

Corporate Social Responsibility Practices in Tourism-related Businesses in Zimbabwe: Community Perspectives

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Abstract: *This study sought to establish the Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives being implemented by tourism-related businesses for communities, including the latter's expectations and levels of satisfaction. The resort hotels in Nyanga, Zimbabwe, were used to represent tourism businesses. Community members were the major respondents. A total of 60 interviews were carried out and data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Community members acknowledged that hotels were involved in corporate social responsibility practices intended to benefit the surrounding communities. However, the initiatives were below their expectations and most of the community members were dissatisfied. An analysis of their suggestions revealed that the community members' expectations were too high and largely unattainable. Although the community expectations seemed impracticable, hotels should try to augment their Corporate Social Responsibility activities, which, if properly executed, can create mutual benefits.*

Key words: *Community expectations, Corporate social responsibility, satisfaction, Tourism related-businesses*

I. Introduction

The initiatives by corporations to deliberately make their multi-faceted interactions impact positively on the society, environment and stakeholders are referred to as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The concept has become a key issue in the strategies of companies around the world for promoting sustainable development. Corporations are voluntarily engaging in practices that have positive impacts on societies and the environment [1]. Tourism has 'significant environment, social and human impacts' [2]. The positive impacts of tourism such as employment can be experienced even by those who are far off, yet the negative impacts tend to be more localized. As such, being socially responsible can be a strategy for ameliorating and compensating for the negative impacts on communities.

The Nyanga area, in Zimbabwe is a prime resort region, which has a unique landscape, climate, and diverse forms of flora and fauna. These natural resources make this part of the country an attractive tourist destination. Consequently, a number of hotels have been established in the area. Some of these hotels are surrounded by rural communities. According to [3] the majority of the tourism facilities in Zimbabwe are found in 'impoverished communities'.

While, there is established literature on how wildlife projects in protected areas bring benefits to adjacent local communities in Africa, there is limited information on how tourism businesses do the same [4]. More so, very little research has been conducted on CSR in the tourism industry from the point of view of the beneficiaries [5]. Therefore, this research sought to establish CSR initiatives being implemented by hotels from the perspective of the community members.

II. Literature Review

Corporate Social Responsibility CSR is a broad and complex term which has been defined from various perspectives. CSR is regarded as a commitment by organizations to enhance community well being through discretionary business practices [6]. It is an ongoing commitment by companies to act ethically and contribute to economic development, while improving the quality of life of the workforce, their families and the local community at large [7]. Companies voluntarily decide to contribute to a better society and a cleaner environment [8]. According to [9] businesses should be responsible to their stakeholders even to the extent of sacrificing some of their profits. [10] averred that these stakeholders include investors, managers, employees, consumers, the local community, media, government, and society as a whole. [11] noted that while the concept of adopting CSR has been a subject of debate among some authors, many companies all over the world are

increasingly embracing CSR activities. Perry, cited in [5] indicated that organizations which embrace social changes have the potential of becoming big brands in the future. According to [12] it is 'almost absurd' for international corporations to be without CSR policy.

Tourism, being one of the largest global industries with international corporations, has become an important social phenomenon [13; 14; 5]. As such, there is need to manage the industry according to the principles of sustainable development in order to positively contribute towards local and regional development [15]. As noted earlier on, tourism brings numerous benefits to destinations, yet it is also associated with enormous negative economic, social and environmental impacts [3, 16]. In view of this, there is argument that companies should try their best to reduce the negative impacts of their operations on the environment by positively contributing to communities they operate in [17]. Further, it can be noted that hotel companies can play an important role in the development of communities [5]. In fact, some international hotels are implementing CSR initiatives which target the local communities [18]. For instance, [19] indicated that many hotels have integrated CSR measures in their company activities. Typical examples are: Marriott International, with their program, "Spirit to Serve Our Communities" and NH Hotels' "Street Children" program. [20] posited that recognition of CSR practices enhances company reputation. Similarly, [21] noted that if tourism and hospitality industries give due respect to CSR initiatives, this can contribute towards a sustainable competitive advantage and good corporate image to the society.

Although the hotel industry is increasingly adopting CSR practices, most of these cases relate to the context of developed countries [5], which have well established economic structures. In Zimbabwe, in terms of reporting, hotels provide little information on social and environmental dimensions, while giving more emphasis to the economic dimension [22]. However, in a study carried by [3], tourism businesses in the country acknowledged that they were engaging in CSR activities. In view of the foregoing, this research sought to consider CSR activities from point of view of the intended beneficiaries.

III. Methodology

Data was collected using interviews, conducted with community members and the hotel management team respectively. Three main communities were targeted. Household heads or representatives who were available during the time of study were the ones who were interviewed. A total of 60 interviews were carried out in three communities adjacent to the hotels. The interviews were discontinued when the researchers were no longer getting meaningful new information (saturation level). The interview guide for the community members had three sections; the first section comprised of questions which sought to establish the profile of the respondents in terms of sex, age and length of stay in the community. In the second part, the questions sought to establish the ways in which communities were benefiting from the hotels in their vicinity whilst the third part had questions on community expectations and the fourth part had questions which sought to establish the community's levels of satisfaction with the CSR practiced by hotels.

