



CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) EFFECTS ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF HOST COMMUNITIES IN NIGERIA UNIVERSITIES: A CASE STUDY OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE, ABEOKUTA, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

CSR effects on socio-economic development of host communities in Nigeria Universities play important roles. In Nigeria, public universities are expected not only to deliver teaching and research but also to contribute meaningfully to the welfare of surrounding communities. Very few studies were available in the literature on university CSR in Nigeria; therefore, this study examined the effects of universities' CSR on socio-economic development of host communities in Nigeria, using the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB) as a case study. Data were obtained from household surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews conducted in selected host communities surrounding the university. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were employed to analyze quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. Findings from 303 respondents revealed that FUNAAB has implemented various CSR initiatives, including 52.5% infrastructure development, 65.7% new construction works, 59.7% land-use change (university expansion), 78.6% population increase effects, and 13.5% waste generation and environmental pressure, among others. These initiatives contributed positively to livelihood enhancement, employment opportunities, and stimulation of local economic activities. However, community perceptions of CSR adequacy were mixed, with concerns regarding limited coverage, inconsistency, and misalignment with priority development needs. Key challenges constraining effective CSR delivery included funding limitations, weak institutional coordination, and inadequate community participation in planning and implementation. The study concludes that while university-led CSR initiatives have the potential to promote socio-economic development and strengthen town-gown relations, their effectiveness depends on institutionalization, participatory engagement, and sustainable funding mechanisms. The study recommends the adoption of structured and inclusive CSR frameworks to enhance the developmental impact of public universities in Nigeria.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility; Universities; Socio-economic development; Host communities; FUNAAB; Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Universities are recognized not only as centres of teaching and research but also as critical development actors within their host communities. Beyond their statutory mandates, higher education institutions interact continuously with surrounding populations through land acquisition, infrastructure

development, employment creation, and social engagement. These interactions often generate expectations among host communities regarding the social and economic responsibilities of universities, particularly in developing countries where public institutions play a prominent role in local development processes (Akpotor, 2018; Adekola, Oyediji, Nwakodo & Sennuga, 2026a).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a useful framework for understanding how universities respond to such expectations. In the context of public universities, CSR encompasses deliberate institutional actions aimed at contributing to the social, economic, and environmental well-being of host communities. These actions may include provision of basic infrastructure, educational support programmes, health interventions, skills development, and mechanisms for community engagement. When effectively implemented, university-led CSR initiatives have the potential to enhance livelihoods, promote local economic activities, and strengthen town–gown relationships (Fatoki, 2017).

In Nigeria, the establishment and expansion of federal universities — particularly non-residential institutions — have significantly transformed rural and peri-urban communities. The Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), for instance, is located within communities whose socio-economic structures have evolved alongside the growth of the institution. While the physical presence of such universities can stimulate development opportunities, it may also generate social pressures, unmet expectations, and tensions if host community needs are inadequately addressed. Consequently, the effectiveness of CSR initiatives becomes a critical determinant of harmonious and sustainable university–community relations.

Despite growing scholarly interest in university–community engagement, empirical evidence on the socio-economic impacts of university CSR initiatives in Nigeria remains limited. Existing studies have often focused on physical development or land-use changes associated with university expansion, with less emphasis on how CSR interventions directly affect livelihoods, employment opportunities, and economic well-being of host communities. This gap is particularly important in the context of publicly funded institutions, where accountability to surrounding communities is increasingly demanded (Eze, 2011; Adekola, Erayetan, Ajala, Nwakod, Oyediji & Sennuga, 2026b). Very few studies were available in the

literature on university CSR in Nigeria; this study therefore contributes to filling that gap.

Against this backdrop, this study examines the effects of universities' corporate social responsibility on the socio-economic development of host communities in Nigeria, using FUNAAB as a case study. The study objectives are to: (i) describe the socio-economic status (SES) of the respondents; (ii) assess the types of CSR implemented by FUNAAB; (iii) ascertain the benefits respondents derive from CSR initiatives; (iv) examine community perceptions of CSR adequacy; and (v) investigate challenges facing the implementation of CSR. This study therefore contributes to policy-relevant discussions on how Nigerian universities can institutionalize CSR practices that promote sustainable development and peaceful coexistence with their host communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility in Higher Education

Corporate Social Responsibility traditionally refers to the obligation of organizations to pursue policies and actions that align with societal values and contribute to social welfare beyond profit maximization. While CSR originated in the private sector, its application has expanded to public institutions, including universities. In higher education, CSR is often conceptualized as University Social Responsibility, reflecting the unique mandates of teaching, research, and community service (Eajournals.org, 2020).

