

Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development of Rural Areas: A Case Study of Dufil Prima Foods Plc

Iyobu Thomas Abbey
iyobu.thomasabbey@gmail.com

Christopher I. Ochonogor (PhD)
christoper.ochonogor@uniport.edu.ng

Afamefuna Clement Asadu (PhD)
afamefuna.asadu@uniport.edu.ng
Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies, University of Port Harcourt
DOI: 10.56201/ijelcs.v9.no3.2024.pg109.124

Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR, of business has developed over time to the extent that it has become a mandatory obligation which corporate organizations are required to undertake in their areas of operation, particularly in the rural areas where the organization's activities have direct impact on the residents of the community. This being so, the need for the participation of members of the rural community in the selection and execution of corporate social responsibility projects cannot be over-emphasized. This work is a case study which examines the extent to which the CSR projects of Dufil Prima Foods Plc. located in Choba, community in Rivers Sate, Nigeria, enhances the well-being of the residents of Choba community where the company operates. The study was guided by the Stakeholders, the Legitimacy and the Participatory Development theories. The survey and the exploratory research methods were adopted towards achieving the objectives of this study. Thus, data were collected and analysed with the use of descriptive statistical tools. The study found that though CSR projects were carried out by Dufil Prima Food Plc. some of the projects do not contribute meaningful to the development of the Choba community because members of the community did not participate actively during project selection and execution stages. The study therefore recommends among others that the CSR projects of business organizations based in rural areas like Choba should be chosen with active participation of the beneficiaries, that is, residents of the rural communities in order to engender sustainable rural development.

Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility, Participatory Development, Sustainable Rural Development.*

INTRODUCTION

In most developing countries like Nigeria, rural areas are those communities where the greater majority of the citizens reside. In such rural communities their main sources of sustenance is through primitive agricultural and fishing techniques, thereby leading to low level of socio-economic survival of residents of rural communities. As such, it is expedient that for the social and economic development of the rural areas corporate bodies doing business in rural communities should embark on CSR projects and programmes like skills acquisition programmes for youths and women to enhance their income generation capabilities and engender sustainable rural development.

Various corporate bodies have at different times embarked on development projects in some rural communities to improve the standard of living of these rural areas. But since the projects are carried out without consultation and do not meet the expectations of the rural dwellers, they are either vandalized or abandoned as soon as the development agent or company leaves the site of the project. As such, CSR projects embarked on by corporate bodies without the participation of members of the rural community in the choice and execution of such projects do not add to rural development. This scenario occurs because according to (Raheem and Bako, 2014) the rural areas are only recognized as areas of agricultural production for raw materials. Thus, many rural areas in Nigeria appear to be neglected because corporate bodies operating in rural areas have failed to adopt the participatory development model which is key to transformation of rural areas, most of which still wallow in poverty, utter neglect and underdevelopment. Therefore, towards developing the rural areas and to ensure steady economic and social growth, the process of rural development should be participatory to the extent of involving the ruralites in project conception, planning and execution.

According to Rabie (2015) development is an economic concept that has positive connotations because it involves the application of certain economic and technical measures to utilize available resources to instigate economic growth and improve the quality of life. Therefore, the resourcefulness, the skills, knowledge of the rural dwellers must be tapped by the development agent in order to achieve set results towards attaining sustainable development of the rural areas. The inclusive nature of the participatory development model by corporate bodies cannot be overemphasized in the bid to achieve sustainable development of rural areas.

According to Williams (1994), the rural communities are still characterized by absence of basic human needs and underdevelopment in agricultural and non-agricultural activities. As such the emphasis on participation by the ruralites in development projects becomes imperative. Thus, it is strongly suggested that participatory rural development strategy should be encouraged in all ramifications if the living conditions of people in the rural areas must be improved. But for this position to succeed the multinational corporations operating in rural communities should develop the political will to work with community members, other stakeholders and development agencies to engender a holistic participatory development strategy in order to eradicate poverty and underdevelopment of the rural areas (Awojobii, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

The rural areas are quite different from the urban centres where social infrastructures like good roads, potable water, electricity supply, schools, hospitals and employment opportunities which are bountiful. This explains why the multinational organizations embark on various corporate social responsibility projects and programmes aimed at improving the living standards of rural dwellers. But the intentions for locating some projects are hardly achieved because members of the rural communities were never given the opportunity to participate during project selection and execution stages.

