

Assessment of Religious Organisations' Corporate Social Responsibility During the COVID-19 Lockdown in the South-South Nigeria

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ABSTRACT *This study was designed to assess religious organisation's corporate social responsibility efforts and the expectations of their members during the COVID-19 lockdown in the South-South Nigeria. The objectives of this study, among others, were find out the expectations of religious organisations and their corporate social responsibility in conflict/emergency situations. It was hypothesised that the corporate social responsibility initiatives of religious organisations had a positive influence on their corporate image and there is a significant relationship between the corporate social responsibility of religious organisations in South-South Nigeria, during the lockdown and the new membership enrolment. The Hypotheses were tested using the using the Cronbach Alpha on Statistical Packages for Social Science. The study adopted the Stakeholders, System theories as it theoretical bases. The descriptive survey research method was adopted with the questionnaire as the research instrument. The South-South region of Nigeria constituted the population of the study while a simple size of 400 respondents from the Taro Yamane formula were selected. However, 381 questionnaire were returned and certified as appropriate for the study. The study adopted the proportional sampling techniques. The findings of the study revealed that a majority of the respondents (57) percent received assistance from various religious organisations during the lockdown though there were significant disparities in their areas of interest. The study concluded that the CRS initiatives of the religious organisation positively influenced their images and fostered a sense of care and compassion which led to new member enrolment. It was thus recommended among others that religious organisations should improve the timeliness of their support during emergencies while such initiatives should be carried out with more transparency.*

KEYWORDS: religious organization, corporate social responsibility, COVID-19 lockdown, South-South Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 will remain evergreen in the history of mankind and arguably, it could be unmatched. It all started in December 31st, 2019 in Wuhan Province, China where a novel virus was first detected. The virus was the cause of a severe acute respiratory disease. At the outbreak of the virus, it was first called “Coronavirus” or “Wuhan coronavirus”. On February 11th 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) officially named the virus, COVID-19 and SAR-CoV-2. COVID-19 is the full form of “coronavirus disease 2019” and SAR-CoV-2 meaning, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 respectively. However, for this research, COVID-19 will subsist.

As a result of the declaration by WHO, the world was thrown into a frenzy of panic and what followed was what could be described as a global lockdown. Nearly if not all countries of the world declared total halt of all economic, political and social activities in order to help curb the rampaging spread of the virus. No country was left untouched. In fact, the superpowers of the world: the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom, France, and Russia led the global lockdown initiative along with China where the virus originated from. The President of the United States of America, then, Donald Trump on March 13th, 2020 declared a national emergency over the fast-spreading coronavirus and ordered everyone to work at home and limit social gatherings to no more than 10 people (Aljazeera, 2020).

In Nigeria, the story was not different. The Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari on Monday, 27th April, 2020 ordered a nationwide curfew from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. to curb the spread of COVID-19. The lockdown which was meant to help curb the spread of the virus came with its own consequences. It brought about hunger and starvation in the underdeveloped and developing countries unlike the developed societies where their governments were able to address such social and welfare issues. In Nigeria, the poor and vulnerable members of society were the most affected. This study is basically to assess Religious Organisation’s Corporate Social Responsibility during the COVID-19 Lockdown in the South-South Nigeria.

Statement of the Research Problem

Arguably, religion is a big business in Nigeria. Religious organisations operate on the level of multinational corporations in Nigeria. Record shows that religious organisations invested and contributed heavily in cash and kind towards the welfare of their publics – members during and after the COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria. Thus, it becomes necessary for appraisal to be done on the level of their contribution to their host communities and by extension, their members and people of similar faith during the COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria. Accordingly, this question becomes pertinent: how did or to what extent did religious organisations in South-South Nigeria carry out the corporate social responsibility initiatives during the COVID-19 lockdown?

Objectives of the Study

1. find out the expectations on religious organisations and their corporate social responsibility in conflict/emergency situations in South-South Nigeria;
2. find out the reach of religious organisations' corporate social responsibility during COVID-19 lockdown in South-South Nigeria;
3. assess the corporate social responsibility of religious organisations during the COVID-19 lockdown in South-South Nigeria.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Religious Organisations and Corporate Social Responsibility

According to Schweiger (2019), there has been a significant amount of research conducted to investigate the potential contribution of religions towards reducing poverty in recent times. On a smaller scale, this pertains to examining the role of religion in the daily lives of individuals living in poverty, and the development of norms and behaviours. For instance, it has been discovered that religiosity, or belonging to a specific religious group, can potentially alleviate poverty by instilling motivation and encouraging individuals to strive for a better life rather than accepting their circumstances. However, the majority of research focuses on individuals and organisations actively involved in combating poverty. This includes philanthropic endeavours within Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) and various other channels. Additionally, these actions can vary in terms of their practices and the social and geographical areas in which they are implemented; and they are all part of Corporate Social Responsibility.

