

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF RURAL DWELLERS: THE LAFARGE CEMENT COMPANY'S EXAMPLE

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Abstract

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Using the Lafarge Cement Company's example, the study examined the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on the well-being of rural dwellers in Nigeria. The design adopted is cross-sectional, where quantitative and qualitative methods were applied in obtaining data from one thousand one hundred and four (1104) respondents from selected communities in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. The research used a multi-stage sampling technique. Data were then analysed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency tables. At the same time, the qualitative data were analysed using content analysis techniques. However, the findings revealed that 62.1% of the respondents reported that they are aware of the existing projects executed by Lafarge Cement Company. While 36.4% of the respondents reported construction and rehabilitation of roads as the projects with the highest attention. The findings of the study further showed that 36.4% of the respondents identified improved income and wealth as the most impacted aspect of their well-being. Beyond investing in infrastructure, the study recommended that more resources be invested in young people's human capital development in rural areas. This will help in achieving sustainable development in rural areas.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Conflict, Education, Infrastructural Development, Socio-Economic, Skill Training, Working Conditions, Problem, Well-Being, Rural Dwellers

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1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a global practice that has gained unprecedented momentum in the business, academic, and public debates, and has become a strategic issue that affects how a company does business (Frynas, 2009; Gwala & Mashau, 2022). The renewed understanding among captains of industries that business has social responsibility that goes beyond profit-making, to include helping to solve social and environmental problems, has provided fertile ground for the debate that has shaped the present direction now assumed by business-society relationships (Ojo & Akande, 2014; Mahfouz, Halim, Bahkia, & Alias, 2022). Some schools of thought have responded that the tremendous increase in business power, the widespread incidence of corporate misdemeanours, issues of ethics, the increasing inability of governments to meet their fundamental responsibility to society, as well as failure to regulate business activities properly, have meant that the acceptance of social responsibility by business has been both inevitable and necessary. The desire for harmony and the appreciation that business, government, or society alone cannot solve today's complex social and environmental concerns allowed for the come together of stakeholders as a useful strategy for a business to meet its social responsibility (Adeyanju, 2012; Idemudia, 2014; Rexha, Ziberi, Hetemi, & Gorda, 2022). The CSR activities range from minor humanitarian services to major infrastructural and social services, directed at social welfare and environmental sustainability (Omang, Okpa, Okoi, & Iniama, 2020).

The concept of corporate social responsibility has been used interchangeably in literature as corporate accountability, corporate ethics, corporate responsibility, corporate citizenship or stewardship, responsible entrepreneurship, responsible competitiveness or corporate sustainability (Abd Rahim, Jalaludin, & Tajuddin, 2011; Amos, 2018; Okpa, Ajah, & Igbe, 2021). According to Fontaine (2013), the concept has emerged as a significant theme in the global business community. It is gradually becoming a mainstream activity of corporate bodies all over the world. According to Werner (2009), Okpa, Ilupeju, and Eshiotse (2020), corporate social responsibility is an increasingly vital tool to maximise the positive development impact of corporations and commercial activity in human society. For Amao (2014), Ipole, Agba, and Okpa (2018), CSR attempts to give back to the society that has made an organisation. The essence of CSR is to improve the well-being of the communities through socio-economic interventions (Milenko, 2013; Ahijo, Ijanu, Abdullahi, & Amoo, 2017; Azizi & Jamali, 2016; Okoi, Iniama, & Okpa, 2021). Corporate social responsibility is continually developing worldwide based on the peculiarities, and the uniqueness of the various places corporate bodies find themselves. Nevertheless, with the constant evolution that goes on overtime, the bottom line is that CSR "is understood to be the way firms integrate social, environmental and economic concerns into their values, culture, decision making, strategy and operations in a transparent and accountable manner and thereby establish better practices within

the firm, create wealth and improve society" (Mourougan, 2015, p. 94). Similarly, Oguntade and Mafimisebi (2011), Uduji and Okolo-Obasi (2019), and El-Hindawy, Shousha, and Rady (2020) observe that firms are conscious of the need to voluntarily integrate social and environmental uplift in their business philosophy and operations.