CSR in universities involves ethical governance, community engagement, environmental stewardship, and socio-economic contributions to surrounding populations. Unlike corporate entities driven by shareholder interests, public universities are expected to operate in the public interest, making CSR an implicit rather than optional responsibility. Scholars argue that universities' social responsibilities extend to addressing local development challenges, fostering inclusive growth, and transferring knowledge and skills to host communities (Freeman, 1984; Fatoki, 2017).

In developing countries, where public infrastructure and social services are often inadequate, universities frequently fill development gaps through CSR initiatives. These may include provision of access roads, water facilities, health outreach programmes, vocational training, and educational support for indigent students from host communities. However, the effectiveness of such initiatives depends on institutional commitment, resource availability, and the degree of community participation in planning and implementation (Ezechukwu & Uzuagu, 2022; Sanusi, Aina, & Adeyemi, 2023).

Universities and Socio-Economic Development of Host Communities

The relationship between universities and host communities is inherently dynamic. Universities influence local economies through direct employment, student expenditure, demand for housing, and stimulation of commercial activities. Beyond these indirect effects, CSR initiatives represent deliberate efforts to enhance socio-economic outcomes for host populations (Bello & Adebisi, 2014; Bello & Ezeokoli, 2020).

Empirical studies suggest that university-led CSR interventions can improve livelihoods by creating employment opportunities, supporting small-scale enterprises, and facilitating skills acquisition. In agricultural universities, extension services, training programmes, and technology transfer initiatives are particularly relevant for rural livelihoods. Additionally, CSR activities related to health, education, and infrastructure can improve quality of life and strengthen social capital within host communities (Akpotor, 2018; Patrick & Ijah, 2020).

However, several studies highlight challenges associated with university CSR in developing contexts. These include inadequate funding, lack of institutional frameworks for CSR, poor communication between universities and communities, and misalignment between CSR initiatives and actual community needs. Where CSR interventions are perceived as insufficient or exclusionary, tensions may arise, undermining

town–gown relations and the sustainability of development outcomes (Eajournals.org, 2020; Ezechukwu & Uzuagu, 2022).

In Nigeria, research on university–community relations has increasingly acknowledged the importance of participatory approaches to CSR. Studies emphasize that host community involvement in identifying priority needs and monitoring CSR projects enhances effectiveness and promotes shared ownership. Nonetheless, systematic assessments of CSR impacts on socio-economic development — particularly from the perspectives of host communities — remain limited.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two theoretical frameworks: Stakeholder Theory and Social Responsibility Theory, which together provide a robust basis for analyzing university CSR and its socio-economic implications (Siebert et al., 1956; Carroll & Brown, 2018).

- **Stakeholder Theory:** This theory posits that organizations have obligations not only to internal actors but also to external stakeholders who are affected by their activities. In the context of universities, host communities constitute key stakeholders whose interests must be considered in institutional decision-making. CSR initiatives can thus be understood as mechanisms through which universities respond to stakeholder expectations and manage relationships with surrounding communities (Freeman, 1984).
- **Social Responsibility Theory:** This theory complements the stakeholder perspective by emphasizing the ethical obligations of institutions to contribute to societal welfare. Applied to public universities, it underscores the expectation that institutions funded by public resources should actively promote social and economic development within their environments. CSR initiatives, from this standpoint, are not acts of benevolence but integral components of universities' social mandates (Siebert et al., 1956; Carroll & Brown, 2018).

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study examines how FUNAAB's CSR initiatives

reflect institutional responsiveness to host community needs and how such initiatives influence socio-economic development outcomes. The framework also provides a basis for identifying gaps between CSR intentions and community perceptions, as well as challenges that constrain effective CSR implementation.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The study was conducted in the host communities surrounding the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), Ogun State, Nigeria. FUNAAB is a non-residential federal university established to provide education and research in agriculture and related disciplines. Since its establishment, the university has expanded spatially and institutionally, leading to sustained interactions with neighboring communities. These host communities are predominantly rural and peri-urban, with livelihoods centered on agriculture, petty trading, informal services, and small-scale enterprises. The proximity of these communities to FUNAAB makes them suitable for assessing the socio-economic effects of university-led CSR initiatives.

Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design using a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative component enabled systematic assessment of socio-economic benefits and community perceptions, while the qualitative component provided deeper insights into experiences, expectations, and challenges associated with CSR initiatives.