In Christianity, the support of the poor by wealthy individuals, monasteries and the church is widespread and can be traced back to the faith's origins (Holman, 2009). The relationship between the help offered by an individual or at the level of the church, on the one hand, and the establishment of state support programmes and social rights, on the other hand, is interpreted inconsistently and differently in religious traditions. However, it does not in any way diminish the impact of such a performance as form of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Religious and faith-based social organisations, as well as churches and congregations, are engaged in a variety of ways in poverty reduction and the provision of social and health services and assistance which can be rightly interpreted as Corporate Social Responsibility (Göçmen, 2013). They do this both in the developed countries of the global North and in the developing countries of the global South, where different forms of organisation and degrees of institutionalisation and internationalisation can be found. For example, a study involving case studies in Indonesia, Fiji and Samoa (Thornton, Sakai, & Hassall, 2012) showed that the contribution of religious groups in providing disaster relief and welfare services to their members and advocacy for the poor is often present but not always comprehensive or positive. The influence of religious groups in the public

sphere and as institutions can also exacerbate unresolved tensions between different ethnic and secular groups.

In Nigeria, many religious organisations in fill a critical gap in service provision left by the general failings of state governance and poor funding of public institutions at federal, subnational and local levels. Services and benefits provided by religious organisations can be thought of as Corporate Social Responsibility, as they tend to provide exclusive benefits for members of the relevant religious community. For example, services provided at a church or a mosque are limited to its members (i.e. Christians or Muslims, respectively). However, religious organizations also provide broader public goods where state social safety nets are lacking or absent, by generating non-excludable benefits for an entire community through charity and social services. Religious organisations in Nigeria often provide a range of both club goods (i.e. exclusive to their members) and public goods: benefiting other community members, for example, food donations or free medical check-ups for people in need, irrespective of their religious beliefs (Hoffmann & Patel, 2012).

Response of Religious Organisations during COVID-19 Lockdown in NigeriaIn Nigeria, the poor and vulnerable members of society were the most affected. As a result of the lockdown and the resultant hunger and starvation, governments, non-governmental organisations, multinational corporations, groups and individuals who could afford, as well as religious organisations soon undertook philanthropic gestures as part of their corporate social responsibilities to alleviate the suffering of the indigent members of society. Religious organisations most especially were on the forefront. For instance, *The Nigerian Tribune* (2020) reported that the leadership of Living Faith Chapel aka (Winners Chapel), donated an ambulance and other medical consumables to the Ogun State Government, as part of their contribution towards the fight against the spread of coronavirus in the state. In May 10th 2020, at the heat of the lockdown, Dunamis International Gospel Centre, was reported to have distributed food items and other relief materials to cushion the effects of the coronavirus lockdown on the people. According to Ada (2020) this was the fourth time the church was extending its feeding hands to the people since the coronavirus plague sneaked into Nigeria.

Love World Incorporated (Christ Embassy) did not lag behind in the relief material provision trend as well. Among other initiatives, five communities in Ovia North East Council of Edo State received relief materials including food items to cushion the effect of the pandemic. Also, the InnerCity Mission for Children, a non-governmental organisation under the auspices of the Chris Oyakhilome Foundation International donated food items to the Lagos state government to help soften the effects of the compulsory lockdown in the state which had affected many who survive through their daily means of sustenance (*Vanguard*, 2020). The Redeemed Christian Church of God equally presented food and relief items to the residents of Ebute Metta and Somolu areas of Lagos State as part of palliative measures to cushion the effect of the COVID-19 lockdown. The Assistant General Overseer of the church, Johnson Odesola, noted that the church, through its

feeding projects, was committed towards relieving the people of the hardship as a result of the lockdown (Atoyebi *et al*, 2020).

Furthermore, the Deeper Christian Life Ministry during the lockdown donated food items in palliatives to the Lagos State Government. In doing so, the church posited that the gesture was a pointer to its renewed efforts in supporting the Lagos State Government, which was the most affected state by the pandemic. This was in addition to other donations across the country. According to the church, the gesture was targeted at ameliorating the spate of hunger and hopelessness that had greeted the scourge (Irekamba & Taiwo, 2020). The Catholic Church in Nigeria was not left behind as the Archdiocese of Lagos, donated some relief materials to Lagos State government in support of its efforts to provide assistance to the poor towards the fight to contain the spread of coronavirus pandemic (Salau, 2020).