For Kytte and Ruggie (2005) and Colaco and Vidhya (2022), CSR promotes a culture of honesty where the organisation does the proper thing to offset risks. Although this perception is ambiguous as doing the right thing goes beyond the realm of CSR only, managing risk however is a central part of many corporate strategies. The position canvassed by Moser (2001) and Dean (2020) is that a business can best contribute to the development and poverty reduction by not only creating new sources of livelihood through social investment but also by ensuring that existing sources of livelihood are not destroyed or lost due to its operation (by addressing negative injunction duties). This position is supported by Tsaknis, Sahinidis, Xanthopoulou, and Vassiliou (2022), who argue that the more an organization is socially and environmentally friendly, the more financial buoyancy it becomes. Extensive research work done on CSR in Nigeria by New Nigeria Foundation showed that CSR had been carried out mainly as philanthropic activities and, as a result, "corporate contributions had remained largely unregulated, unsupervised and unguided, depending entirely on the whims, caprices and generosity or otherwise of particular corporate executives in office" (Oguntade & Mafimisebi, 2011). In a similar vein, Ali, Sami, Senan, Baig, and Khan (2022) point out that the concern in business-society relationships today is not about businesses making money the way they want and then giving a portion of it back to the community. Rather it is about how a company earns the money; how the company is run, and what is the level of social interaction with the host communities. Gwala and Mashau (2022), however, contend that much of the partnership discourse fails to appreciate this concern, and tacitly assumes that meeting affirmative duties through social investment is sufficient compensation for failure to address negative injunction duties.

Whereas some corporate entities have found a need that the environment in which they operate should be provided for because they directly impact the attainment of the corporate goals, objectives, and mission statement, others do not. Lafarge Cement Company, for example, usually responds to the societal needs of the people by providing them with portable drinking water, health services, roads, places of convenience, and others (Akpan, 2006; Eweje, 2006; Edoho, 2008; Elsayed, 2015; Uduji & Okolo-Obasi, 2019; Ukwai & Okpa, 2017). They provide employment in various forms to citizens in the surrounding communities, which in the long run bring development to the community. The company, over the years, has provided enterprise development training for women in the community surrounding its manufacturing plants in order to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises. Four hundred and forty-two women have been trained so far in sewing, poultry, cattle-rearing, kitchen-gardening, candle-making, and shop management (Werner, 2009; Alfred, 2013; Renouard & Lado, 2012; Lompo & Trani, 2013; Omang, Okpa, & Okoi, 2022). Arguably,

the Lafarge Cement Company has gone beyond extraction and cement production to providing social goods to their host communities. As a testament to its community investments, the company provided fully-equipped medical facilities in Emuren and Olujobi communities while renovating and equipping healthcare centres in several communities: Mfamosing, OwodeEpota, Ajegunle-Ogijo, and Sagamu. Within Mfamosing communities, key projects were implemented including access road construction, provision of rural electrification, drilling of boreholes, construction of blocks of classrooms, construction of fully-equipped clinics and maternity centres, and community training on soft skills as well as provision of tools such as sewing machines, farm tools. Awareness programmes have also been organised for indigenes of host communities such as health and environmental awareness sessions in Mfamosing.

However, these provisions have often been on an ad hoc basis and often not sustained. Agba, Okpa, and Ogar (2020) reported that the activities of multi-national cooperation in Nigeria, for example, confirmed that some of the schools, hospitals, and other social amenities claimed to be provided by some of the firms in this sector have been abandoned or did not meet the needs of the communities they were meant to support. Operating in an energy-intensive industry with major environmental, health, and safety implications, Lafarge in its continued determination to support the sustained growth and development of its host communities, and to minimise the impacts of its operations on the environment to the barest minimum, has donated and unveiled several CSR projects in host communities. However, the cement company's activities have not received the required scholarly attention in the literature. Given the perceived knowledge gap, it is therefore worthwhile collating and aggregating data in a more organised manner to assess the well-being implications of Lafarge Cement CSR activities in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The literature review is presented in the second section. The third section highlights the method of data collection and analysis. The fourth section focuses on the research findings while the fifth section presents the discussion of the findings. The last section of the paper focuses on the conclusion and the implication of the study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The stakeholder theory of corporate social responsibility

