enhanced productivity and sustainability within the agricultural sector.

Beyond this, Mobil Producing Nigeria has taken a proactive stance in fostering entrepreneurial development through the Training Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) and the MPN/Growing Business Foundation (GBF) partnerships. The essence of this initiative lies in providing comprehensive support to micro and small enterprises within the state, catalyzing their growth and long-term viability. To bring this program to fruition, ExxonMobil took on the responsibility of providing the necessary financial resources, while STEP stepped in to offer rigorous training, equipping potential beneficiaries with the essential skills and knowledge to navigate the challenges of entrepreneurship effectively. The ultimate goal was to empower individuals to take charge of their businesses and drive sustainable growth. Through a meticulous selection process, only successful candidates were financially empowered to set up and manage their businesses, thus ensuring that the resources were utilized effectively and had a tangible impact on the local entrepreneurial landscape (ExxonMobil, 2021). In summation, these collaborative initiatives not only underscore ExxonMobil Nigeria's unwavering commitment to community development but also exemplify their belief in the transformative potential of

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partnerships to drive skill acquisition, agricultural innovation, and entrepreneurial excellence within Akwa Ibom State.

Collaboratively, the above views are supported with responses from Focus Group Discussion conducted where majority of the participants maintained that ExxonMobil in a way to develop the youth and eradicate poverty in the region, has done well by donating over N95 Million Naira to youth's empowerment programmes in Akwa Ibom State through a programme tagged, Better Life Option. Accordingly, the programme benefited more than 2000 adolescents over an initial three years of its establishment by creating wealth, eradicate poverty among Youths through credit supports for small and medium scale businesses in Eket, Ibeno, Onna, Mbo, and Mkpata Enin Local Government Areas (P7/FGD/ Female/Mkpatak/26th June, 2022). In support of the above view opinion, a discussant, a Mobil staff added that ExxonMobil has spent between 10 million US Dollars and 12 million US Dollars annually on various community assistance initiatives, one of such example is the Aqua Cultural Projects, which was established in two communities in Akwa Ibom State. This programme according to him has provided employment opportunities for more than 200 people who produce about 100 tons of shrimp and more than 500 tons of fish yearly (P8/FGD/ Female/Mkpatak/26th June, 2022).

Still in the area of entrepreneurial development and business skills development, it has been augured that ExxonMobil has sponsored long week training program in area of digital economy and business development in each of the three senatorial districts in Akwa Ibom State. Hence, through the programme, about 295 unemployed graduates benefited from the exercise which in turn enhanced their business development skills and created wealth among Akwa Ibom youths. (P9/FGD/Male/Mkpatak/26th June, 2022). Between 2010 to 2019, the oil company through their business empowerment programmes has giving out loans and grants to women and youths of Egbughu and Ifiat fishing community to support their fishing and farming businesses. This in return has helped the local farmers and fishermen within the area to be financially independent as well as to support their loved ones and families by meeting their needs. In the oil and gas sector, ExxonMobil has organized pipeline welding training and safety programmes where the youths in Awa, and Ikot Akata in Mkpata Enin Local government areas were trained on pipeline fabrication as well as oil and gas safety. This no doubt "has added value to our lives as we are now today the employer of labour" (P8/FGD/ Female/Mkpatak/26th June, 2022).

Summary of Findings

The notion of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been a focal point of both academic discourse and business deliberation, encompassing actions taken by businesses beyond immediate profit motives. In this context, businesses are anticipated to exhibit social responsibility towards the broader community instead of being solely driven by shareholder interests. This entails the consideration of mutual benefits for both parties during the formulation, design, and execution of CSR initiatives. Such an approach not only fosters optimal collaboration but also mitigates the risk of community conflicts and enhances the company's standing within its host communities. In the pursuit of legitimacy and harmonious relationships with their host communities, ExxonMobil has consistently engaged in

diverse community development undertakings. These endeavors encompass a spectrum of activities, spanning from infrastructure projects such as road construction to the provisioning of clean water and electricity, environmental preservation initiatives, enhancements to educational and healthcare facilities, as well as backing for professional associations and civil society groups. The study found that while these initiatives have positively contributed to local communities, it is lamentable that the extent of community development initiatives instigated and executed by the oil giant as part of its CSR strategy does not adequately align with the severity of environmental degradation and pollution resulting from frequent oil spills and gas flaring in the region.

This incongruence can be attributed, in part, to the inadequate implementation of CSR regulations governing compliance by multinational corporations operating in Nigeria. Consequently, many community development initiatives are initiated and managed at the discretion of ExxonMobil, rather than aligning with what should be stipulated by proper government regulations. Another hurdle arises from the involvement of Community Liaison Officers (CLOs), whose complicity can hinder the effective execution of community-driven projects aimed at addressing environmental concerns stemming from ExxonMobil's operations in Akwa Ibom State. Unfortunately, the study found that some CLOs prioritize projects that serve their personal interests over those targeting environmental issues. Instances abound where funds intended for self-nominated projects and programs are redirected for personal gain, rendering ExxonMobil's community development endeavors disconnected from the genuine needs of the selected host communities within Akwa Ibom State. In summary, the alignment of CSR with environmental realities and community needs remains a challenge, necessitating a more robust regulatory framework and the conscientious commitment of key stakeholders to ensure that corporate social responsibility truly enhances the well-being of the communities affected by multinational corporations' operations.

Recommendations

In order to have an effective means and ways of implementing CSR by Exxon Mobil, the study recommends the following:

- i. The government should put a legal framework that will make Corporate Social Responsibility mandatory as against the practice currently in vogue where Corporate Social Responsibility is discretionary. This will make the oil and other multinational companies operating in Nigeria to take CSR as a serious business rather than what is obtainable
- ii. Community Liaison Officers should be more considerate when nominating community development programmes and projects. Hence, they should maintain high moral and ethical standard in nominating community oriented projects that will address infrastructural deficit as well as benefiting the entire community rather than nominating projects that will only serve their selfish interest.
- iii. ExxonMobil Entrepreneur and Skill Acquisition Programmes should be improved upon. More so, the number of the beneficiaries per batch should also be increase to accommodate majority of the inhabitants of the host communities rather than a few selected numbers. This will go a long way to create wealth and improve the living standard of the host communities in Akwa Ibom State.

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