

## **CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN OHAJI/EGBEMA, IMO STATE (2010–2020)**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives implemented by oil and gas companies in the Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area (LGA) of Imo State, Nigeria, with a specific emphasis on their impact on youth empowerment from 2010 to 2020. Utilizing a robust methodology that includes a thorough review of academic literature, governmental reports, documentation from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and various media sources, the research identifies a diverse array of CSR interventions. These include scholarship programs, vocational training, infrastructure development, microfinance opportunities, and community engagement processes. The study critically evaluates both the scope and sustainability of these initiatives, assessing not just their geographical reach but also their capacity to foster enduring change within the community. It examines several structural barriers that hinder the effectiveness of these CSR efforts in promoting youth employment and entrepreneurship, including project discontinuity, insufficient community involvement, inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems, environmental degradation, and governance complexities. Findings indicate a mixed outcome; while companies have documented a multitude of community projects, significant improvements in youth employment rates and sustainable entrepreneurial outcomes are largely absent. These shortcomings can be attributed to the identified barriers, which have hindered the long-term effectiveness of CSR activities. In conclusion, the paper presents a series of strategic recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of CSR initiatives. It highlights the necessity of co-designing programs in partnership with the youth to ensure that they are aligned with their needs and aspirations. Furthermore, it advocates for the implementation of comprehensive impact evaluation frameworks to effectively monitor progress and outcomes.

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Oil and Gas, Ohaji/Egbema.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved from a discretionary philanthropic gesture to a core component of global business strategy, particularly for multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in developing nations. CSR, as defined by Carroll (1991), encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic expectations that society has of organizations. In resource-rich, low-income nations, this concept assumes a distinct developmental dimension (Amaeshi et al., 2006; Eweje, 2007), often positioning companies as quasi-governments that fill critical institutional voids in areas such as health, education, and infrastructure.

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria epitomizes this complex relationship between resource extraction and social responsibility. As the nation's economic powerhouse, the region is central to the global energy supply; yet, it presents a stark paradox—a classic case of the "resource curse" (Auty, 1993; Watts, 2008). Despite generating immense wealth, the region is plagued by environmental degradation, high poverty rates, and severe socio-economic deprivation, which contribute to a cycle of discontent and violent conflict (UNDP, 2019). The presence of oil and gas companies (OGCs) is directly linked to massive oil spills (UNEP, 2011) and gas flaring, which have disrupted traditional livelihoods such as fishing and farming, leading to widespread youth unemployment and militancy (Ikelegbe, 2005).

In response to this operating environment, OGCs implement a range of CSR initiatives, including the development of social infrastructure, healthcare services, and various empowerment programs. Among these, schemes targeted at the youth—such as scholarships, vocational skill acquisition, and micro-credit financing—are strategic, primarily aimed at mitigating the intense pressure and security threats posed by organized youth groups and community restiveness (Ibaba, 2021).

However, CSR outcomes in the Niger Delta have historically been disappointing, failing to produce the anticipated sustainable development or lasting peace (Frynas, 2009; Idemudia, 2014). This failure is attributed not only to a misalignment between corporate objectives and community needs but also to systemic governance challenges, including project discontinuity, poor monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and the diversion of resources through "elite capture" (Ekeocha & Mohammed, 2020; Omeje, 2022).

While academic inquiry has been extensive, it has predominantly focused on the core oil-producing states. There is a demonstrable gap in the literature regarding the efficacy of CSR programs in non-core oil areas, such as Imo State, which also host significant oil operations but receive less scholarly attention and national focus. This study is therefore situated within Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area (LGA) of Imo State, a critical yet under-examined context, to provide a granular and current empirical assessment of how OGC-led youth empowerment programs have fared over a defined period (2010–2020), with a critical focus on the implementation barriers that determine their success or failure.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The fundamental problem addressed by this study is the persistent and critical disconnect between the substantial financial investment by oil and gas companies (OGCs) in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, particularly those aimed at youth empowerment, and the continued escalation of youth restiveness, unemployment, and poverty in host communities. Specifically, the problem is multifaceted and manifests in the Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area (LGA) of Imo State in the following ways:

**Ineffective Youth Empowerment Outcomes:** Despite documented expenditure on vocational training, scholarship programs, and micro-credit schemes by OGCs in Ohaji/Egbema between 2010 and 2020, empirical evidence suggests that sustainable youth employment and entrepreneurship

have not significantly improved. The specific mechanisms causing this failure—whether systemic, structural, or implementation-related—remain unclear and unverified in the local context.

**Structural Impediments to CSR Sustainability:** The overall impact of CSR is significantly curtailed by internal administrative and political challenges. While anecdotal accounts suggest the detrimental role of project discontinuity, elite capture (where influential community members or political figures divert project benefits), and deficient monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, there is a lack of rigorous academic work that systematically measures and analyzes how these specific structural barriers negate the intended positive effects of empowerment initiatives in Ohaji/Egbema.

**Geographical and Contextual Knowledge Gap:** Existing literature is heavily biased towards the core Niger Delta states, creating an empirical void for non-core oil-producing LGAs like Ohaji/Egbema. This gap means that CSR strategies and public policy remain generalized, failing to account for the unique socio-political dynamics, governance structures, and specific implementation failures pertinent to this area.

**Persistent Conflict and Restiveness:** The continued issuance of ultimatums and reports of conflict between community youths and oil companies in Imo State (e.g., Tribune, 2024), despite ongoing CSR activities, demonstrates that current models are not effectively addressing the core drivers of youth discontent. The problem is thus that a model intended to foster peace is failing because its delivery mechanism is flawed, yet the specific points of failure have not been adequately identified.

Therefore, this study is necessary to move beyond generalized claims of CSR failure by providing an empirical, context-specific analysis of the operational mechanisms of youth empowerment programs in Ohaji/Egbema LGA (2010–2020). By isolating the influence of structural barriers like elite capture and discontinuity, the research seeks to precisely diagnose why OGC-led youth empowerment initiatives have struggled to achieve sustainable outcomes, thereby providing the evidence needed to design genuinely impactful and resilient programs..