Consequently, the good intention of corporate bodies for sustainable development of the rural areas suffers natural or systemic setback which leaves the rural dwellers worse off than before the commencement of the project.

For example, land acquired by some companies for development projects in some rural communities must have displaced some rural farmers whose source of livelihood then hangs in the balance. Therefore, for projects sited in rural communities to be useful and sustainable the participation of members of the respective communities in project selection and execution is key, otherwise such projects would have only a short life span if experience is anything to go by.

According to White et al., (1993), participation is an important component of development and that involving the unempowered poor is fundamental to development, which leads to eradication of poverty and injustice.

Therefore, the problem of this study is to determine the extent to which residents of Choba community participated in the selection and execution of corporate social responsibility projects embarked by Dufil Prima Foods Plc. aimed at sustainable development of the area.

Dufil Prima Foods Plc: Corporate Profile

Dufil an acronym for De United Food Industries Ltd entered the noodles industry in 1996. In 2001 Dufil opened its Choba plant in Rivers State. Headquartered in Lagos, Dufil is a joint venture between the Tolaram Group of Singapore and Kellogs of the US. The major shareholders of Dufil are the Salem Group of PT Indofoods Sukses Makmur of Indonesia which owns the Indomie trademark, technology and expertise. As at today Dufil employs about 1,500 staff.

According to Anudu (2018), Dufil hit a production mark of one billion packs of Indomie noodles in 2010. Today, the company is the leader in the noodles industry with the acquisition of two production lines of Dangote Noodles Ltd for ₦3.75 billion (12.26 million) in 2017. The company also signed an agreement with Dangote Noodles to buy its plants at Ikorodu and Calabar factories, along with stock worth ₦383.94 million (Anudu, 2018). In May 2018, Dufil acquired May and Baker's Mimeo noodles with its production line in a deal worth ₦775m, and announced an expansion drive to invest additional ₦20 billion in Nigeria after its initial ₦10 billion investment. As at today Dufil exports noodles to the US, Europe and some African countries. A company with the foregoing success story is worth studying hence its choice as a case study for this work on corporate social responsibility of business organizations and rural development.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to determine the extent to which the CSR programmes and projects of Dufil Prima Food Plc, Choba, Rivers State were carried out with the active participation of members of the Choba community.

Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. to determine the extent to which the CSR programmes and projects of Dufil Prima Foods Plc were carried out with the participation of member of the Choba community.
2. to evaluate the extent to which such programmes and projects have aided the social and economic development of the community in form of skills acquisition for youth and women (the most vulnerable group), income generation and capacity building among members of the Choba community.

Research Questions

1. What has been the extent of your participation in the selection and execution of CSR projects/programmes sited in your community?
2. In what ways have such projects/programmes contributed to the development of your community through employment generation, skill acquisitions, income generation and capacity building of members of your community?

Significance of the Study

The results of this study would be useful both theoretical and practically.

Theoretically, the study would help multinational companies operating in the rural areas to realize the importance of participation of member of rural communities in the selection and execution of development projects aimed at developing the rural areas and also reveal the extent of the sustainability of projects in which members of rural communities participated, as against those foisted on them. Besides, this study would either refute or solidify the theories on which the research is based.

In practice, the study would help policy-makers in multinational companies to appreciate the necessity of the participation of members of rural communities in development projects, as a guarantee for the sustainability of such projects, and also contribute meaningfully to the existing literature in the academic world regarding the relevance of participation of all stakeholders in project selection and execution for development of rural areas. In addition, this study would underscore the inevitability of the participatory development model particularly for the development of the rural areas, by helping the youth acquire useful skills and sustainability of social infrastructure, like schools, hospitals, roads and potable water supply projects to mention a few.

Scope of the Study

Every research undertaken must have specific areas that are listed for study. Therefore, this work focuses on the level of participation of indigenes of Choba, Rivers State during the conception, planning and execution of development projects carried out by Dufil Prima Foods Plc. in their community between 2010 and 2020.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This study is hinged on the Stakeholders Theory, The Legitimacy Theory, and the Participatory Development Theory.

Stakeholders Theory

A stakeholder is somebody who has a stake or interest in a business enterprise.