Source of Data

Primary data constituted the main source of information for the study. These were collected through structured household questionnaires administered to residents of host communities, focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted with selected community members, and key informant interviews (KIIs) with community leaders and relevant institutional stakeholders. Secondary data were obtained from relevant project

documents, institutional reports, and existing literature to complement and contextualize primary data.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed in selecting respondents for the study. In the first stage, host communities located within the immediate influence zone of FUNAAB were purposively selected based on their proximity to the university and intensity of interaction with institutional activities. In the second stage, households within selected communities were systematically sampled. Participants for FGDs were purposively selected to ensure representation of different socio-economic groups, including farmers, traders, youth, and women. Key informants were selected based on their leadership roles, knowledge of community–university relations, and involvement in CSR-related activities. The sample size and composition were determined in line with the approved research design of the TETFund Institution-Based Research project, yielding a total of 303 respondents.

Data Collection Instruments

The household questionnaire was designed to elicit information on respondents' socio-economic characteristics, awareness of CSR initiatives, perceived benefits of CSR interventions, and levels of satisfaction with university engagement. The FGD and KII guides focused on exploring community perceptions of CSR adequacy, relevance to local development needs, and challenges affecting effective CSR delivery. All instruments were subjected to content validation to ensure consistency with the study objectives. Data collection was carried out with due consideration for ethical standards, including informed consent and confidentiality of respondents.

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data obtained from household questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. These were used to summarize types of CSR initiatives, socio-

economic benefits, and community perceptions. Qualitative data from FGDs and KIIs were analyzed using thematic analysis. Responses were transcribed, coded, and organized into thematic

categories aligned with the study objectives. This facilitated triangulation of findings and enhanced the robustness of interpretations.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Types of Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives Provided by FUNAAB

Table 1: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Schemes Provided by FUNAAB to Host Communities

Types of CSR Intervention	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
Infrastructure development	159	52.5	Roads, electricity supply and borehole projects were identified as visible CSR interventions
New construction works	199	65.7	University expansion led to construction of new buildings and facilities within host areas
Land-use change (University expansion)	181	59.7	Spatial transformation occurred due to campus growth
Population increase effects	238	78.6	Influx of staff and students stimulated housing demand and economic activity
Waste generation & environmental pressure	41	13.5	Negative externalities such as waste disposal challenges emerged
Total (N = 303)	—	100	Multiple responses recorded

Source: Author's Computation from Field Survey, 2025 (TETFund IBR Project)

As shown in Table 1, the CSR initiative that most significantly stimulated changes in the university environment, as rated by 78.6% of the respondents, is population increase. The population increase stemmed from the influx of students and university staff, which led to increased demand for housing and business activities in the area. Another significant CSR-related change, as rated by 65.7% of the respondents, is new construction works. This was followed by land-use change due to university expansion (59.7%) and infrastructure development (52.5%), while

waste generation and environmental pressure were reported by 13.5% of respondents as a negative externality of the university's presence.

Findings from the survey, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews indicate that FUNAAB has implemented various CSR initiatives within its host communities spanning social, economic, and capacity-building dimensions. Key CSR initiatives identified by respondents include educational support programmes such as community-based training, agricultural

extension services, and opportunities for skills acquisition. Community members also reported health-related interventions, including periodic medical outreach programmes and health awareness activities. In addition, FUNAAB has contributed to infrastructure development through support for access roads, community halls, and other basic facilities, although the scale and coverage of such interventions varied across communities.

Agriculture-related CSR activities were particularly prominent, consistent with the university's mandate. These included farmer training programmes, dissemination of improved agricultural practices, and limited access to technical advisory services. Such initiatives were perceived as directly relevant to the livelihoods of many host community residents. Despite the presence of these CSR initiatives, respondents noted that implementation was often project-based rather than institutionalized, resulting in uneven distribution and limited continuity.

Socio-Economic Benefits of CSR Initiatives to Host Communities

Livelihood Enhancement

Results indicate that FUNAAB's CSR initiatives have contributed to socio-economic development in host communities, particularly in relation to livelihoods and local economic activities. Many respondents during the focus group discussions acknowledged that training programmes and agricultural extension services enhanced their knowledge and productivity, leading to improved income-generating opportunities (Fatoki, 2017; Medupin, Ibrahim, & Adesina, 2024). The infrastructure development initiatives, reported by 52.5% of respondents, contributed to improved access to

services and facilitated economic activities within the communities.

Employment Creation

Employment creation emerged as another important benefit. Community members reported both direct and indirect employment opportunities linked to the university's presence and CSR-related activities. These included temporary employment during project implementation, engagement as casual workers, and opportunities for service provision to the university community (Patrick & Ijah, 2020; Bello & Ezeokoli, 2020). The population increase effect, identified by 78.6% of respondents, directly stimulated housing demand and expanded commercial activities, generating livelihood opportunities for local traders and service providers.