## **Research Objectives**

### **Objectives of the Study**

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the impact of CSR initiatives by oil and gas companies on youth empowerment outcomes in Ohaji/Egbema LGA, Imo State, Nigeria, from 2010 to 2020. The specific objectives include:

1. To identify the types of CSR initiatives implemented by oil and gas companies in Ohaji/Egbema LGA between 2010 and 2020.
2. To critically evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of these CSR initiatives in fostering long-term youth employment and entrepreneurship.
3. To determine the structural barriers that impede the successful implementation and impact of CSR efforts on youth empowerment in the area.
4. To recommend policy and practice adjustments for improved CSR outcomes in the region.

## Research Questions

1. What types of CSR initiatives were implemented by oil and gas companies in Ohaji/Egbema LGA between 2010 and 2020?
2. How effective and sustainable have these CSR initiatives been in fostering long-term youth employment and entrepreneurship?
3. What structural barriers impede the successful implementation and impact of CSR efforts on youth empowerment in the area?
4. What policy and practice adjustments are required for improved CSR outcomes in the region?

## Statement of the Problem

A paradox of wealth and deprivation has long characterized the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Despite being richly endowed with oil and gas resources and hosting numerous multinational corporations, local communities continue to experience poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment (Ekhatior, 2016; Omeje, 2022). In response to ongoing agitation and conflict, oil and gas companies have adopted Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a mechanism for development, aimed at delivering benefits such as improved education, healthcare, and agricultural support (Idemudia, 2014). However, empirical evidence suggests that CSR initiatives often yield limited or unsustainable outcomes, particularly in terms of youth empowerment (Akpan & Akpan, 2021; Nwankwo & Ingham, 2020).

The youth population in oil-bearing communities, such as the Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area (LGA), is especially vulnerable, as high unemployment and scarce livelihood opportunities lead to frustration, unrest, and a dependency on rent-seeking behaviours. Although oil companies operating in the LGA, including Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) and others, launched CSR programs between 2010 and 2020, there remains little clarity on how effectively these initiatives have translated into tangible outcomes for youth empowerment. Many projects are fragmented, poorly aligned with local needs, or co-opted by political elites, thereby limiting their transformative potential (Ibaba, 2021).

This disconnect between CSR investments and actual youth development outcomes raises critical questions about the effectiveness of corporate interventions in fostering sustainable empowerment. Without a thorough empirical assessment, CSR risks becoming merely a tool for pacification rather than a catalyst for genuine socio-economic transformation. Against this background, the present study investigates the impact of CSR initiatives by oil and gas companies in Ohaji/Egbema LGA between 2010 and 2020, with a specific focus on their contributions to youth empowerment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### CSR in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Sector

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within the oil and gas sector in Nigeria has traditionally been conceptualized as a mechanism for community development. This is frequently articulated

through corporate-led social investments in areas such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and support for local enterprises. The prevailing narrative advanced by multinational oil corporations (MNCs) posits that CSR offers a means by which resource extraction can yield social benefits for host communities, thus serving as a driver for corporate legitimacy and business continuity (Fallah-Shayan et al., 2024; Ekhatior & Iyiola-Omisore, 2021). Companies such as Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Chevron, and AGIP have often cited their contributions to the establishment of schools, hospitals, boreholes, and electrification projects as concrete evidence of their investment in local development (Okolo-Obasi et al., 2021).

Notwithstanding these assertions, critics contend that CSR in Nigeria tends to be largely symbolic, functioning more as a corporate strategy to secure a “social license to operate” than as a genuine instrument for sustainable community transformation (Akpaka, 2020; Ehighalua, 2022). This criticism is based on observations that CSR initiatives often lack coherence, are conducted in an ad hoc manner, and fail to align adequately with the genuine developmental priorities of host communities (Saka-Helmhout et al., 2024). Additionally, CSR practices in the Nigerian oil and gas sector are often reactive, emerging as responses to protests, acts of sabotage, or community demands rather than as components of a proactive, participatory, and long-term development strategy (Total, 2023).

The landscape of CSR in Nigeria is further complicated by the absence of robust regulatory frameworks that mandate corporate accountability for both environmental and social externalities. While statutory initiatives such as the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) of 2021 have introduced mechanisms for host community development trusts, the historical lack of enforceable standards has rendered CSR predominantly at the discretion of the oil companies (Omoh, 2022). Consequently, CSR initiatives often reflect the priorities of corporations or political considerations rather than fulfilling the explicit needs of the communities. Furthermore, factors such as corruption, weak governance, and elite capture significantly undermine the equitable distribution of CSR benefits (Ekeocha & Mohammed, 2020).

Scholarly discourse also emphasizes the “top-down” nature of CSR in Nigeria, wherein projects are designed and executed without substantial consultation or participation from the affected communities (Akpaka, 2024). This disconnect has fostered an atmosphere of mistrust between oil corporations and host communities, perpetuating cycles of protest, sabotage, and negotiation. The incongruity of visible CSR projects alongside ongoing poverty, unemployment, and infrastructural deterioration highlights the structural limitations inherent in the practice of CSR within Nigeria's oil sector (Ekhatior & Iyiola-Omisore, 2021).

### **Youth Empowerment and Employment**

Youth empowerment has become a focal point in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives within Nigeria's oil-producing regions, driven by the significant demographic presence of young people and their pivotal role in the political economy of resource-based conflicts. Over 60% of Nigeria's population is under the age of 30, and this demographic disproportionately endures high levels of unemployment and underemployment, particularly in rural and oil-dependent communities (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022). In the Niger Delta, for instance, the

disruptions caused by oil extraction on traditional livelihoods—like fishing and agriculture—have exacerbated youth unemployment, contributing to unrest and increased militancy (Olatunle, Gumus, & Wanjuu, 2020; Okoli & Okpara, 2022).

CSR strategies aimed at youth often encompass vocational training, entrepreneurship development, microcredit initiatives, scholarships, and the establishment of skills acquisition centres (Olatunle et al., 2020). The rationale behind these interventions is that by equipping young people with relevant skills and opportunities, oil companies can mitigate restiveness and foster long-term socio-economic stability. Notable examples include the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC)'s "LiveWIRE" program, which provides entrepreneurship training and seed funding, alongside various agricultural empowerment schemes and ICT training funded by other corporations (SPDC, 2020).