Three hotel establishments were also included in the study and selected using typical case purposive sampling. The three hotels were selected as typical cases in this study, as they were presumed to be representative of the group of cases under study [23] that is the group of hotels in Nyanga initiating some form of CSR. Purposive sampling was used in this study; because it had the advantage of making it possible to select information-rich cases that allow one to learn more about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research [24]. The hotel management interviews served the purpose of triangulating findings from the community interviews. Three managers were interviewed from each establishment.

The interview guide for managers was divided into two sections the first section contained questions which sought to establish what the hotels were doing for the communities, whether they were satisfied by their current activities. The second section had questions which sought to establish the challenges which the hoteliers were facing in executing CSR practices.

The data was analyzed by establishing dominant themes emerging from the study. Simple descriptive statistics in the form of percentages were also used to quantify data on community expectations, while some quotations from some of the respondents were used to illustrate the common community perspectives.

IV. Findings

4.1 Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives by Hotels in Nyanga

Most of the respondents from the community had stayed in the area for a relatively long period of at least 6 years and above. In order to establish the CSR initiatives from the perspective of the community, interviewees were first asked whether they interacted with the hotels in any way. The majority of the interviewees (67%) indicated that they do not interact with the hotels, while 33% of the respondents indicated that they interacted with hotels in one way or the other. One of the community members reiterated the following:

"We never have a relationship with this hotel. We operate as one man for himself God for us all."

“The hotel only comes to us when they are stranded, like when they have run out of stocks and when the hotel is fully booked that’s when they come to us to buy some commodities like tomatoes.”

Those who interacted with hotels were then asked to indicate the nature of the interaction. It was interesting to note that there was consensus on the kind of activities being practiced by the hotels amongst community members. From the community’s point of view, the CSR practices by the hotels include the provision of employment, buying horticultural products from some of the community members, occasional donations to orphanages, provision of recreational facilities for sporting activities, donations of old equipment and support of state functions such as Independence celebrations. However, when asked about the frequency of such interaction, all the community members indicated that these activities were not done on a regular basis.

In terms of employment, indications were that most of the local people were low level workers mostly doing menial activities. The majority of the respondents shared sentiments similar to those expressed by a respondent from one of the villages as below:

“It’s so unfair what hotels do to us they take people from afar to come and grab jobs that belong to us. Even for simple and general jobs like gardening, still the hotels take people from Harare”

“Table 1” summarizes some of the CSR activities undertaken by the sampled hotels as perceived by community members.

Table 1: CSR Initiatives by Hotels in Nyanga

Hotel 1	Hotel 2	Hotel 3
Employment	Employment	Employment
Charitable activities	Charitable activities	Charitable activities
Recreational facilities	Recreational facilities	Recreational facilities
Buying horticultural produce	Buying horticultural produce	Buying horticultural produce
Supporting state functions	Supporting state functions	Supporting state functions
-	Donations of utensils	-
Cleaning campaigns	-	-

Source: Interviews with community members

Hotel management interviewees also revealed that they support the community by mainly buying their farm produce. However, the hotels acknowledged that they only buy from a few well known farmers who produce quality agricultural products, because of the need to maintain high quality and standard of dishes. In general there was a common thread of CSR activities amongst hotels as perceived by community members. All the hotels indicated that they provided recreational facilities, such as soccer pitches, for community entertainment. All hotels engaged in some charitable activities in one way or the other and only one hotel conducted cleaning campaigns. Community members indicated that most of the CSR practices were largely targeting charity activities and state functions, while the ordinary community members received minimal benefits from such activities.

4.2 Community Expectations

The community members were asked to indicate the kind of help they would expect from the hotel establishments in their areas. The most mentioned expectations included the provision of agricultural inputs and soft loans to start small businesses such as art and craft, the employment of more locals as well as infrastructural development. The community also expressed the desire to be taught basic skills related to the hospitality industry for them to appreciate its existence in their communities. “We just need to be taught little, simple and basic things which the hotels do like cooking, bedding and cleaning.” Some of the community members also stated that they expected provision of food and drugs to the main hospital, scholarships for capable underprivileged students and the sponsoring of adult education. “Table 2” summarizes the communities’ main expectations regarding hotels’ social responsibility:

Table 2: Community Expectations (n=60)

Community Expectations	% Response
Provision of farming inputs	70
Infrastructural development	50
Loans for starting projects	50
Cooking and home management training	45
Better paid jobs	40
Buying more of their farm products	40
Health and nutrition education	25
School fees for poor capable students	25
Funding community projects	20
Promoting local retail businesses	15

Source: interviews with community members

4.3 Level of satisfaction with CSR initiatives

The study also sought to establish the extent to which communities were satisfied with CSR initiatives by hotels in the area. Most of the respondents, 75%, indicated that they were not satisfied. Their major concern was that few people were benefitting through employment, selling of horticultural produce and charity activities. Moreover, some recipients of donations indicated that they were not happy with receiving old utensils. One of the respondents said that:

“These hotels see us as their dumping site for old linen and plates. Why not give us new things? Even once in a while, we will be grateful.”