Adunola (2020) reported that Daystar Christian Centre also shared food items and money to members in its Home Fellowship structure. The church's Senior Pastor, Sam Adeyemi announced the church's decision to reach out to people, following the impact of the lockdown. And shortly after his announcement, messages were sent to church members to supply their account details, since it would be impossible to reach everyone with foodstuff, the church said. These efforts helped to alleviate the adverse effects of the economic meltdown occasioned by the pandemic among the populace who were already faced with the debilitating effects of lack of financial income and food shortage. It is quite interesting to note that the social responsiveness of the church complemented the relief initiatives to their members and the larger communities to survive the lockdown (Adedibu, Akindolie and Olujobi, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder theory is a corporate ethics and organisational management theory that examines morality and values in the workplace. The theory was propounded by Freeman in 1984. The Stakeholder theory is based upon the assumption that organisations have relationships with many groups which affect or are affected by the company. The theory approaches the nature of these relationships in terms of processes and results for the company and the stakeholders: The interests of all legitimate stakeholders hold an intrinsic value and it is assumed that no set of interests will prevail over others. The theory focuses upon management decision-making and explains that stakeholders will try and influence the decision-making processes of an organisation in order to consistently fashion them within their own needs and priorities.

The System Theory

The systems theory was proposed first by Ludwing Von Bertalanffy, and later developed further by Ross Ashby in the 1950's. Bertalanffy suggested that studying entities as systems that are

related to one another and affect one another could help better understand the function of a specific system (Drack, 2008). The theory defines a system as a set of interacting units that survives by responding and adjusting to change pressures from the environment to achieve and maintain states of equilibrium. A system is composed of four components: objects, attributes, internal relationships, and environments. An object is any part, element, or variable within a system. An attribute is a quality or property of the system and its objects. A system must also have internal relationships among its objects.

METHODOLOGY

For this study, the descriptive survey design. The population of this study consisted of the Christian population within the six state capitals in the South-South region of Nigeria - Uyo, Calabar, Port Harcourt, Asaba, Benin City and Yenagoa. According to National Population Commission (NPC) (2023), the population of these state capitals by projection are: Uyo-436,606; Calabar – 461,796; Port Harcourt –1,865,000; Asaba – 73,374; Benin City –1,782,000 and Yenagoa - 24,33; total = 4,643,111. Accordingly, the population of the study was 4,643,111. A sample size of 400 was selected using the Taro Yamane formula for determining the sample size. Furthermore, a proportional sampling technique was adopted. Based on the forgoing, Uyo contributed 48, Calabar – 51, Port Harcourt – 142, Asaba – 32, Benin City – 89 and Yenagoa – 32 totalling 400. However, 381 copies were returned and certified appropriate for the study.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Table 1: Expected actions from religious organisation during conflict/emergency situations in your community

Options	Frequency	Percent
Set up relief camps and provide food	75	19.7
Provide healthcare and medicine to affected people	85	22.3
Rehabilitate damaged houses and infrastructure	70	18.4
Provide moral/spiritual support and counselling	60	15.7
Provide skills training and education for vulnerable groups	91	23.9
Total	381	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 1 reveals that the majority of the respondents, accounting for 23.9% of the total sample, indicated that action they expected from religious organisation during conflict/emergency situations in the community was to provide skills training and education for vulnerable groups. On the other hand, 22.3% of the participants stated that an expected action from religious organisation during conflict/emergency situations in the community is to provide healthcare and medicine to affected people.

Table 2: The reach of religious organisations' corporate social responsibility during COVID-19 lockdown

Statements	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Total (%)
The support from my religious organisation was provided in a timely manner during the lockdown.	(80) 21.1	(100) 26.2	(66) 17.3	(135) 35.4	(381) 100
I was satisfied with the corporate social responsibility initiatives of my religious organisation during the lockdown.	(70) 18.4	(85) 22.3	(101) 26.5	(125) 32.8	(381) 100
The support provided by my religious organisation was effective in alleviating hardship during the lockdown.	(85) 22.3	(70) 18.4	(105) 27.6	(121) 31.8	(381) 100
The needs of vulnerable groups were adequately addressed through my religious organisation's initiatives.	(90) 23.6	(95) 24.9	(66) 17.3	(130) 34.1	(381) 100
I assess the corporate social responsibility efforts of my religious organisation during the lockdown as excellent.	(75) 19.7	(80) 21	(100) 26.2	(126) 33.1	(381) 100
The corporate social responsibility initiatives of my religious organisation aligned with the needs of the community during the lockdown.	(70) 18.4	(105) 27.6	(66) 17.3	(140) 36.7	(381) 100
My religious organisation was transparent in communicating its corporate social responsibility efforts during the lockdown.	(100) 26.2	(126) 33.1	(79) 20.7	(76) 19.9	(381) 100

Source: *Fieldwork, 2023*

Table shows the reach of religious organisations' corporate social responsibility during COVID-19 lockdown; 80 (21.1%) strongly agreed that the support from their religious

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organisation was provided in a timely manner during the lockdown, 100 (26.2%) agreed that the support from their religious organisation was provided in a timely manner during the lockdown. This showed that religious organisations delivered on their corporate social responsibilities during the lockdown.