A stakeholder according to Freeman and Reed, (1983) encompasses any identified group or individual that can influence or is influenced by the success of an organization's objectives. Thus, this theory is considered very relevant to this study on CSR and participation in the choice and implementation of projects by the ruralites who are the beneficiaries of such projects and programmes. Hence, Tench and Yeomans (2009) described stakeholders as those with a vested interest in the organization's operations. According to them the most common stakeholders in for-profit organizations include providers of capital (banks, investors), shareholders, employees, consumers, suppliers, competitors, community, pressure groups, and the general public. The basic proposition of this theory is that an organization's stakeholders have the right to be treated fairly. Accordingly, the assertion that the stakeholder theory of corporate social responsibility which avers that corporations have an obligation to constituent groups in society other than stockholders and beyond that prescribed by law, or union contract, cannot be controverted (Jones, 1997). A typology of stakeholders could be based on the attributes of power, that is, the extent a stakeholder has the power to impose its will in a relationship which includes the power to affect the smooth running of the organization (Mutchell, et al., 1997). This theory is relevant to this study because residents of rural communities are veritable stakeholders in the drive for sustainable development of their communities.

The Legitimacy Theory

The idea of the legitimacy theory is that an organization and the society in which it works have a "social compact". According to Deegan et al., (2002) the legitimacy theory states that an organization continuously tries to ensure that it carries out programmes and projects that are in accordance with the expectations of the society in which it operates, or activities that are in tandem with social norms. Thus, the theory focuses on the interaction of organizations with the society at large, unlike the stakeholders theory that limits its interactions to those who can influence or be influenced following outcomes from an organization's operations. Legitimacy theory was developed by Dowling and Pfeffer (1995) and is said to be operative when an organization undertakes a course which is in harmony with the value system of the larger social system of which the establishment is a part (Guthrie and Ward, 2006). The Legitimacy Theory admonishes an organization to fulfill the social contract it entered into with the society in order to smoothen the path for the recognition or legitimization of the organization's activities by its hosts. As such, the relevance of this theory to this study is rooted in the fact that corporate bodies carry out rural

development projects in order to fulfill their social compact with the community and legitimize their business activities there.

Participatory Development Theory

The major difference between other development models for developing countries and the participatory development model is that with the latter, emphasis is placed on the ability of the members of a community to think for themselves and determine what will engender development of their community. The main proponents of this idea of development are Paulo Freire and Bocilo Augusto. These scholars believe that for development to take place the people, that is, the beneficiaries of the development initiative should be involved in the conception, planning and execution stages of such development projects. Thus, according to Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008) participation is necessary in order to share information, knowledge, trust, commitment and a right attitude in planning and implementing development programmes. The participatory idea of development is premised on the fact that people including those residing in rural areas are intelligent and can be active agents in change management. Therefore, development efforts should be based on the people's capacity to contribute and participate actively in the task of transforming and developing the society (Anaeto and Anaeto, 2010). Participatory development therefore, means that the people are actively involved in making decisions about implementation of programmes and projects that affect them (Slocum et al., 1995). The assumption in participatory development is that stakeholders like members of a rural community would be involved in the decision making process during project determination stage and this would make their resolution to be more inclusive and go a long way towards instigating ownership over the development process, which would, in turn, guarantee sustainable development of rural areas.

The relevance of this theory to this work cannot be overemphasized because participation of beneficiaries of projects sited in rural communities eventually enhances ownership of such projects by members of the community and also guarantees sustainability of the projects to enhance rural development.

Conceptual Review

Rural Areas

The concept of rural area has been defined in various ways by different scholars based on their specific contexts. According to Mayowa (2014), a rural area is a geographical area characterized by primary activities such as extraction, farming, fishing, gathering among others. This means that rural areas in Nigeria could be measured by a spatial index or by the occupation carried out by the ruralites. Most of us are quite familiar with the features of rural areas where the major means of survival still remains outmoded forms of farming and fishing. Besides, the rural areas where the contestable assertion that a greater majority of the Nigeria's population resides, is characterized with acute dearth of infrastructure like roads networks and other impediments to communication and transportation. This dearth of transportation facilities makes agricultural practice unprofitable, unfeasible, because of the difficulty it imposed on the movement of food produce from the rural to urban centres for consumption. This lack of road networks which inhibits communication and prevents rural farmers from realizing the full potentials of their labour, is a major disincentive to