The stakeholder theory of CSR is the brainchild of Freeman (1984). The central thesis of stakeholder theory is that those whose lives are touched by a corporation, hold a right and obligation to participate in directing it. The theory posits that besides shareholders, employees and other interest groups are beneficiaries of a company's activities and have to be considered in a manager's decision, possibly, equally with shareholders (Ali et al., 2022). The theory argues that a business owes its stakeholders a social responsibility beyond

the production of goods and services and profit-seeking. The theory asserts that companies have a social responsibility that requires them to consider the interest of all parties affected by their actions (Prasad, Sharma, Bano, & Chand, 2022). The theory implies that CSR is a proactive strategy for enhancing the well-being of citizens and promoting corporate morality. This suggests that corporate entities operate where human beings exist. They operate within a social context, which is the communities where they have their presence. Therefore, giving back to the society that has created an enabling atmosphere that leads to industrial harmony should not be difficult for a corporate organisation to honour.

The idea is principally to contribute to the betterment of the society and make the organisations socially friendly with the communities for the former's smooth operations (Dover, 2016; Dean, 2020; Okpa, Okorie, Nzeakor, Eshiotse, & Abang, 2022). In practical terms, corporate organisations are supposed to respond to the societal needs of the people by providing them with good drinking water, electricity, clinics, roads, places of convenience, national institutions, and others. The findings of this show that Lafarge Cement Company has lived up to expectations by displaying corporate commitments to ethical conduct and philanthropic gestures to the host communities where they do business. It implies that a corporate organisation's inclusion of community and environmental-oriented projects aligns with its corporate social responsibility. Based on this theory, the company's responsibilities to its host communities as stakeholders in the company's operations include helping to prevent pollution, providing jobs for indigenes, enforcing policies that are in the interest of all employees, and generally enhancing everyone's quality of life. Despite the merit of this theory, scholars have highlighted some of its inadequacies of the theory to include the inability of the theory to analyse the tension that results when business enterprises fail to accommodate societal goals alongside their corporate goals.

2.2. Basic human need approach

The basic needs development strategy grew out of the work of the The International Labour Organization (ILO) World Employment Program (WEP) of the 1970s (Watson, 2014; Gough, 2020). It brought people and human needs back to the centre of development strategy. The model proposes the satisfaction of basic human needs as the overriding objective of national and international development policy (Wierling, 2018). The basic need approach to development was the precursor to the human development approach (Guillen-Royo, 2016). It has influenced the programmes and policies of corporate organisations like the Lafarge Cement Company, international donors, and multilateral and bilateral development agencies.

However, basic needs can, in principle, be met through benevolent or charitable actions (Rao & Min, 2018). The basic needs included not only those essential to physical survival but also those necessary for access to services, employment, and decision-making. This approach often aims at

obtaining additional resources to help a marginalized group obtain access to services (Di Giulio & Defila, 2021). This model is important to this study because it focuses on the ends of development. This implies an open confrontation with poverty through meeting the essential human needs of the downtrodden in society. The Lafarge Cement Company's investment in different infrastructural projects in the study area has resulted in the improvement of the socio-economic well-being of rural people.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

Data were gathered from young and old adults in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. The data were collected as part of a research project designed to examine the impact of CSR on the well-being of rural dwellers in selected rural areas in Nigeria. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked about their socio-demographic features, knowledge about the existing CSR programmes of Lafarge Cement Company (LCC), the scope of CSR of LCC, beneficiaries of Lafarge CSR, and areas of positive impact. The data were evenly collected from respondents in Akamkpa, Odukpani, Biasi, and Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling technique was used in respondent recruitment. The technique entails the use of multiple sampling techniques such as simple random, purposive, and systematic stratified sampling techniques. In accordance with informed-consent principles, the respondents were informed about the background and purpose of the study before they were asked to participate in the research voluntarily. Participants were also informed about their right to withdraw from the research once it had begun and were provided with contact information for possible further questions concerning the research project. The survey data were anonymous, and no identifying information was collected from the respondents. From each of the twelve (12) selected communities, ninety-two (92) respondents were selected. Six (6) interviews were conducted in three (3) selected communities. Thus, the total sample size of the study was one thousand one hundred and ten (1110) respondents.