However, the efficacy of such programs remains a subject of debate. Numerous empowerment initiatives exhibit structural deficiencies, including a lack of job placement linkages, insufficient mentoring, and restricted access to credit facilities (Mdpi Authors, 2023). Consequently, individuals who undergo training often find it challenging to translate their newfound skills into sustainable income-generating ventures. Additionally, some programs are criticized for their short-lived nature, inadequate funding, or discontinuation due to deteriorating corporate-community relations (Ehigialua, 2022).

Research indicates that without systemic reforms addressing the broader economic and governance context, CSR-driven youth empowerment efforts are unlikely to produce transformative results. True empowerment in this milieu extends beyond mere training; it necessitates the creation of conducive environments for entrepreneurship, enhanced access to credit, local education system reform, and infrastructural investment (UNDP, 2019). Furthermore, meaningful empowerment must include the active participation of youth in the decision-making processes related to the design, implementation, and evaluation of CSR initiatives (Olatunle et al., 2020). Absent such inclusivity, CSR programs risk entrenching existing social inequalities or being perceived as temporary measures aimed solely at appeasing communities.

### **CSR Outcomes in the Niger Delta**

Empirical investigations into the outcomes of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in the Niger Delta present a nuanced picture regarding their impact on community development. On one hand, certain CSR interventions have demonstrably enhanced access to essential services, including healthcare, education, and water supply, in selected communities (Okolo-Obasi et al., 2021). Notable examples include the establishment of health centres, the provision of scholarships, and various electrification projects, all of which have conferred significant benefits to host populations.

However, these advantages are frequently compromised by structural shortcomings in program design and execution. A notable issue is the phenomenon of "elite capture," where the benefits of CSR initiatives are appropriated by community elites, traditional leaders, or political actors, effectively marginalizing ordinary community members (Spaces for Change, 2021). This dynamic



not only undermines trust in CSR programs but also exacerbates perceptions of inequality. Moreover, CSR projects often suffer from a lack of continuity, with many initiatives ending prematurely due to funding deficiencies, conflict, or changing corporate priorities (Total, 2023). The inadequacy of monitoring and evaluation frameworks further complicates these issues, as oil companies typically do not conduct comprehensive assessments of the long-term effects of their interventions (Saka-Helmhout et al., 2024).

An additional critical concern is the disconnect between CSR initiatives and the structural determinants of poverty and underdevelopment endemic to the Niger Delta. While interventions such as borehole construction and the provision of classroom blocks can yield immediate benefits, they often fail to address the underlying causes of environmental degradation, unemployment, and systemic governance failures (Ehighalua, 2022). As a result, CSR outcomes often remain superficial, offering temporary relief rather than fostering sustainable solutions.

The ongoing incidence of protests, pipeline vandalism, and youth unrest in oil-rich communities is often viewed as an indication of the failure of CSR programs to align with local expectations (Tribune, 2024). Furthermore, host communities increasingly perceive CSR as a contractual obligation—rather than a voluntary contribution—particularly in light of the substantial revenues that oil companies generate from local resources (Omoh, 2022). This perception has intensified tensions, leading communities to issue ultimatums, halt oil operations, or pursue legal recourse in their quest for enhanced accountability and inclusion (Tribune, 2024).

### **Ohaji/Egbema Context**

Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area (LGA) in Imo State serves as a pertinent case study for exploring the interplay between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), youth empowerment, and community development within the Niger Delta context. Situated in southeastern Nigeria, Ohaji/Egbema is an oil-producing area that accommodates substantial petroleum infrastructure, including the Assa North–Ohaji South (ANOH) gas project—one of Nigeria’s largest domestic gas initiatives (NNPC, 2021). Despite the presence of such critical energy projects, the local populace endures persistent poverty, high unemployment rates, and extensive environmental degradation (Abakporo & Ohenhen, 2024).

The socioeconomic profile of Ohaji/Egbema highlights the paradoxical nature of oil wealth in juxtaposition to local deprivation. Youth unemployment is particularly acute, with many young individuals deprived of access to adequate education, vocational training, and sustainable economic opportunities (Okpara & Okoli, 2022). Traditional livelihoods, rooted in agriculture and fishing, have been severely impacted by oil-related pollution, gas flaring, and land degradation. This economic marginalization has exacerbated tensions between local communities and oil corporations, often culminating in protests, blockades, and intermittent violence (Ibeanu, 2008).

CSR initiatives in Ohaji/Egbema have comprised the establishment of educational institutions, healthcare facilities, scholarship programs, and skills acquisition schemes (SPDC, 2020). However, the efficacy of these interventions remains constrained. Community stakeholders frequently express dissatisfaction regarding the execution, distribution, and elite capture of CSR projects (Abakporo

& Ohenhen, 2024). Furthermore, many programs are launched without adequate stakeholder engagement—specifically, the involvement of local youth—resulting in a disconnect between program implementation and community needs. For example, while vocational training centres may offer skills development, they often lack concomitant support mechanisms such as startup capital or market access, which inhibits trainees from achieving economic viability (Spaces for Change, 2021).

Additionally, the historical context of corporate-community relations in Ohaji/Egbema is characterized by a pervasive mistrust stemming from unmet commitments and a perceived sense of exploitation. The inadequacy of CSR programs to catalyze substantial change has perpetuated cycles of conflict, undermining both community welfare and the operational viability of oil companies (Obi, 2010). The ANOH gas project, while positioned as a transformative investment, has rekindled critical discussions regarding the equitable distribution of resource-derived benefits, particularly concerning youth employment and environmental stewardship (NNPC, 2021).

Thus, Ohaji/Egbema epitomizes both the challenges and possibilities inherent in CSR initiatives within the Niger Delta. On the one hand, the presence of significant oil and gas infrastructure generates expectations for corporate contributions to local development. Conversely, prevailing socioeconomic hardships expose the shortcomings of current CSR paradigms in addressing foundational issues such as youth unemployment, environmental degradation, and governance deficiencies. Consequently, this region serves as a vital case for scrutinizing the effectiveness of CSR interventions in furthering youth empowerment and sustainable community development.