the survival and development of the rural areas. Among other social infrastructure the rural areas lack potable water, electricity, hospitals, educational facilities, and employment opportunities, a situation that exposes rural dwellers to preventable diseases, and predisposes them to rural urban drift with its attendant consequence in urban centres. Realizing this deficiency, successive governments in Nigeria embarked on various development programmes aimed at bridging the development gap between rural and urban areas. The goal of the development programmes, according to Olanipekun (2013), was to stimulate rural agriculture which the government believed would facilitate infrastructural development, create rural employment and checkmate rural urban migration. However, most of these government programs like the Better Life for Rural Women, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and the Agricultural Development Projects failed as is evidenced by the low level of infrastructural and human capital development in the rural areas (Akpamuvie, 2010).

The effect of this failure is that the rural areas still remain grossly underdeveloped in terms of income generation and the general standard of living of those in the rural areas.

Development

The concept of development has various meanings. Development could mean that an object is passing through a process of growth, differentiation or evolution (Merriam Webster Dictionary). Development, according to Rabbie (2013) is a concept that has positive connotations because it involves the use of certain economic and technical measures to utilize available resources with a view to instigating economic growth and improve the quality of life. For Rogers (1976) cited in Wilson (2005), development is a participatory process of social change in a society which intention is to bring about social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining control over their environment.

Thus, according to Opubor (1977) development is not indicated by skyscrapers and flyovers, but through the improvement in the standard of living for a majority of the population. In other words, the task of development is the substantial improvement in standard of living of citizens and those residing in the rural areas in particular. Moreover, the ultimate goal of development is an improvement in the quality of life of the citizen while preserving the environment for use by generations to come (Sabourin, 2010). Therefore, this work sees development in Choba community from the prism of skills acquisition for youths, greater income generation and enhanced physical development of the community.

Rural Development

The concept of rural development means different things to different scholars because it encompasses a number of disciplines and is defined from the academic bias of the definer. Hence, the World Bank (1995) defined rural development as a process through which rural poverty is alleviated by sustained increases in the productivity and incomes of low income rural dwellers and households.

According to Oluseyi (2018), rural development focuses on organizing human and natural resources designed to provide a solution to the perennial problems of poverty and deprivation of

rural folks with a view to raising their living condition. From the foregoing rural development could be conceptualized as a comprehensive and multidimensional concept that encompasses the development of agriculture and allied activities – village and cottage industries and crafts, socio-economic infrastructure, community services and facilities and above all, the human resources in rural areas (Todaro, 2008). Laah et al., (2013) assert that rural development is the product of various quantitative and qualitative changes in the midst of a rural population and where converging impacts indicated, in time, an increase in the standard of living and favourable changes in the way of life of the people. In his view, Adenipekun (2010) opines that the exploitation of rural resources endowments in rural areas would accelerate their development by providing enough capital for projects, adding that for rural development to be sustainable natural resources should be harnessed in an eco-friendly manner so as to protect the environment and ensure sustainability in the production of the resources. This forms the basis for this study which asserts the need for participation of those residing in rural areas in projects and programmes chosen by themselves in order to sustain such projects for themselves and for the use of future generations.

This fact is buttressed by the assertion that development is about man which is the subject and recipient of development. Thus, there is development when there is evidence of socio-economic change in the quality and level of human existence which aim is the raising of the standard of living, the quality of life and human dignity (Amodu, 2007).

Sustainable Rural Development

The thesis of this study is that participation of rural dwellers, or lack of it, in the choice and execution of rural development projects is key to the success or failure of such projects in contributing to the well-being of rural dwellers. Therefore, for corporate social responsibility projects embarked on by multinational corporations to achieve set goals participation by rural dwellers is important. According to Mohapatra (2015) sustainable rural development does not mean a return to a pre-industrial era, but calls for continued growth with businesses acknowledging and taking responsibility for their impact on society and the environment. Thus, sustainable rural development should be viewed as a process of positive change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are made consistent with the future as well as present needs (Mohapatra, 2015). Sustainable rural development based on the four pillars of development including social, political, economic and environmental could be achieved with the 17 United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals agreed by member nations. The Report of the 17th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) of the UN noted that sustainable rural development is vital to the economic, social and environmental viability of nations and this is essential for poverty eradication. On the whole, this paper agreed with the submission of Saboum (2017) who averred that sustainable rural development is about a process which seeks social change and sustainable economic development for rural communities in an on-going process, and which overall effect is the curtailing of rural urban drift because the rural dwellers have been empowered through the process of development. No doubt, these ideals designed for the better livelihood of residents of rural areas and the development of the rural areas would be realized more speedily when governments and corporate bodies incorporate the tenets of participation of rural dwellers in the process of development.