3.2. Research design

The study adopted quantitative and qualitative methods. The study sought to test and define existing relationships between the variables under study. The study was descriptive, describing the relationship of the independent variables, and how they impact the well-being of rural dwellers. The quantitative data were obtained via the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of closed and opened ended questions, which were in two parts. Section "A" of the questionnaire contained respondents' socio-demographic data, while section "B" focused on the substantive issues of the study. The questionnaire facilitated the collection of a large amount of information from a large number of people in a short time and in a relatively cost-effective way. The in-depth interview (IDI) guide was the second instrument of data collection that was

adopted in this study. The questions were open-ended in nature. The questions enabled the researcher to stimulate follow-up questions, which were similar to what was contained in the research objectives. The IDI participants were purposively gathered on two bases. The first criterion was the relevance of a participant's official position in the company. The second basis was a participant's reputation for being knowledgeable on the activities of Lafarge Cement Company and how it has impacted the well-being of people in the study area. The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods ensured complementarities of data and triangulation, which are the hallmark of modern research.

3.3. Measures

Well-being is used as the *dependent variable*. Well-being is an abstract concept that cannot be seen, but it can be inferred via something more concrete and observable. A set of questions were designed to determine whether the respondents' well-being has improved. To measure well-being, respondents were asked whether the Lafarge Cement CSR projects have improved their living standards, knowledge and skills, social connections and relationships, income, and wealth. The responses to the questions were measured on a binary response scale (1 = "yes", 0 = "no"). Improved well-being in this study was not measured only by indicating "yes" but by stating the particular aspect of the well-being that was affected by the CSR of LCC. All the items are validated and widely used measures of well-being. Also, the study adopted OECD Framework for measuring well-being and progress as approved in 2009.

A pilot test was conducted with 56 copies of the research instrument. The questionnaire was distributed twice within two weeks to respondents who were selected from a population that shared similar characteristics but resided in communities different from the one used for the study. Two separate scores were obtained and statistically analysed using the Pearson product-moment correlation (PPMC). The reliability coefficient showed an r-value of 0.76, implying that the method used was suitable for the investigation. To ensure face and content validity, the documents were validated by two Senior Lecturers at the Department of Sociology, University of Calabar, Nigeria.

Independent variables. Lafarge Cement CSRs were measured by dichotomous variables (where 0 indicated that no project had been executed in the past five years, while 1 indicated that a project had been executed in the past five years). The variable measuring Lafarge Cement CSRs, in general, was based on a survey item in which the respondents were asked whether Lafarge Cement Company has executed any project in their community in the past five years. Respondents whose replies were positive ("yes"), were further asked to list the projects executed by Lafarge Cement Company as part of their CSRs. Two CSRs variables were then coded based on these answers. Corporate social responsibilities that focus on infrastructural projects were coded as 1 if the respondent had listed projects like construction of roads, and provision of potable water in the past

five years. Corporate social responsibilities that dealt with social investment were coded as 2 if the respondent had listed projects like healthcare delivery, and educational services in the past five years. The two variables were coded as 0 for respondents that indicated that no project had been executed in their community.

3.4. Covariates

Arising from an extensive literature review, the following determinants of having benefited from the CSR project of Lafarge Cement Company were considered: a place of residence, relationship between influential personality in the area and the company, specific needs of the people that require urgent attention, availability of raw materials, level of education, and exposure to media (frequency of calling out the organisation on radio, newspapers, and television stations). The variable measuring the scope of benefit from the CSR project of the Lafarge Cement Company was based on a survey item in which respondents were asked to indicate which factor influences the Lafarge Cement Company to execute a project in their community.