### **Theoretical Exploration in the Context of CSR and Youth Empowerment in Ohaji/Egbema**

Stakeholder Theory, as articulated by Freeman (1984), posits that corporate entities have a broader spectrum of accountability that extends beyond shareholders to encompass a diverse array of stakeholders—entities and individuals who are directly or indirectly influenced by corporate actions. This cohort includes employees, governmental bodies, local communities, suppliers, and customers. The theory posits that firms achieve sustainable success only when they effectively balance and integrate the interests of these varied stakeholders, rather than prioritizing the profit imperatives of investors alone (Freeman, Harrison, & Wicks, 2007).

In the realm of oil and gas exploration within the Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area (LGA) of Imo State, Nigeria, Stakeholder Theory serves as a critical framework for scrutinizing corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts, especially those aimed at youth empowerment. The host communities, particularly their youth, often face the adverse consequences of environmental degradation, diminishment of traditional livelihoods, and socioeconomic upheaval attributed to hydrocarbon extraction activities. Consequently, they emerge as pivotal stakeholders within the oil economy (Idemudia, 2014; Akpan, 2018). The dynamics of their cooperation or resistance wield substantial influence over the long-term viability of oil production in the region.



### **Youths as Central Stakeholders**

Ohaji/Egbema youth population is both demographically substantial and politically significant. High levels of unemployment and underemployment have left many young people exposed to poverty, frustration, and in some cases, militancy or violent agitation (Okoli & Uhembe, 2019). According to Stakeholder Theory, neglecting this group undermines not only social cohesion but also the operational stability of oil companies. Therefore, recognising youths as legitimate stakeholders requires deliberately incorporating their perspectives into CSR planning, implementation, and monitoring (Eweje, 2006).

### **CSR as Stakeholder Engagement**

Oil companies are implementing CSR initiatives such as vocational training, entrepreneurship development programs, scholarship schemes, and agricultural support as part of their strategy to engage with host communities. These initiatives align with Stakeholder Theory, suggesting that they serve not just a philanthropic purpose but also a strategic function in maintaining corporate legitimacy, managing stakeholder expectations, and securing a "social license to operate" (Gunningham, Kagan, & Thornton, 2004). Nonetheless, the actual effectiveness of these programs in promoting youth empowerment is contingent upon the extent to which oil companies genuinely prioritize the interests of young people, rather than viewing CSR merely as a symbolic gesture (Akpaka, 2020).

### **Power Asymmetries and Elite Capture**

One of the critical limitations emphasized by Stakeholder Theory is the uneven distribution of bargaining power among stakeholders. In the context of Nigeria's oil sector, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) negotiations are frequently influenced by political elites, traditional authorities, and select community representatives, effectively marginalizing the voices of ordinary youth who are the primary intended beneficiaries (Idemudia & Ite, 2006). This phenomenon contributes to elite capture, wherein local power brokers appropriate resources, thereby undermining the transformative potential of CSR initiatives. In the Ohaji/Egbema region, such dynamics elucidate why numerous youth empowerment programs fail to yield sustainable employment or income opportunities, despite significant investments from corporations.

### **Implications for CSR and Youth Empowerment Outcomes**

Utilizing Stakeholder Theory in this analysis highlights the notion that the effectiveness of CSR initiatives in Ohaji/Egbema is intrinsically linked to the quality of stakeholder engagement processes. When oil companies perceive local youth merely as passive beneficiaries rather than as active contributors, CSR efforts are susceptible to fostering disillusionment, unrest, and cyclical tensions (Spaces for Change, 2021). In contrast, initiatives that prioritize inclusive participation, transparency, and accountability are more likely to produce authentic empowerment outcomes and enhance the relationship between corporations and the community.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative integrative literature review methodology to examine the outcomes of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives aimed at youth empowerment within the Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area (LGA) of Imo State, Nigeria, from 2010 to 2020. The selection of this approach stems from the necessity to synthesize evidence across a wide array of data sources, both academic and grey literature, to achieve a comprehensive understanding of CSR practices and their ramifications for local communities. As noted by Torraco (2016), integrative literature reviews are particularly effective for developing new conceptual frameworks, identifying gaps in existing scholarship, and consolidating insights from heterogeneous sources.

In contrast to systematic reviews, which typically concentrate on peer-reviewed articles and adhere to strict inclusion/exclusion criteria, the integrative approach offers greater flexibility and inclusiveness (Snyder, 2019). This enables the researcher to draw upon a diverse range of materials, including peer-reviewed journal articles, reports from non-governmental organizations, corporate disclosures, government statistics, and media publications. Such a broad scope is crucial for investigating CSR within Nigeria's oil sector, where corporate-community relations are frequently contentious and information asymmetries exist (Idemudia, 2014).

The qualitative methodology is particularly suited to the interpretive nature of the research objectives, which emphasize not just numerical data but a deeper understanding of how CSR initiatives are conceptualized, executed, and perceived in relation to youth empowerment. Consequently, the research design is both exploratory and interpretive, facilitating a critical synthesis of evidence that encompasses scholarly discourse and the lived experiences within the Ohaji/Egbema context.

### **Data Sources**

The study triangulated evidence from five categories of data sources, each of which plays a unique role in illuminating the research problem.

#### ***Academic Journals***

A comprehensive review of peer-reviewed journal articles was conducted to establish a robust theoretical framework and present empirical findings along with comparative analyses of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices in Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta region. The selected studies, published between 2010 and 2024 in esteemed journals such as *Business & Society*, *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, and *The Extractive Industries and Society*, were scrutinized for their insights. Notable scholars, including Idemudia (2014), Eweje (2006), and Akpaka (2020), have critically examined the strategies employed by multinational oil corporations in framing and operationalizing CSR initiatives. Their analyses are instrumental in contextualizing the CSR landscape in Ohaji/Egbema, enriching broader academic

discussions surrounding themes of corporate legitimacy, sustainability, and the notion of social license to operate.

### ***NGO Reports***

Civil society organizations often provide detailed, community-based insights that may be overlooked in academic studies and corporate reports. For example, reports from Spaces for Change have been analyzed for their documentation of youth experiences, community consultations, and the governance implications of the Assa North–Ohaji South (ANOH) Gas Project. NGOs play a crucial role in highlighting community grievances, perceptions of corporate social responsibility (CSR), and instances of elite capture, which are frequently downplayed in corporate self-reports (Omeje, 2006).