Participation

The thrust of the argument of scholars who advance the idea of participation in development projects in rural areas, an idea which this paper subscribes to, is that involving the would-be beneficiaries of such projects in the selection and execution stages of projects in rural areas would lead to maintenance and sustainability of such projects and therefore, engender rural development. Paulo Friere (1989) is one of the most influential thinkers in recent years regarding this concept of participatory development which started taking root in the 1980s. According to White, Nair and Ascroft (1993) genuine participation is in process when the local elite including chiefs, community elders and other opinion leaders, the development bureaucracy, like a business organization, and the people generally are working in co-operation throughout the decision making process of the implementation of development projects (Maser, 1997).

Participatory development therefore, refers to the active involvement of the people in making decisions about implementation of processes, programmes and projects that affect them (Sloum, et al., 1995).

To this extent, the people are made more confident as they are allowed to exercise their power of thinking, acting and controlling their actions in a collaborative manner. Thus, participation assumes that the people possess prior knowledge about their environment, and have useful skills which if effectively harnessed would contribute to rural development. More so, in view of the fact that participation as an important component of development is expected to result to the empowerment of the rural poor, which then leads to the eradication of poverty and injustice, the very issues which development is out to address, the importance of the concept of participatory development of rural areas cannot be overemphasized (White, Nair and Ascroft, 1993). In addition, participation and involvement of beneficiary groups in development initiatives would develop and strengthen capabilities of such groups, a process that leads to their transformation and self-reliance thereby ensuring sustainability of projects located in rural areas for development purposes. In this connection, Ihejirika (2020) observes that participatory development takes people into consideration when planning for development that intends to touch their lives.

Development Communication

Various scholars including sociologists, communication experts and economic development experts who have proffered definitions of development communication have done so from the point of view of their respective disciplines. To a great extent, the definitions underline the fact that development communication is a hydra-headed or multi-faceted enterprise in terms of the media and strategies deployed to achieve targets. Thus, communication being an interactive process its relevance in participatory development processes cannot be overemphasized. In simple terms, development communication could be viewed as the use of communication to promote development, particularly in rural areas.

According to Quebral (1975), development communication is the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth in a process that makes possible greater economic and social equality and the larger fulfillment of human potential. In other words, development communication is simply the

application of the process of communication to the development process (Moemeka, 1991). It follows, according to Kumar (1995) that development communication has a transforming role as it seeks social change in the direction of higher social values for communities. Schram (1964) was the first scholar to recognize the important role which communication could play in the development of Third World Nations. According to him, the mass media could improve people's lives by supplementing the information resources and exposing people for learning opportunity, thus linking development communication with economic growth. From the foregoing, it becomes clear that development communication involves the use of communication to promote social development by systematically applying the processes, strategies and principles of the use of integrated media for communication to engender positive change, particularly in rural areas.

What is Corporate Social Responsibility?

Though scholars are not agreed on a universal definition for the concept corporate social responsibility, the term simply means that corporate bodies are obliged to the society in which they operate in terms of aiding the development of the community and in protecting the environment in which they operate particularly where company activities have direct negative impact on the environment. However, corporate social responsibility of an organization is targeted at the stakeholders of the organization to whom the former is directly or indirectly accountable to.

The term stakeholders is elastic and it tends to be industry or organization specific. Apart from lack of precise definition for corporate social responsibility, its multi-disciplinary nature has led different organizations to go about the processes in ways that are most suitable to them. In a study by Carroll and Shabana (2010) a whopping 37 definitions of corporate social responsibility were identified. All the definitions according to them, covers the extent of social expectations on businesses which are constantly in a state of flux (Carroll and Shabana, 2010).

Tench and Yeomans (2009) define corporate social responsibility in terms of how an organization plans and manages its relationships with key stakeholders and the larger society. According to Macmillan (2005), corporate social responsibility is the obligation of an organization to be accountable to its stakeholders. Stakeholders in this broad sense include those directly impacted by the operations of the organization, like those who reside in rural areas like Choba where a business organization like Dufil Prima Foods Plc. operates and those who are impacted indirectly by such operations.