3.5. Data analysis techniques

To ensure that all items used for the analysis were adequately responded to, a proper check was carried out on both the quantitative and qualitative components of the data collected from the survey. Responses from the quantitative data were edited, coded, and analysed using appropriate descriptive statistics like frequency distribution tables. Qualitative data were properly edited and transcribed before analysed using content analysis. Fascinating comments and expressions from the respondents were identified and organised under distinct themes.

4. RESULTS

Out of 1,104 questionnaires administered, 1,094 were recovered and therefore used for analysis. A more significant part of the respondents was female 55.00%, while the men were in the minority with 45.00%. Twenty percent (20.00%) of the respondents were 55 years and above, while 33.00% were within the age bracket of 45-54 years. This was followed by those aged 26-34 years (22.00%), next were those aged 35-44 years (20.00%), while those below 25 years were the least (5.00%). Thus, the majority of the respondents sampled are mature adults (45-54 years).

The distribution of the marital status of the respondents showed that respondents who were married were more than those in other categories, and they accounted for 48.00% of the sample. This was followed by singles (45.00%). Divorced participants were 4.00%, and those that had lost their spouses were 2.6% and were the least among those sampled.

Data carrying the educational qualification of the respondents revealed that 39.00% of the respondents had completed their secondary education, and 37.00% had obtained their tertiary education certificate. In comparison, 24.00% had

completed their primary education. Therefore, most of the respondents were literate enough to provide reliable information on the issue under consideration.

4.1. Knowledge of existing Lafarge Cement CSR programmes

The results in Table 1 showed that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (62.1%) were aware of existing CSR projects executed by Lafarge in their community. In comparison, 37.9% revealed that they were not aware of any existing project executed by Lafarge in their community.

Table 1. Percentage distribution of respondents on the knowledge of existing Lafarge Cement CSR programmes in their community

Knowledge of programmes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	679	62.1
No	415	37.9
Total	1094	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2019.

A youth leader at Odukpani during the IDI interview had this to say about his knowledge of the existing projects executed by Lafarge in his community:

"I am aware that a company named Lafarge operates in Cross River state. I can also report to you that they have executed projects that have direct impacts on the lives of their host community and the lives of other persons in Cross River. The company has constructed roads, supported rural communities with a water supply and provided health services to rural people" (IDI/youth leader/Odukpani Local Government Area — LGA).

A woman leader in Akpabuyo during an IDI interview reported:

"Lafarge Cement Company has done well by supporting rural communities with roads, healthcare and educational services. Though not all the communities are beneficiary of these projects, communities that are beneficiaries of these projects enjoy good roads, renovated schools, and accessible healthcare programmes. These are the few projects I can point to most communities in this local government area that has benefitted" (IDI/woman leader/Akpabuyo LGA).

An excerpt from an IDI interview session with a community leader in Odukpani LGA who shared an elaborate opinion and provided a different perception of what he thought about the projects executed by Lafarge cement company in his community:

"First, I commend Lafarge Cement Company for the little they are doing to improve the living conditions of people in selected LGA in Cross River state. The rural people are suffering as a result of age-long neglect from the government and other well-meaning individuals. However, for the intervention of Lafarge Cement Company in road construction, rural roads would have remained dilapidated and in bad condition. The problem of rural people goes beyond road construction; rural dwellers need quality education, a functional healthcare system and potable water for consumption. Again, the tokenism support from Lafarge Cement Company cannot significantly improve the well-being of people in rural

areas. More funds should be invested in education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and other aspects that would provoke a sudden improvement in people's living standard in rural area. The government, too, should borrow a leaf from what the cement company is doing in order to save lives and enhance livelihood in a rural area" (IDI/community leader/Odukpani LGA).

