

Community Engagement in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Policy Design and Implementation: A Case Study of Sanzule Community, Ghana, and ENI Exploration and Production Company Limited.

Wilfred King Arthur¹

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Abstract

This study investigates how community engagement shapes the design and implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies in resource-rich regions, using Eni Exploration and Production Limited's activities in the Sanzule community, Ghana, as a case study. Despite the growing adoption of CSR in extractive industries, limited research has examined how local communities influence CSR policy outcomes through participatory mechanisms. Anchored in stakeholder theory and guided by participatory governance principles, this qualitative study employed interviews, document analysis, and field observations involving 67 participants, including local leaders, health professionals, and company representatives. Findings reveal that Eni's CSR approach is rooted in free, prior, and informed consultation, with community liaison officers and local leaders playing integral roles in needs assessments, project planning, and implementation. Collaborative efforts with public institutions further strengthened the relevance and sustainability of interventions, particularly in health, education, and livelihoods. The study concludes that sustained community participation enhances ownership, trust, and the long-term impact of CSR initiatives. These insights contribute to refining community-centric CSR models in extractive sectors.

Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility, Community Engagement, Sustainability, Community Development*

Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become an essential aspect of sustainable business practices, particularly in industries with significant social and environmental footprints, such as oil and gas. The concept of CSR emphasizes that businesses have obligations beyond profit-making—to include societal, environmental, and ethical responsibilities—especially in resource-rich regions where corporate activities often intersect with local livelihoods and ecosystems (Jamali & Mirshak, 2007). In developing countries like Ghana, CSR initiatives are frequently framed as vehicles for local development and community welfare (Barkemeyer et al., 2014).

Over the past decade, Ghana's oil and gas sector has expanded rapidly, with increasing public and policy attention on how extractive firms engage host communities. Companies like Eni Exploration and Production Limited, operating in the Western Region, are expected to deliver CSR policies that not only mitigate adverse impacts but also align with community priorities and promote sustainable development

(Acheampong, Ashong, & Svanikier, 2016). While literature acknowledges the growing relevance of CSR in Ghana, critical questions remain about the depth and authenticity of community engagement in CSR policy design. Some scholars have noted that CSR practices in African contexts risk being **tokenistic**, serving corporate image-building rather than empowering communities (Idemudia, 2007; Frynas, 2009). Others question the sustainability and ownership of CSR outcomes when communities are insufficiently involved in decision-making (Amaeshi et al., 2016).

Despite growing scholarly and policy interest, limited empirical research exists on how CSR initiatives in Ghana are co-developed with local communities and what mechanisms foster truly participatory models. There is a need to understand how companies operationalize community engagement and whether such engagement leads to meaningful and sustainable outcomes. This study seeks to fill this gap by critically examining the CSR practices of Eni Exploration and Production Limited in the Sanzule community, focusing on the extent,

¹ Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi-Ghana. Institute of Distance Learning (IDL)

nature, and effectiveness of community participation in CSR policy formulation and implementation.

Guided by stakeholder theory and participatory governance frameworks, this study explores how local actors shape CSR agendas, how engagement processes are structured, and what outcomes emerge from these interactions. By doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of context-specific CSR models and offers insights into how extractive companies can foster more inclusive and impactful partnerships with host communities in Ghana and beyond.

Literature Review

The Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

CSR has been given different definitions in different ways through existing CSR literature. According to Bowen (1953, cited in Mohammed 2015), social responsibilities refer to “the obligation of businessman to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action that are desirable in terms of objectives and values of our society”. The European Commission (2001) defined Corporate Social Responsibility as “*a concept whereby companies incorporate social and environmental issues in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a freewill basis*”. It is quite difficult for businesses to develop a policy incorporating this definition into their mainstream because of its absolute nature, as these businesses do not know exactly what should go into the CSR policies and activities. As a result, firms often resort to their own subjective criteria in implementing their CSR policies. In a more pragmatic approach, the International Finance Corporation defines CSR as “the dedication of businesses to contribute to sustainable economic growth by working with employees, their families, the local community and society at large to impact positively on their lives in ways that are good for business and for development” (IFC, 2008).