Thus, the main proponent of the need for organizations to be socially responsible to their stakeholders, Freeman (2018) defines corporate social responsibility as a management concept which helps organizations to incorporate social and environment concerns in their business operations and relations with stakeholders including those residing in rural areas.

It is this concern for the sustenance of the environment from which rural dwellers derive their livelihood, but which may have been negatively impacted by business operations that underlines the imperative for those residing in rural areas to participate in the choice, selection and execution of corporate social responsibility programmes, targeted at rural development. Concurring, Teixeira et al., (2018) observed that CSR involves greater sensitivity to environmental and social concerns in areas where multinational companies operate, like in the rural areas.

Objectives of Rural Development

The main objective of development, according to Todaro and Smith (2003) cited in Anaeto and Anaeto (2010) is to make available, and to the reach of majority of the citizens, the basic good things of life which encompasses the requirement for food, shelter and protection from aggression. It follows therefore, that towards achieving development of the rural low income people some deliberate action is necessary in order to ensure that:

- i. A greater percentage of resources are committed to infrastructural development of rural areas.
- ii. Members of the community should participate in the identification and prioritization of projects meant for them, from the planning to the execution stages.
- iii. Promotion of local skills prevalent in rural communities is necessary to create rural employment opportunities. For instance, local boat building industry could be enhanced through application of modern technology, and to
- iv. Increase the output of agricultural products to enhance food supply and increase the incomes of farmers also through introduction of modern fishing, farming methods (Ijere, 1990).

Various development plans failed to achieve positive results because of the top-bottom approach adopted in their implementation. Experience has indicated that the bottom-top approach in rural development issues which involves the full participation of the rural dwellers in projects selection and execution holds the ace to sustainable rural development. This process takes into consideration the knowledge of the community members, imbues them with a sense of self-pride and ownership of the projects, thus guaranteeing sustainability. According to Olatunji (2023) if the government and corporate organization focus on integrated rural development, rural-urban migration which leads to slums in the cities, which provides shelter for sundry criminals, would be eliminated (Punch, May, 26, p. 17). The lack of infrastructural facilities in rural areas has inevitably led to huge population growth in urban centres with attendant strain on the fragile urban infrastructure. But if sustainable rural development processes were in place there would be employment opportunities for youths in rural areas including self-employment by those who may have acquired useful artisanal skills, with the resultant halt on rural-urban drift (Olatunji, 2023). As such, the CSR role of multinational corporations doing business in the rural areas is very inevitable towards the development of the rural areas in all ramifications.

Constraints to Sustainable Rural Development

1. Low participation of ruralites in project selection

The foregoing has demonstrated the failure of corporate organizations' strategies aimed at developing the rural areas which consequence is the glaring social disparities between the rural areas and urban centres. Thus, the need for the participation of the community members in projects that would contribute to sustainable rural development cannot be overemphasized. According to the World Bank (2011) one major constraint towards achieving sustainable rural development is the absence of the participation of the local or rural dwellers in the decision making process concerning development projects. This exclusive strategy robs the development agency, be it

government or corporate bodies, of the body of local knowledge of ruralites in terms of resource management and proper utilization of horizontal institutional linkages, the factors that are required to create successful partnership with the rural community members. This major impediment to sustainable rural development, according to Abass (1993) creates the problem of unemployment, land pressures, inequitable income distribution and the low living conditions of those in the low strata of the society in addition to breeding and tends to breed a new form of home slavery.

2. An uncoordinated rural development strategy of the various tiers of government towards rural development is another problem that impedes sustainable rural development.
3. Lack of spatial focus in rural development planning. This highlights the issue of threshold population for sustaining rural infrastructure like schools and hospitals. For example, a community with an influential citizen, though sparsely populated, could attract a development project like a school, which is sooner abandoned because of lack of threshold population.
4. Corruption and the absence of a national ideology for sustainable rural development, according to Raheem and Bako (2014) are also enemies to rural development. These identified problems could be addressed more easily by for-profit multinational corporations like Dufil Prima Foods Plc. where red-tapeism in administrative matters and corrupt tendencies are minimal.