Support for Local Commercial Activities

CSR interventions were also found to support local commercial activities. Responses from the focus group discussions indicated increased patronage of small businesses, especially during university events and outreach programmes. Some community members noted that exposure to university-led training stimulated diversification of livelihood activities beyond traditional farming. However, the magnitude of socio-economic benefits varied among communities, with differences attributed to proximity to the university, level of engagement with CSR programmes, and existing community capacity.



Community Perceptions of CSR Adequacy and Relevance

Table 2: Host Communities ' CSR Needs and Expectations from FUNAAB

Type of Needs	Typical Response Patterns	Key Demand Theme
Before FUNAAB Relocation	Depended on farm produce, streams, firewood from bush, community wells, markets	Largely self-sufficient agrarian livelihoods with limited infrastructure
Present Situation	Using boreholes, local markets, gas cookers; “buy from market, use borehole”	Dependence on purchased goods and formal amenities; need for university-supported facilities
Expectations from FUNAAB as CSR Projects	Borehole water, access roads, scholarships, employment, market facilities, waste management	Social and economic empowerment initiatives

Source: Field Survey, FGDs and KIIs, 2025

Table 2 reveals a clear transition from subsistence-based livelihoods to market-oriented dependency following the establishment of FUNAAB. Host communities now expect CSR interventions that go beyond physical infrastructure to include employment creation, educational support, healthcare, and environmental management, reflecting changing socio-economic realities.

Community perceptions regarding the adequacy of FUNAAB's CSR initiatives were mixed. While many respondents appreciated the university's efforts and recognized its contributions to local development, a significant proportion expressed concerns about the scale, consistency, and inclusiveness of CSR interventions. FGD participants frequently noted that CSR initiatives did not always align with the most pressing needs of host communities. For example, while training programmes were valued, respondents expressed stronger demand for sustained infrastructure development, employment opportunities for youth, and greater involvement of community members in decision-making processes (Eajournals.org, 2020; Ezechukwu & Uzuagu, 2022).

Perceptions of inequality in CSR distribution

were also evident. Some communities felt marginalized compared to others, leading to feelings of neglect and dissatisfaction. These perceptions were particularly pronounced among youth groups, who expressed expectations for more structured employment and empowerment programmes. Overall, findings suggest that although FUNAAB's CSR initiatives are generally viewed positively, gaps remain between community expectations and actual outcomes.

Challenges Constraining Effective CSR Implementation

The study identified several challenges limiting the effectiveness of CSR initiatives by FUNAAB. Funding constraints were consistently highlighted by key informants as a major limitation, affecting the scope and sustainability of CSR programmes. CSR activities were often dependent on ad hoc funding rather than being embedded within a dedicated institutional framework (Abubakar et al., 2024; Sanusi et al., 2023).

Institutional challenges, including limited coordination among university units responsible for community engagement, also constrained effective CSR delivery. In some

cases, the lack of clear communication channels between the university and host communities resulted in misunderstandings and unmet expectations. Community-related challenges were equally significant. These included limited community participation in planning CSR initiatives, weak local organizational structures, and divergent expectations among different community groups. Such factors reduced the effectiveness and perceived legitimacy of some CSR interventions. The absence of a formal participatory framework for university–community engagement emerged as a cross-cutting issue, undermining opportunities for collaboration and joint ownership of development initiatives.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the growing role of public universities as development actors within their host communities, particularly through CSR initiatives. The results demonstrate that FUNAAB has implemented a range of CSR activities spanning education, agriculture, health, and infrastructure development. Notably, population increase effects were identified by 78.6% of respondents as the most significant CSR-related change within their communities, while new construction works (65.7%) and land-use change due to university expansion (59.7%) were also prominently reported. These figures indicate that the physical and demographic footprint of the university has had far-reaching socio-economic consequences for host communities, consistent with findings by Patrick and Ijah (2020) and Fatoki (2017), who document similar patterns in Nigerian university communities.

The identification of agriculture-related training and extension services as prominent CSR initiatives aligns with FUNAAB's institutional mandate. Infrastructure development was reported by 52.5% of respondents, and focus group discussions corroborated that these physical interventions

— including access roads, boreholes, and community facilities — contributed positively to livelihood enhancement. This finding is supported by Medupin et al. (2024) and Akpotor (2018), who link university-led capacity-building and infrastructure initiatives to improved socio-economic outcomes in peri-urban communities.