Friedman contributed to the corporate social responsibility debate by arguing for businesses to consider profits as their only priority. For him, business had no immediate objective responding to societal problems but was rather accountable to its shareholders. What this means is that corporations only have a social

responsibility towards those directly involved or affected by the business and not to other parties unaffected by its endeavors. However, Freeman, through his stakeholder theory, expressed a positive view of corporate social responsibility. He proposed that the engagement of businesses with their stakeholders other than shareholders was equally essential to their sustenance (Broomhill, 2001). By this, he implied that corporate social responsibility was seen as an essential tool for securing the primary objective of corporations—profits. Political economists have also indicated that business operations can have significant impacts on the environment in which they operate and, for that matter, on the livelihood of people living in that environment. They believe that the corporate social responsibility of a company has a way of mitigating the adverse consequences of its operations (Broomhill, 2007). To them, CSR should be made mandatory. Thus, it is the duty of businesses to pay attention not only to the desire of their shareholders, but also to the issues of the whole community in which they operate, including their responsibility for law and order (Utting, 2005).

In contrast to Milton Friedman’s view—which posits that a corporation’s sole social responsibility is to increase profits for its shareholders (Friedman, 1970)—Freeman’s stakeholder theory offers a broader conceptualization of corporate responsibility. Freeman (1984) argues that businesses must address the interests of all stakeholders—employees, customers, communities, governments, and shareholders—because these actors are all affected by corporate decisions. This perspective shifts CSR from a peripheral, voluntary activity to a central strategic function that is essential to long-term success and legitimacy. Freeman’s theory is particularly relevant in the context of extractive industries, in which its principles are put to the test as their operations directly impact host communities. The implementation reinforces the importance of stakeholder engagement not only as a moral and ethical imperative but also as a practical necessity to build trust, reduce conflict, and ensure project sustainability. Contemporary CSR practices increasingly reflect this logic, emphasizing inclusive participation, transparency, and co-creation of development interventions with affected communities.

In this study, Eni Exploration and Production Limited's CSR efforts are examined through the lens of stakeholder theory. The company's obligation extends beyond profit generation to include active responsibility toward its host communities. This responsibility is operationalized through participatory approaches, where local stakeholders are meaningfully involved in the design and implementation of CSR interventions. Through these approaches, Eni aims to achieve a balance between fulfilling shareholder expectations and contributing to local development—an approach that exemplifies stakeholder-oriented CSR and reinforces the theoretical foundation of this research.

Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility

The evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reflects broader transformations in global business practices, public expectations, and socio-political accountability. Although the concept gained prominence in the mid-20th century with Howard Bowen's seminal work *The Social Responsibilities of the Businessman* (1953), its roots lie in earlier notions of business ethics and philanthropic responsibility. Initially, CSR was largely driven by moral imperatives and corporate philanthropy, but it has since transitioned to a more strategic and institutionalized component of corporate governance, particularly in high-impact industries such as oil and gas. However, the rapid globalization of markets in the 1980s and 1990s, combined with rising environmental concerns and civil society activism, pressured corporations to expand their accountability beyond shareholders to include a wider group of stakeholders. Scandals involving labor abuses, oil spills, and environmental degradation further catalyzed public demand for corporate transparency and social responsibility. As a result, CSR frameworks began to formalize across sectors and regions, becoming increasingly embedded within risk management and reputation strategies.

International bodies such as the European Commission (2001) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC, 2008) developed influential definitions of CSR, emphasizing the integration of social and environmental concerns into business operations and stakeholder interactions. The European Commission's

definition, for instance, stresses voluntary corporate behavior, which has attracted criticism for lacking enforcement mechanisms and enabling symbolic compliance. Meanwhile, the IFC's approach links CSR directly to sustainable economic development, aligning corporate goals with community well-being. These differing emphases highlight ongoing debates about the purpose and enforceability of CSR in both developed and developing contexts.

Critically, not all definitions are universally accepted or equally impactful. For example, Friedman's (1970) dismissal of CSR as a distraction from profit maximization continues to influence corporate resistance to social obligations, especially where regulatory frameworks are weak. Conversely, Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory and Carroll's (1991) pyramid model—encompassing economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities—have been widely adopted to justify more integrated and context-responsive CSR approaches. Carroll's model, in particular, is notable for its recognition of the layered nature of business obligations, making it adaptable across different cultural and legal settings.