Integration of the quantitative and qualitative data showed that a significant number of the respondent agreed that the presence of Lafarge Cement Company was felt by rural communities where road construction and other projects were executed. Although some of the participants, during the IDI, commended the company for their kind gesture, they argued that the projects were insignificant to cause any severe and remarkable change in the lives of the beneficiaries.

Table 2. Percentage distribution of respondents by the type of projects executed by Lafarge Cement Company in their community

<i>Projects executed</i>	<i>Mentioned</i>	<i>Not mentioned</i>	<i>Total</i>
Healthcare delivery	102 (15.0)	577 (85.0)	679 (100.0)
Road construction and rehabilitation	247 (36.4)	432 (63.6)	679 (100.0)
Provision of portable water	94 (13.8)	585 (86.2)	679 (100.0)
Educational service	191 (28.1)	488 (71.9)	679 (100.0)
Economic empowerment	21 (3.0)	658 (97.0)	679 (100.0)
Others	24 (3.5)	655 (96.5)	679 (100.0)

Source: Fieldwork, 2019.

All participants during the qualitative study affirmed that road construction and rehabilitation and educational services were the most notable projects executed by Lafarge Cement Company in most of the benefiting local government areas in Cross River State, Nigeria. However, the nature and the sizes of these projects varied from one local government to another. One of the participants responding to the question on the major projects executed by Lafarge Cement Company said:

"The organisation has invested reasonably on road construction" (IDI/farmer, Odukpani LGA).

Other participants essentially acknowledged that Lafarge Cement Company had done well in the construction and rehabilitation of roads in their local government area. However, what differed in their narratives was the inclusion of educational and healthcare delivery as major projects. One of the participants whose local government benefitted from road construction and rehabilitation in Akpabuyo LGA had this to say:

"Lafarge Cement Company has invested so much in the construction and repair of roads in this local government. The general assumption is that the company heavy-duty trucks are responsible for the damaged roads. The company intervening from time to time to ensure the road is in good condition is for the benefit of the rural people" (IDI/farmer, Akpabuyo LGA).

Most participants from other local government areas that have benefitted from Lafarge Cement Company road construction mentioned other educational and healthcare services as critical projects executed by the company in their locality. For example, one of the participants from Odukpani LGA had this to say regarding the other projects executed by Lafarge Cement Company:

"Beyond the construction of roads, Lafarge Cement Company has assisted rural communities

4.2. Projects executed by Lafarge Cement Company

Only six hundred and seventy-nine (679) respondents indicated that they were aware of the existing projects executed by Lafarge Cement Company provided. Data in Table 2 revealed that the most commonly mentioned project was road construction and rehabilitation (36.4%). This was followed by educational services (28.1%) with 15.0% reporting healthcare delivery, while 13.8% mentioned the provision of potable water. Economic empowerment was mentioned by 3.0%. In contrast, only 3.5% had other views. This suggests that most of the respondents (36.4%) noted that the most common project executed by the Lafarge Cement Company was road construction and rehabilitation.

in the construction and renovation of schools and the provision of healthcare services" (IDI/driver, Odukpani LGA).

4.3. The positive impact of Lafarge CSR projects on the well-being of rural people

Respondents were asked whether the Lafarge Cement corporate social responsibility projects have improved their well-being. Data presented in Table 3 showed that 87.9% of the respondents indicated "yes", while 12.1% responded "no" to the question.

Table 3. Percentage distribution of respondents on the positive impacts of Lafarge projects

<i>Impact</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Yes	597	87.9
No	82	12.1
Total	679	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2019.

Respondents were further asked to state the particular aspects of their well-being that are affected by projects executed by Lafarge Cement Company. The responses presented in Table 4 revealed that 26.4% of the respondents mentioned improved living standard, while 21.6% pointed to improved knowledge and skills. In comparison, 12.2% of the respondents mentioned social connections and relationships as the area of positive impact. Also, 32.0% of the respondents identified income and wealth while 33.0% of the respondents mentioned improved health. In comparison, 14.3% of the respondents pointed to other options not listed in the questionnaire. Three of the items (improved living standard, knowledge and skills, and income and wealth) were the most visible areas of positive impact from the responses.