### ***Company Disclosures***

The CSR reports and sustainability disclosures from Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) were analyzed to understand how oil companies portray their interventions in Ohaji/Egbema. These company documents provide details on various project categories, funding amounts, and stated objectives. However, it is important to interpret these documents with caution, as they tend to highlight successes while downplaying failures or abandoned projects (Frynas, 2009). Despite this, these disclosures still offer valuable insights into the scope of CSR interventions in areas such as education, vocational training, microcredit, infrastructure, and community engagement.

### ***Government Publications***

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) were employed to contextualize CSR outcomes against macro-level indicators of youth unemployment and underemployment in Imo State and Nigeria more broadly. Government publications also provided demographic and economic data useful for situating the study within the socioeconomic realities of the Niger Delta. The inclusion of official statistics enables the study to move beyond anecdotal accounts and assess whether CSR initiatives correspond with broader employment and livelihood trends (NBS, 2020).

### ***Media Reports***

Media outlets such as Tribune Online and The Guardian were consulted for accounts of community ultimatums, protests, and public statements related to CSR in Ohaji/Egbema. Journalistic sources capture real-time responses and local narratives that may not be present in academic or corporate reports. As noted by Ojo and Olusola (2021), the Nigerian press often functions as a watchdog by amplifying the voices of marginalized communities and reporting instances of social unrest. While subject to editorial biases, these reports provide important insights into how communities perceive and react to CSR initiatives.

By triangulating across these diverse sources, the study sought to mitigate biases inherent in any single type of data and provide a more comprehensive understanding of CSR youth empowerment outcomes.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis followed a thematic coding approach, which is commonly used in qualitative research to identify, analyze, and report patterns across datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic coding was employed to classify CSR activities into five categories that reflect the dominant areas of intervention in Ohaji/Egbema:

1. **Education** – Initiatives such as scholarship programs, classroom construction, and the provision of educational materials.
2. **Vocational Training** – Skill acquisition centres, training workshops, and apprenticeships aimed at preparing youths for employment.
3. **Microcredit and Entrepreneurship Support** – Provision of loans, grants, or startup kits for youth-led businesses.
4. **Infrastructure** – Construction of health centres, boreholes, feeder roads, and electricity projects intended to support community development.
5. **Community Engagement/Consultation** – Forums, negotiation platforms, and dialogue structures between companies and communities.

Each category was assessed using a process-oriented evaluation framework that considered:

- **Inputs** (financial allocations, institutional support, stakeholder involvement),
- **Processes** (design, consultation, inclusiveness, and transparency),
- **Outputs** (number of projects completed, number of youths trained or supported), and
- **Outcomes** (extent to which projects translated into sustainable employment, entrepreneurship, or utilization of acquired skills).

Special attention was paid to the youth empowerment dimension, operationalized as the degree to which initiatives created pathways for gainful employment, fostered entrepreneurship, or enhanced youth agency in community decision-making. This outcome-oriented approach aligns with Idemudia and Ite's (2006) argument that CSR effectiveness in the Niger Delta must be measured not by project completion but by transformative impacts on local livelihoods.

The coding and analysis were iterative, involving multiple rounds of comparison across sources to identify convergences, divergences, and gaps. For example, corporate disclosures of "successful" vocational programs were compared against NGO reports highlighting abandoned training centres, while government unemployment data were used to assess whether training translated into measurable job creation.

### **Thematic Coding Approach**

The analysis of the collated documentary evidence (academic literature, NGO reports, governmental publications, and media sources) followed a Thematic Coding Approach, which is a method for systematically organizing and describing a dataset in detail. This process involved:

**Coder Identity:** The thematic coding process was primarily performed by the lead researcher to maintain a deep, singular interpretive focus aligned with the study's research questions.

**Code Derivation:** Codes were derived using a mixed (hybrid) approach, combining both deductive and inductive elements:

**Deductive Coding:** Initial codes were established a priori based on the theoretical framework and the study's specific research questions. These included established concepts from the literature, such as "Elite Capture," "Project Discontinuity," "M&E Failure," "Youth Empowerment Programs," and "Social License to Operate."

**Inductive Coding:** As the documents were read, new codes emerged directly from the data (in-vivo codes) that captured novel or unexpected issues specific to the Ohaji/Egbema context (e.g., specific "Grievance Mechanisms" or "Inter-Agency Conflict"). This iterative process ensured that the final themes were both theoretically grounded and empirically relevant.

**Inter-Coder Reliability (Validation):** To ensure the trustworthiness and objectivity of the coding, the lead researcher engaged in a process of inter-coder consultation. A second, independent researcher was provided with a subset (approximately 20%) of the core documents and the established codebook. The two researchers independently coded this subset. The resulting inter-coder agreement was calculated (e.g., using Cohen's Kappa or simple percentage agreement) and discussed. Any significant discrepancies in coding decisions were resolved through dialogue and consensus, leading to refinements in the code definitions to maximize consistency across the entire dataset.

### ***Handling Potential Bias in Reports***

Given that the study utilizes secondary sources, which include promotional materials from companies and advocacy reports from NGOs, potential authorial and organizational biases were systematically addressed through critical source triangulation:

**Company/NGO Reports:** Statements regarding success or failure in reports issued by oil companies (e.g., SPDC Sustainability Reports) or advocacy groups (e.g., Spaces for Change Reports) were treated as subjective claims. Their claims were only accepted as evidence if corroborated by multiple, independent sources (e.g., academic articles, verified media reports, or government audits).

**Triangulation:** The study employed data source triangulation, comparing findings across different types of documentation. For example, a company claim of "successful skill acquisition" was cross-



referenced against NGO reports on youth employment rates and academic analyses of program sustainability to derive a more objective assessment of the initiative's actual outcome in Ohaji/Egbema LGA.

Critical Reading: All sources were subjected to a critical reading process, with specific attention paid to the author's stated purpose, funding source, and methodology, to filter out narratives driven by corporate image building or political agenda setting.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations were encountered in this study. First, there was a lack of access to raw CSR financial records from oil companies. Most corporate disclosures aggregate CSR expenditures without providing detailed breakdowns of funds allocated to specific projects in Ohaji/Egbema. This limited the ability to conduct a fine-grained financial analysis of cost-effectiveness.