Regionally, CSR has evolved unevenly. In Western countries, CSR is often linked to environmental sustainability, labor rights, and corporate governance. In contrast, in many developing nations—including Ghana—CSR tends to emphasize community development and service provision, often compensating for weak state capacity (Idemudia, 2007). This shift raises questions about whether CSR reinforces state withdrawal or genuinely empowers communities through long-term partnerships. Recent developments, such as the ISO 26000 standard (2010) and global ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) reporting trends, underscore the formalization of CSR into mainstream business practices. These tools aim to create measurable benchmarks but also reveal tensions between standardized expectations and local realities. Ultimately, the debate remains: is CSR a tool for justice and inclusion, or a strategic device for managing public image?

In summary, CSR has undergone a significant transformation—from optional goodwill to strategic necessity. Yet, its meaning and implementation remain contested, shaped by ideological debates, institutional norms, and socio-economic conditions. For countries

like Ghana, where extractive industries play a central role in development, understanding CSR's evolution is vital for assessing its capacity to deliver equitable, inclusive, and sustainable outcomes.

Community Engagement in CSR

In industries like mining, oil, and gas that have a direct impact on local populations, community engagement has been found to be extremely important for designing and implementing corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies. Participating in CSR activities with communities increases mutual trust, project relevance and acceptance, and produces more long-lasting results (Muthuri, Moon, & Idemudia, 2012). Businesses can more effectively match their social and environmental goals to the real needs and objectives of the impacted communities when they actively include local stakeholders in decision-making processes (Frederick, 2008).

Studies have indicated that there are several ways to accomplish community involvement in corporate social responsibility (CSR), including stakeholder meetings, participatory needs assessments, and free, advance, and informed consultations. These techniques enable CSR projects to be co-created with local beneficiaries rather than being seen as top-down mandates (Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi, & Herremans, 2010). Through early conflict identification and the development of local support for initiatives, community engagement also aids in risk management for businesses (Esteves & Barclay, 2011). Nonetheless, there is a significant difference in the quality of involvement. For a community engagement to be authentic, stakeholders' input must be gathered, integrated into project designs, and be adaptable during implementation (Dare, Schirmer, & Vanclay, 2014). There is a difference between authentic engagement, where communities truly shape decisions, and tokenistic approaches, where participation is only for compliance (Arnstein, 1969). Research suggests that genuine community involvement enhances the social license to operate and yields more equitable development outcomes (Hall & Jeanneret, 2015).

In developing nations with potentially laxer regulatory regimes, businesses may have more latitude in their community engagement strategies. CSR can fill in these gaps in the delivery of public services, but in order to

prevent perpetuating dependency, the strategy must be attentive to the context and customised to local realities (Idemudia, 2007). By utilising supplementary resources and knowledge, partnerships with NGOs and local government can increase the impact of CSR initiatives (Lepineux, 2005).

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative case study design to explore how community engagement influences the design and implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies in the Sanzule community by Eni Exploration and Production Limited. The approach is particularly suitable for understanding complex social processes within their real-life contexts (Yin, 2014), especially where boundaries between phenomenon and context are blurred. This design enables in-depth analysis of stakeholder interactions, power dynamics, and the operationalization of CSR in a resource-rich Ghanaian setting.

The interview guide draws on key themes from the literature on stakeholder theory, participatory governance, and CSR implementation in extractive contexts (e.g., Freeman, 1984; Idemudia, 2007). The guide was structured into sections addressing community involvement in needs assessment, decision-making processes, perceptions of CSR outcomes, and interactions with corporate and governmental actors. Questions were open-ended to allow participants to share their experiences freely while also permitting thematic alignment for analysis. The guide was reviewed by two qualitative research experts and pre-tested with a small group of community members, leading to refinements in question wording and sequencing.

The study population included members of the Sanzule community and staff of Eni Ghana involved in CSR planning and implementation. A purposive sampling technique was used to identify key informants such as community leaders, unit committee members, youth leaders, and representatives of Eni's Local Content department. Snowball sampling was then employed to reach beneficiaries of CSR initiatives such as the Livelihood Restoration Plan (LRP). In total, 67 participants were interviewed—62 from the community and 5 from Eni. The study ensured diversity in age,

gender, occupation, and involvement in CSR activities to effectively capture a wide range of perspectives. However, it is acknowledged that the sample slightly underrepresents female voices, a limitation that reflects broader gender dynamics in leadership and public engagement in the study setting.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in English or local languages, depending on participant preference. Interviews were held in accessible community locations and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Where participants consented, audio recordings were made; otherwise, detailed field notes were taken. Interviews explored participants' perceptions of the CSR planning process, the degree of community participation, and the impact of CSR interventions. The researcher maintained a field journal to capture observations, contextual insights, and initial analytical reflections, contributing to reflexive awareness during data collection.

Thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret key patterns in the data. Interview transcripts and notes were first read for familiarity, then coded inductively using NVivo software. Codes were grouped into broader categories corresponding to major themes such as needs identification, stakeholder collaboration, project ownership, and feedback mechanisms. Data were iteratively revisited to ensure consistency and depth of interpretation. To enhance analytical rigor, peer debriefing was conducted with two independent qualitative researchers who reviewed a sample of transcripts and coding decisions.

Adhering to key ethical principles and having received clearance from the Institutional Review Board of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, the study obtained informed consent from all participants after clearly explaining the purpose of the research. Furthermore, to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were used to report the findings. To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed multiple strategies, including triangulation of data sources (community members, Eni staff, observations), peer review, and detailed documentation of the research process. The researcher also maintained reflexivity throughout the study, acknowledging their positionality as an academic observer and remaining aware of the potential

influence of power dynamics during interviews, particularly when engaging with corporate staff or community elites. The reflexive journaling helped to identify and mitigate bias during both data collection and interpretation.

Data Analysis And Presentation Of Results

Community Engagement and Local Participation in CSR Policy Design and Implementation

Community engagement plays a pivotal role in shaping the design, implementation, and outcomes of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, particularly in resource-rich areas like the Sanzule community. Eni Exploration and Production Limited has adopted a participatory approach to CSR that integrates local voices at multiple stages of project planning and execution, aligning with stakeholder theory's emphasis on inclusive decision-making (Freeman, 1984; Idemudia, 2014).

Participatory CSR Planning

Eni's CSR efforts begin with community-level consultations designed to ensure that interventions reflect local priorities. These participatory processes, often led by the company's Local Content department—headed by an indigene of the Sanzule community—help establish trust and foster a sense of ownership among residents. Community liaison officers, also drawn from Sanzule, act as intermediaries between the company and community members, ensuring that local voices are continually reflected in corporate decisions. Eni regularly engages the community through stakeholder meetings, where needs assessments are conducted before launching projects. This participatory planning structure contributes to transparency and responsiveness, core principles in stakeholder-oriented CSR models.

Collaboration with Public Institutions

A defining feature of Eni's CSR approach is its collaboration with public sector agencies. For instance, the company designed its health-related interventions in partnership with the Western Regional Health Directorate and district health administrations. Similarly, it developed its educational programs with input from district education offices. These partnerships align CSR activities with public development goals and promote long-term sustainability. By coordinating with local authorities, Eni

ensures that its CSR efforts are not duplicative but complementary—filling service gaps and enhancing government capacity where needed. This institutional alignment also enhances project legitimacy and reduces the risk of community pushback.

Economic Empowerment through the Livelihood Restoration Plan (LRP)

One of the most significant manifestations of community engagement is Eni’s Livelihood Restoration Plan (LRP). The LRP targeted over 1,400 individuals in several communities affected by the Offshore Cape Three Points (OCTP) project. Designed in collaboration with the community and implemented by Technoserve, the initiative allowed beneficiaries to choose from a range of economic activities suited to their interests and capacities. Feedback from beneficiaries, such as Emmanuel Mieza, indicates that the participatory design enhanced satisfaction and project relevance. The flexibility of the LRP, which allowed beneficiaries to revise their initial choices, reflects a deeper commitment to adaptive, community-driven development.

Continuous Feedback and Responsive Governance

Feedback loops are critical to the success of CSR programs. In Sanzule, community liaison officers and local leaders facilitate regular meetings—often at the chief’s palace—where ongoing projects are discussed, and challenges are addressed. These meetings serve as platforms for accountability, transparency, and real-time problem-solving. An observed meeting in August 2019, involving Eni, Vitol, GNPC, Technoserve, and community stakeholders, highlighted the role of dialogue in sustaining trust and aligning expectations. Such forums not only validate the participatory model but also help preempt conflicts and ensure CSR interventions remain contextually relevant.