Table 4. Percentage distribution of respondents by the positive impact of Lafarge projects on the well-being of rural people

<i>Area of positive impact</i>	<i>Mentioned</i>	<i>Not mentioned</i>	<i>Total</i>
Improved living standard	179 (30.0)	418 (70.0)	597 (100.0)
Knowledge and skills	147 (24.6)	432 (72.4)	597 (100.0)
Social connections and relationships	83 (13.9)	514 (86.1)	597 (100.0)
Income and wealth	217 (36.4)	362 (60.6)	597 (100.0)
Improved health	31 (5.2)	566 (94.8)	597 (100.0)
Others	97 (16.2)	500 (83.8)	597 (100.0)

Source: Fieldwork, 2019.

The qualitative data indicated that improved living standard was the most mentioned area of positive impact. However, other participants also mentioned knowledge and skills and improved income and wealth as the most affected areas of their lives that were impacted by projects executed by Lafarge Cement Company. One of the participants who mentioned improved living standards as an area of positive impact said:

“The road constructed and rehabilitated by Lafarge Cement Company has helped rural farmers to move their farm produce from the rural area to urban centres where they make more money from their sales. From the gains made from such sales, some of the farmers are landlords. In contrast, others can afford the luxury of sending their children to university. Some of the farmers own motorcycle from the farm proceed, which they give out to people to use for commercial purposes and make returns to them either daily or weekly” (IDI/male farmer, Akamkpa LGA).

Another participant explained that though Lafarge Company projects positively impacted other aspects of human life, the impact is mainly felt in areas such as improved access to income, improved living standard, and knowledge and skills. She indicated that:

“Some of the development projects of Lafarge Company is gear towards enhancing human life. The projects may not have achieved this purpose entirely. However, to a large extent, the projects have improved access to income, improved people’s living standards, and achieved other benefits. The company has renovated dilapidated schools’ structures in some rural areas, reading and writing materials provided to the schools to enhance learning. Because of the endemic nature of poverty in most rural areas, it may be challenging for the impacts of the projects to be visible. But, it is a fact that the company has been assisting rural communities within the area of their operation” (IDI/Lafarge company staff, Akpabuyo LGA).

5. DISCUSSION

The study examines the impact of CSR on the well-being of rural dwellers in Nigeria. According to the findings, 62.1% of the respondents were aware of Lafarge Cement Company’s existing CSR projects. This suggests a high level of awareness among locals of the activities of Lafarge Company in ensuring they give back to society. Amongst the existing projects executed by the company, the majority (36.4%) of the respondents mentioned road construction and rehabilitation, 28.1% indicated educational services, 15.0% mentioned healthcare delivery, and 13.8% said it was the provision of potable water, 3.0% mentioned economic empowerment. In contrast, 3.5% have other views. On the issue of the positive

impact of the projects, the majority (87.9%) agreed that the projects had positive impacts on the well-being of the people. In comparison, 12.1% of the respondents refuted the claims. Findings from this study further reveal that the majority (36.4%) of the respondents mentioned improved income and wealth as the most impacted aspect of peoples’ lives by the projects executed by the Lafarge Cement Company.

This implies that CSR undertaking by Lafarge Company has a significant impact on the well-being of rural dwellers in their domain of operations. These results are in line with earlier research on the impact of corporate social responsibility on the socio-economic development of rural dwellers. Results also reinforced past findings on the relationship between infrastructural projects, social investment, and rural people’s well-being. Thus, even though most of the respondents argued that more needed to be done by the cement company to enhance the well-being of rural people, there was a consensus among the respondents that the investment made in infrastructure and social investment by Lafarge Cement Company has to a large extent enhanced the well-being of benefitting local government areas in Cross River State, Nigeria. The company has opened up several areas for easy movement of goods and persons. The landscape of some communities has been transformed because of the opening up of access roads. This development has also facilitated business activities. Some communities in the study area can now have asphalted roads.