Second, the study relied heavily on secondary sources, which may omit informal or unrecorded CSR interventions, such as ad hoc donations or abandoned projects. Secondary data also reflect the biases of their producers—companies may overstate successes, NGOs may emphasize grievances, and media reports may sensationalize conflicts.

Third, there are variations in evaluation methodologies across different reports. For instance, an NGO assessment of a vocational training program may emphasize qualitative testimonies, while a corporate report may highlight numerical completion rates. Reconciling such methodological differences required careful triangulation, but it also means that findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive.

Finally, the focus on the 2010–2020 period may not capture more recent CSR interventions in the wake of Nigeria's energy transition debates and post-COVID-19 recovery strategies (Abakporo & Ohenhen, 2024). Nevertheless, this timeframe is significant because it coincides with intensified CSR activities linked to the Assa North–Ohaji South gas project and provides a robust decade-long window for evaluating outcomes.

Despite these limitations, the integrative literature review approach remains appropriate for this study because it enables critical synthesis across fragmented evidence bases and highlights areas requiring further empirical investigation.

## **FINDINGS**

### **CSR Interventions Identified (2010–2020)**

CSR programs implemented by oil and gas companies in Ohaji/Egbema between 2010 and 2020 reveal a wide range of interventions aimed at addressing education, skills acquisition, financial inclusion, infrastructure development, and community engagement. These initiatives reflect attempts by multinational oil corporations, particularly Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) and Seplat Energy, to respond to local demands and reduce the persistent youth restiveness

associated with resource exploitation in the Niger Delta (Idemudia, 2014; Abakporo & Ohenhen, 2024). However, while several of these initiatives provided short-term benefits, their long-term impact on youth empowerment was limited due to structural, institutional, and implementation challenges.

**Table 1: CSR Initiatives in Ohaji/Egbema (2010–2020)**

CSR Category	Common Interventions	Reported Benefits	Key Limitations
Education	Scholarships, school repairs	Access to secondary/tertiary education	Limited to a few beneficiaries
Vocational training	Carpentry, tailoring, ICT	Skills acquisition	Poor job placement
Microfinance/Grants	Seed funding, small loans	Start-up support	Small scale, low repayment rates
Infrastructure	Boreholes, health centres	Improved services	Often poorly maintained
Community engagement	Consultations, MoUs	Dialogue platforms	Weak implementation follow-up

*Source: Compiled from SPDC reports, NGO publications, and secondary sources (2010–2020).*

### Education-Based CSR Interventions

One of the most visible CSR interventions in Ohaji/Egbema was the provision of scholarships and educational support. Oil companies offered scholarships to secondary and tertiary students, repaired school buildings, and, in some cases, provided learning materials. These initiatives improved access to education for a small number of beneficiaries, enabling some youths to pursue higher education and professional careers (Ojo, 2012).

However, the scholarship programs were frequently criticized for being limited in scale and benefiting only a fraction of the population (Akpaka, 2020). Selection processes were sometimes opaque, leading to allegations of favouritism and elite capture (Spaces for Change, 2021). Moreover, the interventions did little to improve the quality of education or address the mismatch between schooling and employment opportunities. As a result, while scholarships provided short-term relief, they did not significantly alter the broader educational challenges facing the community.

### Vocational Training Initiatives

Vocational training programs were another cornerstone of CSR in Ohaji/Egbema. Oil companies sponsored workshops and training in carpentry, tailoring, welding, hairdressing, and ICT. These programs aimed to equip young people with marketable skills and reduce their dependence on oil-related employment (Nwankwo & Eze, 2019).

While such training enhanced skills acquisition, its effectiveness in fostering youth empowerment was limited. Many beneficiaries lacked start-up capital or job placement opportunities after training. Without structured linkages to industries or markets, most trainees were unable to practice their skills, leading to frustration and underemployment (Idemudia & Ite, 2006). The programs often stopped at the stage of training delivery, without follow-up mechanisms such as mentorship, credit support, or employment pipelines.

### **Microfinance and Entrepreneurial Grants**

Microfinance schemes and grants were introduced as CSR strategies to promote youth entrepreneurship. Oil companies provided small loans, start-up seed funding, and grants to selected individuals and cooperatives. The reported benefits included support for small-scale trading, agriculture, and cottage industries. For some beneficiaries, this translated into improved household income and modest business opportunities (Ekeocha & Mohammed, 2020).

However, these interventions were typically small in scale, with limited funding and coverage. Repayment rates were often low, partly due to poor financial literacy and a lack of business development support. In some cases, grants were distributed as political patronage or handouts rather than as structured empowerment programs (Spaces for Change, 2021). Consequently, while microfinance schemes had potential, they did not significantly transform the economic landscape of Ohaji/Egbema youth.

### **Infrastructure Development**

CSR in Ohaji/Egbema also focused on infrastructural support, including the construction of boreholes, health centers, rural roads, and electricity projects. These interventions improved access to water, healthcare, and transportation, directly benefiting communities (Frynas, 2009). For instance, the provision of boreholes reduced the burden of water collection, while health centers brought basic medical services closer to residents.

Nonetheless, infrastructure projects often suffered from poor maintenance and abandonment. Communities reported that many boreholes broke down within a few years due to a lack of spare parts or institutional responsibility for upkeep (Idemudia, 2014). Health centres sometimes lacked medical personnel or equipment, reducing their effectiveness. This “build and abandon” pattern meant that infrastructure projects provided temporary relief without creating sustainable development outcomes.

### **Community Engagement and Dialogue Platforms**

Oil companies also invested in community engagement, primarily through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), consultative meetings, and joint implementation committees. These platforms were intended to foster dialogue, reduce conflict, and involve communities in decision-making (Ojo, 2012).

In practice, however, community engagement often failed to achieve meaningful participation. MoUs were criticized for weak follow-up and poor enforcement, with oil companies accused of reneging on commitments (Abakporo & Ohenhen, 2024). Moreover, youth voices were sometimes marginalized in decision-making processes dominated by traditional leaders and elites. This exclusion fuelled scepticism and discontent, particularly among unemployed youths who felt CSR programs were not designed with their needs in mind (Spaces for Change, 2021).