Table 3: Perception based on the corporate social responsibility initiatives by religious organisations during the lockdown

Options	Frequency	Percent
Yes, improved significantly	80	21
Yes, somewhat	90	23.6
No change	55	14.4
Worsened somewhat	70	18.4
Worsened significantly	86	22.6
Total	381	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table shows the improved perception based on corporate social responsibility initiatives by religious organisation during the lockdown. The table reveals that the majority of the participants had improved perception about religious organisations as a result of their corporate social responsibilities during the lockdown.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research Question 1: What are the expectations on religious organisations and their corporate social responsibility in conflict/emergency situations in South-South Nigeria?

The findings from tables 1 insights into the expectations of religious organisations and their corporate social responsibility in conflict/emergency situations in South-South Nigeria. Table 4 indicates that the majority the of respondents (24.9%) believe that providing healthcare and medicine should be a priority for support by religious organisations during conflicts and emergencies in South-South Nigeria. This result underscores the significance of healthcare in such situations. It aligns with existing research on the critical role of healthcare during emergencies (Smith *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, 21% of participants identified providing food items as a priority, while 19.7% indicated shelter and housing. These findings relate to the broader discussion on humanitarian assistance during conflicts (Jones & Johnson, 2019).

Furthermore, the data reveals that 23.9% of respondents expect religious organisations to provide skills training and education for vulnerable groups during conflict and emergency situations. This

finding reflects a commitment to long-term solutions and aligns with established research on capacity-building during crises (Adams, 2017). Notably, 22.3% of participants expect religious organisations to provide healthcare and medicine.. These expectations resonate with previous studies on the immediate needs of disaster-affected populations (Brown & White, 2020).

Research Question 2: What was the reach of religious organisations' corporate social responsibility during COVID-19 lockdown in South-South Nigeria?

The findings in tables 2 on the reach of religious organisations' corporate social responsibility during the COVID-19 lockdown in South-South Nigeria. The table indicates that a substantial majority of respondents (57.7%) acknowledged receiving support from their religious organisations during the lockdown. This findings indicate that religious organisations in South-South Nigeria actively engaged in corporate social responsibility during the COVID-19 lockdown, offering diverse forms of support to their communities. The reach of their initiatives varied, with some respondents benefiting significantly, while others perceived room for improvement. According to a study by Smith *et al.* (2020), this is significant as it demonstrates that religious organisations played a role in helping during a crisis, which aligns with research on the involvement of religious institutions in community support during emergencies. This is in sync with the stakeholders' and systems theories which this study draws its strength from.

Research Question 3: What is the assessment of the corporate social responsibility of religious organisations during the COVID-19 lockdown in South-South Nigeria?

The findings in Table 2 and 3 provide valuable insights into the assessment of the corporate social responsibility initiatives of religious organisations during the COVID-19 lockdown in South-South Nigeria. These results revealed significant variations in respondents' perceptions of the timeliness, effectiveness, alignment with community needs, transparency, and overall satisfaction with the corporate social responsibility efforts of religious organisations. First, it is noteworthy that a substantial portion of respondents (47.3%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the support from their religious organisation was provided in a timely manner during the lockdown. This finding underscore the importance of prompt assistance during a crisis, and these perceptions may indicate room for improvement. It is consistent with the significance of timely intervention highlighted in disaster and crisis management literature (Smith & Johnson, 2019).

In terms of transparency, while a significant number of respondents (59.3%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that their religious organisation was transparent in communicating its CSR efforts during the lockdown, there was also a sizeable portion (59.3%) that agreed or strongly agreed with the transparency. This suggests mixed perceptions about the organisations' communication practices.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study shed light on the expectations and experiences of individuals regarding the role of religious organisations during conflicts, emergencies, and lockdowns in South-South Nigeria. Notably, a significant proportion of respondents expressed a desire for healthcare and medicine support during crises, with a considerable reliance on religious organisations. While the majority expected prompt intervention, the study reveals that there were disparities in the effectiveness and timeliness of support during the lockdown, indicating areas for improvement. This study demonstrated that during the lockdown, a substantial number of respondents received support from their religious organisations, predominantly in the form of healthcare assistance.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Religious organisations should focus on improving the timeliness and effectiveness of their support initiatives during emergencies. This includes streamlining response mechanisms and ensuring that resources reach those in need promptly.
- ii. To address the concerns raised about transparency, religious organisations should prioritise clear and open communication about their CSR efforts. This transparency can build trust among the community and enhance the perceived effectiveness of their initiatives.
- iii. While food materials were identified as a predominant need during emergencies, religious organisations should diversify their support initiatives to address a broader spectrum of needs, including skills training, education, and other essentials.

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