Multinational Corporations and Sustainable Development of Rural Areas

Having identified some factors that contribute to the failure associated with corporate organizations' strategies at sustainable rural development it is expected that the multinational organization doing business in rural areas like Choba should fill the deficiency in sustainable rural development by adopting the participatory model of development through functional projects and programmes to achieve desired results. Thus, the extent to which the multinationals have adopted this model is the concern of this paper. Without the participatory model of development or the bottom-top approach, where the multinationals adopt the top-bottom approach to rural development, the expected results would not be achieved because the projects or programmes were decided for the people and not with the people (Raheem and Bako, 2014).

This is because the rural communities whose environments are directly impacted by operations of multinational companies now look up to the companies as the alternative government that should provide their social needs. Moreso, when the loss of their means of livelihood, fishing and farming have been directly or indirectly impacted by company operations.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Being a case study on Dufil Prima Foods Plc, this work utilized both the survey and the exploratory research methods to generate primary and secondary data, respectively, to achieve its objectives. The case study method was described "as an empirical enquiry that uses multiple sources of

evidence to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context” (Yin, 1994). Wimmer and Dominick (2000: 124) list the “essential characteristics of a case study research to include particularistic, descriptive, heuristic and inductive”. According to them, a typical case study focuses on a particular situation, problem or event; its final product is a detailed description of the topic under study; it helps people to understand what is being studied, and principles and generalization often emerge from the study by attempting to discover new relationships.

These characteristics are germane to this study because the sources of data collection in case studies include documents, interviews and observation. Besides, an exploratory study implies that recourse was also made to secondary data. According to Monette, Sullivan and DeJong (1994) secondary data refers to any documented material (whether hand written, typed, or recorded video and audio) that was already in existence, produced for some other purposes other than the benefits of the researcher. The justification is that reliable documents are capable of throwing up information that are quite significant and which could not be obtained through other methods. Thus, where reliable documents exist, generalization appear more reliable, hence the combination of these two research methods to achieving the objectives of this study.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The problem of sustainable rural development has engaged the attention of governments at various levels and at different periods as indicated by the National Development Plans of the Nigerian Federal Government. The same is true for multinational corporations doing business in the rural areas of the Niger Delta. This study therefore examined the extent of participation of residents of Choba community in the determination of development projects in their community described as rural area. This study also looked at the strategies used by the Dufil Prima Foods Plc. in the selection and execution of projects aimed at advancing the sustainable development of Choba. Our investigation showed that the company paid little attention to the participation of members of the community through their exclusive style of operations in project selection, siting and execution. As a result, the goals of rural development, like rural infrastructure development, development in human capital, protection of the environment, poverty reduction and economic empowerment are achieved in breach (Adenipekun, 2013). However, there is some evidence that the multinational company adopted, to a limited extent, the sustainable business strategy through their corporate social responsibility programmes. According to Amiolemen and Adegbite, (2010), some companies attempt at striking a balance between economic, environmental and social values in their business operations. Regrettably, however, the corporate social responsibility programmes of some companies have not contributed much to employment generation, income generation and capacity building of residents in rural communities because of the low participation of members of the communities in the selection and execution of projects and programmes meant for them.

Furthermore, it was found that members of the rural communities were not always aware of development projects, meant for them especially at the conception stage because, in most cases, thorough needs assessment was not done. The project is, sort of, foisted on the rural communities by the development agent including the multinational companies. By excluding members of rural communities from participating in the process, the development agent loses the benefit of the local knowledge of the rural people, a resource which goes a long way in insuring sustainability of

development projects in rural areas. Thus, the usefulness in deploying development communication techniques to support participation of members of rural community in the development projects cannot be overstressed.

This study also found that given the aforementioned scenario, the rural community are not achieving any remarkable improvement in their standard of living because, they still lack the relevant skills and capacity to engage the development agencies, whenever the later unilaterally comes up with a project. As a result, the vicious circle of underdevelopment in the rural areas continues unabated.

Conclusion

This work set out to establish the links between the corporate social responsibility of business organizations operating in rural areas and the participation of those residing in rural areas in project implementation, towards enhancing sustainable rural development. The findings indicate that since there was absence of rural needs assessment before commencement of most CSR projects and programmes, the participation of the rural dwellers in the project selection and execution stages was minimal. The result is that the goals, objectives of sustainable rural development were hardly achieved. Therefore, to promote sustainable rural development, even the contractors of rural development projects should be sourced from the communities where the projects are to be located. In this way, local capacity building would be enhanced, incomes of rural dwellers would also improve and the projects would be protected by the community members who now see such project as their own. On the whole, among the constraints that militates against sustainable rural development, poor participation of those for whom the projects are intended, improper planning on the part of development agents and corruption among the rural elite are some of the enemies of sustainable rural development.