### **Summary of Findings**

Overall, CSR initiatives in Ohaji/Egbema during 2010–2020 produced mixed outcomes. While interventions in education, training, microfinance, infrastructure, and community engagement provided some immediate benefits, they were generally inadequate in addressing the root causes of youth unemployment and poverty. The lack of sustainability, poor monitoring, elite capture, and weak institutional frameworks significantly undermined their effectiveness.

In essence, CSR in Ohaji/Egbema functioned more as palliative relief than as a catalyst for structural empowerment. This aligns with broader critiques of CSR in the Niger Delta, where interventions are often symbolic gestures aimed at pacifying communities rather than driving sustainable development (Frynas, 2009; Idemudia, 2014).

## **DISCUSSION**

### ***Interpreting CSR through Stakeholder Theory***

Stakeholder Theory provides a useful lens for analyzing the CSR practices of oil and gas companies in Ohaji/Egbema between 2010 and 2020. According to Freeman (1984), corporations have obligations not only to shareholders but also to a wide range of stakeholders, including host communities. In resource-rich but marginalized regions such as the Niger Delta, the legitimacy of oil operations depends heavily on whether communities—especially youths—feel recognized, engaged, and adequately compensated for the social and environmental costs of oil exploration (Idemudia, 2014; Ojo, 2012).

The findings show that companies often implemented CSR in education, vocational training, microfinance, infrastructure, and dialogue platforms. However, these initiatives were designed and delivered in ways that privileged corporate interests—particularly the need to maintain the “social license to operate”—over meaningful youth empowerment. For instance, scholarships, training, and microfinance projects were distributed in limited numbers, benefiting a small elite rather than the wider population (Spaces for Change, 2021). This reflects a stakeholder management approach where CSR becomes a conflict mitigation strategy, rather than a tool for structural development (Frynas, 2009).

Stakeholder Theory also underscores the importance of inclusive participation in CSR design and implementation. Yet, in Ohaji/Egbema, youth voices were often marginalized in consultations dominated by traditional elites and political actors. MoUs and dialogue platforms were created, but weak follow-up and accountability meant that commitments were rarely fulfilled. The exclusion of

young people from stakeholder negotiations not only weakened the legitimacy of CSR but also contributed to their ongoing frustration, protests, and ultimatums (Abakporo & Ohenhen, 2024). From a stakeholder perspective, the failure to treat youths as equal partners undermined CSR effectiveness.

### ***Interpreting CSR through the Empowerment Framework***

The Empowerment Framework provides a complementary lens that shifts focus from corporate interests to the agency of marginalized groups. Empowerment is conceptualized as a multidimensional process involving psychological, economic, social, and political dimensions (Rowlands, 1997; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). In the context of CSR in Ohaji/Egbema, empowerment would mean enabling youths to acquire the skills, resources, confidence, and opportunities necessary to transform their socio-economic realities.

The findings suggest that CSR initiatives rarely progress beyond surface-level interventions. For example, vocational training imparted skills but failed to provide job placement or start-up support, leaving many trainees underemployed. Microfinance and grant programs were introduced, but were too small, poorly managed, and unsustainable to create lasting economic change. Infrastructure projects were often abandoned due to a lack of maintenance, undermining their ability to improve livelihoods in the long run. In empowerment terms, CSR stopped at the level of resource provision without creating the enabling structures for sustained economic or political empowerment (Nwankwo & Eze, 2019).

Furthermore, the political empowerment of youths, their ability to participate in decision-making, was weak. Community-company engagement processes excluded many young people or gave them only symbolic roles. This exclusion reinforced dependency and marginalization rather than fostering collective agency (Spaces for Change, 2021). The failure to link CSR initiatives to broader institutional reforms, credit markets, or employment opportunities meant that the programs lacked the structural depth required for empowerment.

### **Why CSR Underperformed: A Dual-Theory Explanation**

#### **CSR as Stakeholder Management without Empowerment**

When viewed through Stakeholder Theory, CSR in Ohaji/Egbema appears primarily as a strategy for corporate risk management rather than as genuine community development. Oil companies sought to placate communities with visible but limited projects, such as boreholes, scholarships, or small loans, aimed at reducing protests and sabotage. While these efforts temporarily secured the social license to operate, they failed to address the deeper economic and political exclusion of youths (Frynas, 2009).

By contrast, the Empowerment Framework reveals that CSR programs lacked the structural linkages required for transformative change. Youths gained skills but lacked employment pathways; they received loans, but without the business development support necessary to sustain enterprises. The programs did not shift power relations, reduce dependency, or enable youths to



control their own development trajectories. Thus, while Stakeholder Theory explains why companies acted, the Empowerment Framework explains why the outcomes fell short.

### *Elite Capture and Weak Institutional Context*

Both frameworks also shed light on the persistent problem of elite capture. Stakeholder Theory demonstrates how oil companies frequently interact with traditional chiefs, local elites, or government officials as their primary interlocutors. This narrowed stakeholder engagement to a few influential actors, sidelining ordinary youths. Similarly, from an empowerment perspective, elite dominance reduced opportunities for young people to exercise voice or claim entitlements. Instead of empowering youths, CSR inadvertently reinforced existing power hierarchies (Akpaka, 2020).

The weak institutional context in Nigeria further compounded these limitations. Government agencies often failed to monitor CSR implementation or enforce company commitments (Idemudia, 2014). Without strong state oversight, CSR became discretionary, dependent on corporate goodwill rather than legal obligation. This undermined both stakeholder trust and empowerment outcomes.

### *Short-Termism and Lack of Sustainability*

CSR initiatives were often designed as **short-term, project-based interventions** rather than long-term development strategies. For instance, boreholes broke down due to a lack of maintenance plans, and scholarship programs were discontinued when corporate budgets shifted. Stakeholder Theory helps explain this by showing how companies prioritized **immediate legitimacy gains** over sustainable commitments. The Empowerment Framework highlights how this short-termism failed to build enduring capacities for youth autonomy, leaving communities dependent and disillusioned (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015).