In addition, villagers expected the hotels to do more, arguing that they were deprived of their land in order to pave way for development of the hotels.

“Our land was taken away, especially the fertile soils. However, we consider ourselves lucky to have settled near the hotels where the land is a bit fertile, but some of our relatives were resettled far away where the soils are poor. If we had the powers we would have taken back our land.”

The communities were asked what their reaction would be, if the hotels were to be closed. In that regard, 53% of the respondents stated that they would welcome the closure of the hotels. One of the respondents noted that;

“It is better for these hotels to close, we will be resettled and get back our land and prices will go down especially food commodities in our supermarkets,”

Meanwhile, 20% of the respondents indicated they would not welcome that development. Those against the closure of the hotels indicated that this would make them lose their jobs. However, 27% were indifferent as they had no interaction with hotels in any way.

From the findings, it emerged that the hotels were assisting the community in one way or the other, but it appears some of the community members did not appreciate the kind of help they were receiving.

V. Discussion

This research is invaluable to CSR literature as it is based on a developing country perspective, views which have remained anecdotal in extant literature. This study has identified the importance of hotels' social responsibility towards charity organizations, state functions and community recreation, to a greater extent confirming the findings from a study carried by [3]. However, the communities in close proximity to the hotels expressed concern over the immediate benefits of such activities to their livelihood. The indication by communities that they were not benefitting much from the hotels located in the Nyanga area means that is need for hoteliers to re-strategize in order to target immediate benefits to the ordinary community member. The study has also revealed the importance of hotels' in enhancing the visibility and appreciation of their wider CSR activities amongst communities in their vicinity.

Whilst the execution of CSR practices is not mandatory, there is need for tourism related businesses in Zimbabwe to be in line with global trends. Perry cited in [5] posited that “big brands in the future are those that tap into social changes that are taking place”. There is need for local for tourism related businesses to benchmark their CSR initiatives with best practices and adopt measures which enable the majority of community members to benefit in one way or the other. It emerged that assistance with agricultural inputs is the major need for these communities since agriculture is their main source of livelihood. Therefore, there is need for hotels to come up with small agricultural packages that are appreciated by the local communities, in liaison with agricultural authorities in the area.

The suggestion by community members that hotels should train them to acquire home management and cooking skills was one of the important findings of this study. These skills would make the rural homesteads attractive to tourists, thereby paving way for rural based tourism ventures. The Nyanga area, with its pristine natural outlook provides a conducive environment for ecotourism activities. The development of eco-tourism would further stimulate multiple benefits to the locals given that community involvement and community development are the core objectives of ecotourism. In addition, home management and cooking skills could have far reaching social benefits, such as creating happier and healthier families. [12] posited that hotel companies can play an important role towards the improvement of the quality of life of host communities. Similarly, [25] also noted that there is a growing realization that tourism is one of the best placed and effective tools in improving community lives.

CSR creates mutual benefits as it helps organizations to justify benefits over costs, innovate and manage risk, while enabling citizens to benefit from the tourism industry [26]. The implementation of more CSR initiatives that benefit local communities assist in the creation of a positive attitude by locals towards tourism businesses and tourists. It is a well known fact that host community's friendliness towards visitors is a key success factor for tourism development.

However, the research established that the community expectations were too high and difficult to achieve. The complaint over being given old plates indicates that some community members do not appreciate

the things the hotels are managing to do. These high expectations make it imperative for hotels to ensure that locals are getting some benefits for the sake of nurturing cordial relations between tourism businesses and the community.

Meanwhile, it was encouraging to note that hoteliers had a positive attitude towards the concept of CSR. This is an essential input in the execution of CSR practices. The hotel management indicated that the major constraint for them was the low economic performance of the industry due to depressed tourists' numbers. However, hotels need to be innovative and come up with cheap and simple sustainable CSR packages. If properly planned, most of the initiatives such as cleaning campaigns for instance, do not require much in terms of capital injection.

VI. Conclusions

Tourism related businesses in Nyanga, Zimbabwe, engaged in activities towards helping communities. Most of the community members had very high expectations and were dissatisfied, since they were more concerned about the immediate benefits. Hotels' assistance with the acquisition of cooking and home management skills can go a long way in empowering community members, especially women. It is recommended that hotels should consult the local communities to identify their needs in order to provide help which can be more appreciated. Total disregard of community expectations can be a potential source of conflict, especially in countries where indigenization and economic empowerment of locals have been identified as major drivers of economic and social development. Accommodation establishments, being a major component of the tourism industry, should contribute towards social and economic development of destinations. In future, it may be necessary to carry out a similar research on CSR using the quantitative approach.

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