Employment-related benefits further highlight the indirect economic contributions of FUNAAB to host communities. Respondents reported both direct employment during project implementation and indirect livelihood stimulation through increased commercial activities, particularly as a result of the 78.6% population increase effect. Although many of these opportunities were temporary or informal, they nonetheless contributed to household incomes and local economic circulation. Similar patterns have been reported in studies examining town–gown relationships in Nigerian university communities (Bello & Ezeokoli, 2020; Bello & Adebisi, 2014). Despite these positive outcomes, the mixed perceptions of CSR adequacy revealed by the study point to persistent gaps between institutional efforts and community expectations. The finding that only 52.5% of respondents linked FUNAAB's CSR directly to infrastructure development — a priority need identified in Table 2 — suggests that CSR delivery has not fully addressed the most pressing community demands. The shift from subsistence livelihoods to market-dependent livelihoods documented in Table 2 further underscores that evolving community needs require a more responsive and structured CSR approach. This supports stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), which emphasizes the importance of meaningful engagement and responsiveness to stakeholder interests. The challenges identified — particularly funding constraints, weak institutional coordination, and limited participatory mechanisms — mirror broader structural issues affecting CSR implementation in public

institutions. The low reporting of waste management interventions (13.5%), despite waste generation being a recognized negative externality, illustrates the reactive and fragmented nature of FUNAAB's CSR activities. The absence of a formalized CSR framework within FUNAAB suggests that CSR activities are largely ad hoc rather than strategic, undermining sustainability and reducing their developmental impact. The study therefore reinforces arguments in the literature advocating for institutionalization of CSR within university governance structures (Abubakar et al., 2024; Medupin et al., 2024). Overall, the findings support social responsibility theory by illustrating that while universities acknowledge their societal obligations, the effectiveness of CSR in promoting socio-economic development depends on deliberate institutional commitment, stakeholder inclusion, and sustained resource allocation (Siebert et al., 1956; Carroll & Brown, 2018). Realizing the full developmental potential of university CSR in Nigeria requires a shift from project-based interventions to a structured, participatory, and institutionalized framework.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study examined the effects of universities' corporate social responsibility on the socio-economic development of host communities in Nigeria, using the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta as a case study. The findings reveal that FUNAAB has undertaken various CSR initiatives that have contributed to livelihood enhancement, employment opportunities, and support for local economic activities within host communities. Key CSR-related changes included population increase effects (78.6%), new construction works (65.7%), land-use change (59.7%), and infrastructure development (52.5%), all of which influenced socio-economic outcomes in the surrounding communities.

However, the study also highlights significant limitations in the scope, consistency, and perceived adequacy of these initiatives. While CSR interventions were generally appreciated, gaps remain between community expectations and actual outcomes, largely due to funding constraints, weak institutional coordination, and limited community participation in CSR planning and implementation.

The study concludes that CSR has the potential to serve as an effective tool for promoting socio-economic development and fostering harmonious university-community relations. However, realizing this potential requires a shift from ad hoc interventions to a more structured, participatory, and institutionalized approach to CSR within Nigerian universities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and in line with the stated objectives, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Socio-Economic Profiling of Host Communities (Objective i):** Periodic socio-economic profiling of host communities should be institutionalised as a prerequisite for CSR planning in Nigerian universities. Such profiling will ensure that CSR interventions are targeted at the most vulnerable groups and aligned with actual socio-economic needs and realities of host community members.
2. **Institutionalisation of Diverse CSR Frameworks (Objective ii):** Nigerian universities should establish dedicated CSR units or committees responsible for planning, coordinating, and monitoring CSR initiatives across social, economic, infrastructure, agricultural, and environmental dimensions. This will ensure continuity, diversity, and sustainability of CSR interventions beyond ad hoc project-based delivery.
3. **Strengthening Livelihood and Employment Benefits (Objective iii):** Universities should deliberately design CSR programmes that prioritise livelihood enhancement, employment creation, and local economic

stimulation. In particular, agriculture-related extension services, vocational skills acquisition, and support for small-scale enterprises should be scaled up to maximise the socio-economic benefits accruing to host community members.

4. Participatory and Inclusive CSR Planning (Objective iv): Host communities should be actively involved in identifying priority development needs, designing CSR interventions, and evaluating outcomes. This participatory approach will bridge the gap between community expectations and actual CSR delivery, address perceptions of unequal distribution, and promote shared ownership and legitimacy of university-led initiatives.
5. Policy Support, Funding, and

Communication Frameworks (Objective v): Regulatory bodies and funding agencies such as TETFund should provide dedicated policy guidance and funding frameworks that encourage universities to embed CSR within institutional development plans and performance evaluation systems. Additionally, clear and transparent communication channels should be established between universities and host communities to manage expectations, reduce institutional–community tensions, and overcome the structural challenges constraining effective CSR implementation.

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