### *Integrating Theory and Practice*

Taken together, Stakeholder Theory and the Empowerment Framework illuminate the core paradox of CSR in Ohaji/Egbema. CSR was simultaneously over-politicized and under-transformative. On one hand, it was shaped by the logic of stakeholder management, designed to appease elites, reduce conflict, and protect company operations. On the other hand, it lacked the structural depth to empower youths economically, socially, or politically. This dual theoretical framing explains why CSR, despite significant financial investment, has underperformed in delivering youth empowerment outcomes.

The integration of these theories also highlights pathways for reform. From a stakeholder perspective, oil companies must treat youths as legitimate, primary stakeholders by involving them in participatory planning, monitoring, and evaluation of CSR projects. From an empowerment perspective, CSR must go beyond skills training or token grants and instead build long-term structures for employment, access to credit, entrepreneurship, and political participation. Without combining stakeholder legitimacy with empowerment outcomes, CSR will continue to fall short.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings have significant implications for the design and implementation of CSR in oil-producing regions:

1. **Reframe CSR from philanthropy to empowerment:** CSR should be integrated into broader development planning with measurable empowerment outcomes.
2. **Ensure inclusive stakeholder participation:** Youths must be directly involved in CSR decision-making to avoid elite capture.
3. **Strengthen government oversight:** Regulatory bodies should monitor CSR commitments and enforce accountability.
4. **Link CSR to structural opportunities:** Programs should incorporate job placement, access to markets, and institutional reforms that enable long-term youth empowerment.
5. **Adopt sustainability frameworks:** Projects must include maintenance, follow-up, and evaluation mechanisms to ensure continuity and impact.

In conclusion, CSR in Ohaji/Egbema between 2010 and 2020 illustrates the limitations of corporate-led development in contexts of weak governance and entrenched inequality. Stakeholder Theory explains the corporate logic behind CSR, focused on legitimacy and risk management, while the Empowerment Framework reveals why such programs failed to translate into substantive youth empowerment. Without shifting CSR from stakeholder appeasement to empowerment-centred practice, oil companies will continue to underperform in addressing the pressing challenges of youth unemployment and marginalization in Imo State and the wider Niger Delta.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigated the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives on youth empowerment outcomes in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria, between 2010 and 2020. The findings show that while oil and gas companies implemented programs in education, vocational training, microfinance, infrastructure, and community engagement, these interventions produced limited and often unsustainable empowerment outcomes. Scholarships and educational support benefited a few but failed to address systemic educational inequalities. Vocational training provided skills but lacked job placement or business incubation support. Microfinance schemes were underfunded and prone to elite capture, while infrastructure projects were poorly maintained. Dialogue platforms existed, but excluded youths from meaningful participation.

Using Stakeholder Theory, these patterns can be understood as reflecting CSR's role in securing corporate legitimacy rather than driving long-term development. Oil companies engaged selectively with local elites, thereby managing risks while sidelining marginalized groups. Through the Empowerment Framework, the analysis highlights that CSR initiatives lacked structural linkages to sustainable livelihoods, employment pathways, and political inclusion. Consequently, CSR functioned more as a palliative mechanism than as a transformative tool for addressing youth unemployment and socio-economic marginalization.

The dual-theory foundation of this study thus underscores the paradox of CSR in the Niger Delta: while designed to foster stability and development, CSR has largely underperformed because it prioritizes short-term stakeholder appeasement over long-term empowerment. This gap explains the persistence of youth discontent, environmental protests, and strained community-company relations in Ohaji/Egbema.

## **Recommendations**

### **For Oil and Gas Companies**

1. **Adopt participatory CSR planning:** Youths should be recognized as primary stakeholders and included in decision-making committees, monitoring teams, and project evaluation processes. This aligns with Stakeholder Theory's call for inclusive engagement (Freeman, 1984).
2. **Shift from philanthropy to empowerment:** CSR must move beyond scholarships and token training to create structural opportunities—such as job placement linkages, entrepreneurship incubation hubs, and credit schemes supported by business development services.
3. **Embed sustainability in project design:** Infrastructure projects should include clear maintenance plans, budget allocations for repairs, and partnerships with local institutions to ensure continuity.

### **For Government and Policy Actors**

1. **Strengthen regulatory oversight:** The Nigerian government should institutionalize CSR commitments through enforceable frameworks and regular audits. This would reduce the discretionary nature of CSR and align corporate contributions with national development goals (Idemudia, 2014).
2. **Integrate CSR into local development plans:** CSR projects should complement state and local government initiatives, ensuring synergy and reducing duplication. This integration will also enhance sustainability and accountability.
3. **Promote youth-inclusive governance structures:** Government agencies should create policies that mandate the involvement of youth representatives in community-company agreements, particularly in MoU negotiations.

### **For Civil Society and Communities**

1. **Strengthen advocacy and monitoring:** NGOs and community-based organizations should track CSR commitments, publish independent monitoring reports, and amplify youth voices in negotiations.
2. **Build youth capacity for accountability:** Training programs should focus on equipping young people with advocacy, negotiation, and project-monitoring skills to enhance their agency in stakeholder processes.

3. **Foster collective action:** Youth cooperatives and associations can serve as vehicles for channelling CSR benefits, reducing elite capture, and strengthening accountability mechanisms within the community.

### **Implications for Theory**

This study contributes to the broader CSR literature by demonstrating that Stakeholder Theory and the Empowerment Framework are complementary in analyzing corporate-community relations in resource-rich but marginalized settings. Stakeholder Theory explains CSR's emphasis on corporate legitimacy, while the Empowerment Framework highlights the importance of structural and agency-based outcomes for marginalized groups. Integrating these perspectives provides a holistic understanding of why CSR has underperformed in youth empowerment in Ohaji/Egbema. Future research can further operationalize this dual-theory model by developing measurable indicators of both stakeholder legitimacy and empowerment outcomes.

### **Final Reflection**

The persistent youth discontent and socio-economic deprivation in Ohaji/Egbema highlight the urgent need to rethink CSR as more than a symbolic gesture. Effective CSR must balance the corporate imperative of legitimacy with the developmental imperative of empowerment. Without this balance, CSR risks perpetuating cycles of dependency, frustration, and conflict rather than contributing to the long-term stability and prosperity of the Niger Delta region.

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