Recommendations

From the findings of this study and the conclusions therefrom, it is recommended that in order to achieve sustainable development of rural communities, the following strategies appear indispensable;

1. Involvement of the rural dwellers by way of participation in project conception, planning and execution or implementation.
2. Before siting any rural development project, proper needs assessment is vital to determine priority projects of the community, and the local knowledge they could muster to tackle the problem.
3. Also the development agencies, government and the corporate bodies should cooperate towards designing a comprehensive plan for rural development in order to avoid duplication of efforts and reduce rural urban movement.

References

- Adenipekun, M.T. (2013). Sustainable rural infrastructural development in Nigeria within the context of vision 20:2020. *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, 2(1), 254-269.
- Amiolemen, S.O. and Adegbite, A. (2012). Sustainable development policy and corporate social responsibility business organization in Nigeria. *Social Science Research Network*. Retrieved from <https://papers.ssm.com/5013papers.cfm?abstracted=1991771>.
- Amodu, L.O. (2007). The role of internet in the sustainable development of rural Africa: A fact or farce? In Mojaye, E.V., Salawu, A. and Oyewo, O.O. (eds.), Ebenezer Soala Conference on Communication: Proceedings, 8-13, Ibadan.
- Anaeto, G.S. and Anaeto, M.S. (2010). *Development communication: principles and practice*. Stirling-Horden Publishes Ltd, Lagos.
- Anaeto, S.G., Onabanjo, O.S. and Osifeso, J.B. (2008). *Models and theories of communication*. Bowie, Maryland: African Renaissance Books Inc.
- Anudu, O. (2018). Dufil showing strength 22 years after entering the noodles industry. *Business Day*, Nov. 12, 2018.
- Carroll, B.A. and Shabana, K.M. (2010). The business case for corporate social responsibility: A review of concepts, research, and practice, *Int. Journal of Management Review*, 12(2010), 85-105.
- Freeman, R.E. (1994). The politics of stakeholder theory: some future directions, *Business Ethics Q.* 14(4) (1994) 409-421.
- Gara, O. (2000). *Legitimacy theory as an explanation for corporate environmental disclosure*. Ph.D Thesis, Victoria University of Tech.
- Monette, R.D., Sullivan, J.T. and Dejong, R.C. (1994). *Applied social research* (3rd ed.) Harcourt Brace.
- Olatunji, S. (2023). Rural-urban migration fueling insecurity. *The Punch*: May 26, p. 7.
- Oluseyi, O. (2018). Assessment of rural development strategy in Nigeria: lessons from the past. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 23(9), 01-10.
- Quebral, N.C. (1986). Development communication today. In Maslog, C.C. (ed.), *Philippine Communication: An Introduction*, 109-120, Philippines: Philippines Association of Communication Educators.
- Rabie, M. (2012). *Meaning of development*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-57952>.

- Raheem, W.M. and Bako, A.I. (2014). Sustainable rural development programmes in Nigeria: Issues and challenges. *Asian Journal of Science and Technology*, 5(9), 577-586.
- Schramm, W. (1964). *Mass media and national development. The role of information in developing countries*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Slocum, Widihand, Rocekau, and Slater, T. (1995). *Meaning of participatory development: www.researchgate.net>publication*.
- Teixeira, A., Marisa, F.R., Aldina, C. and Vanda, L. (2018). Student's perception of corporate social responsibility: evidence from a Portuguese higher education institution, *International Review of Public Non-profit Market*, 15(2018), 235-252.
- Tench, R. and Yeomana, L. (2019). *Exploring public relation*. (2nd Ed.) Prentice Hall.
- Williams, S.K.T. (1994). *Issues and priority in agricultural extension in Nigeria in the 21st century*. Keynote Address presented at the maiden conference of society for Nigeria Agricultural Extension. ARMTI, Ilorin, February 28 – March 4.
- World Bank (2011). *World development report 2012: Gender equity and development*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.