Bamboye (2007) points out that where poverty prevails, people do not have access to infrastructure development that would help improve the quality of life. In the same vein, Oyewole and Oloko (2006) remark that good infrastructure development could reduce the cost of production, which affects productivity, level of outputs, and employment. It was observed that where infrastructures are put in place, agricultural productivity would increase. If otherwise, citizens would suffer, particularly the rural poor, and economic renewal, as well as societal welfare, would worsen and halt (Perkins & Luiz, 2005; Akinola, 2007). Similarly, Ebingha, Eni, and Okpa (2019) report that the development of physical infrastructure in rural communities has helped to improve the quality of life of the people and has promoted a sustained and orderly development of vast resources for the benefit of the people. In addition, it has resulted in the creation of an infrastructural base, which is conducive to profitable investment. The provision of basic infrastructure such as roads enhances inputs supply and agricultural products evacuation. Also, the provision of pipe-borne water and electricity to communities is a laudable social investment by corporate organisations.

Occasionally, corporate organisations carry out enlightenment campaigns to expose the community to the benefits of education, which may help members of the community in their day-to-day businesses and interactions. Unachukwu (1991), Peter, Okpa, and Okoi (2020) maintain that corporate organisations often organise adult education classes that involve productive activities. The adult education classes help members of the community to restructure needs and goals for development. They create an opportunity for the rural people to understand what it takes to engage in sustainable trading and farming.

6. CONCLUSION

The study examined the relationship between CSR and the well-being of rural dwellers in Nigeria. The study focused on the projects executed by Lafarge Cement Company and the implications of such projects on the well-being of benefitting communities. The study applied qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data from one thousand ninety-four (1094) respondents. Based on the empirical evidence from both descriptive and inferential statistics employed in the analysis of the data, it has been observed that the majority of the respondents (62.1%) were aware of the existing projects executed by Lafarge Cement Company. The majority of respondents (36.4%) mentioned road construction and rehabilitation as the major project executed by the cement company in their local government. Areas of positive impacts as identified by this study include improved living standards, knowledge and skills, social connection and relationship, improved income and wealth, and improved health. The study, therefore, concludes that there is a significant relationship between CSR and the well-being of rural dwellers in Nigeria.

Thus, beyond investing in infrastructure, the study recommends that more resources be invested in the human capital development of young people in rural areas. This will help in achieving sustainable development in rural areas. In addition, to facilitate rural development in Nigeria, corporate entities should ensure that they give back to society

in terms of providing electricity, roads, water, and supporting educational programmes.

The findings have certain policy implications. First, the cement company, corporate managers, and environmental activities should initiate policies to ameliorate the environmental and economic effects of their activities in rural communities. This could be done by investing in infrastructure and social amenities that would transform the well-being of rural dwellers.

Second, companies operating in communities should reengineer the financial inclusion of small and medium businesses, especially in the rural areas as their social responsibility. Therefore, corporate entities in the study area should increase and strengthen their support for SMEs services as part of CSR. A comprehensive awareness campaign on the relevance of economic empowerment programmes should be launched by corporate entities in the study area. If the poor are to ever come out for their poverty, they need to be adequately informed and given the chance to demonstrate their risk abilities and create wealth for themselves.

Third, corporate policies should gear towards enhancing the living standard of rural people and should be approached both imperturbably and objectively. Therefore, corporate entities should partner with traditional institutions in order to implement a robust rural infrastructure development programme and the rehabilitation of existing roads, health centres, market centres, water supply, and sanitation, etc., in the rural areas. This should help to reduce poverty and significantly improve people's standard of living.

Despite the far-reaching results and policy implications of this survey, it is important to highlight the key limitation of this study. The research participants comprised only the staff of Lafarge Cement Company and rural dwellers from the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria and thus limiting the application and generalisation of the findings to Nigerian rural areas.

Further study should be carried out to determine the effect of CSR by the Lafarge cement company on the well-being of rural dwellers in other states in Nigeria where they are currently operating.

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