Summary and Reflections

The integrated approach employed by Eni in the Sanzule community demonstrates the effectiveness of participatory, stakeholder-driven CSR. By involving the community in every stage—from needs assessment and planning to implementation and feedback—the company has enhanced project relevance, fostered trust, and improved long-term outcomes. This approach



Figure 1. CSR Community Engagement Process Model – Eni in Sanzule

Source: Author (2025)

Figure 1 illustrates the systematic process adopted by Eni Ghana in its CSR policy design and implementation in the Sanzule community. The model emphasizes participatory planning, collaboration with public institutions, local management through community liaison officers, and continuous feedback mechanisms that inform project adaptation.

supports broader CSR theories that advocate for local ownership, cross-sector collaboration, and continuous engagement. It also reflects a shift from symbolic or compliance-driven CSR toward more embedded and community-led strategies, offering valuable lessons for extractive companies operating in similar contexts.

Discussions of Findings

The study of Eni Ghana’s CSR policies in the Sanzule community reveals that community engagement plays a critical role in ensuring the effectiveness, sustainability, and local relevance of CSR initiatives. The findings are consistent with the growing recognition of stakeholder-driven CSR, which aligns corporate policies with the interests and needs of local communities (Jamali & Mirshak, 2007; Idemudia, 2014). This

discussion analyzes the findings in relation to existing literature on CSR theory, focusing on the key aspects of participatory engagement, collaboration with stakeholders, and localized management of CSR activities.

One of the major findings of the study is the importance of community involvement in the design and implementation of CSR policies. Eni's inclusion of the Sanzule community in policy planning exemplifies a participatory approach that fosters local ownership of CSR projects. This aligns with contemporary CSR theory, which advocates for a shift from traditional, top-down models to more inclusive, bottom-up strategies (Muthuri, Moon, & Idemudia, 2012). The active participation of community members in CSR meetings and project decision-making builds trust, enhances transparency, and cultivates a sense of responsibility among beneficiaries.

Another key finding is the role of local leadership in the successful management of CSR initiatives. Eni's decision to appoint local personnel—such as a community indigene to head the Local Content department and community liaison officers to facilitate ongoing communication—underscores the importance of localized management in ensuring the cultural relevance and operational success of CSR policies. This localized leadership approach resonates with the work of Crane et al. (2016), who argue that local representation in CSR decision-making is essential for bridging the gap between corporate goals and community expectations.

The study also highlights the effectiveness of community liaison officers in maintaining a continuous dialogue between Eni and Sanzule residents. These officers, who are both beneficiaries and representatives of the community, act as intermediaries, ensuring that the community's concerns are swiftly communicated to the company for timely resolution. The two roles taken by the officers are consistent with the broader CSR literature, which emphasizes the need for companies to establish strong, ongoing relationships with local stakeholders (Visser, 2006). The localized management of CSR activities, supported by continuous communication channels, ensures that projects remain adaptable and responsive to emerging community needs, as argued by Blowfield and Murray (2014).

The findings also demonstrate the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder collaboration

in CSR policy formulation and implementation. Eni's partnerships with local institutions—such as the Western Regional Health Directorate and district health administrations—exemplify a collaborative approach that ensures CSR projects address specific community needs, particularly in healthcare and education. This partnership model aligns with the work of Acheampong, Ashong, and Svanikier (2016), who emphasize the importance of involving local institutions in CSR initiatives to enhance the relevance and sustainability of projects.

Eni's collaboration with regional and district education authorities to design its educational policies is another example of how multi-stakeholder partnerships can align corporate CSR efforts with broader public goals. As noted by Idemudia (2014), the involvement of governmental bodies in CSR planning ensures that corporate initiatives complement existing public sector strategies, thereby maximizing the overall impact on community development. These partnerships enhance the credibility and effectiveness of CSR programs, making them more likely to deliver long-term benefits to both the company and the community.

The flexibility and responsiveness of Eni's CSR programming were particularly evident in the Livelihood Restoration Plan (LRP). The study found that the LRP was designed with input from the community, allowing beneficiaries to choose from a range of economic activities tailored to their needs and preferences. This flexible approach is a hallmark of adaptive CSR, which allows companies to adjust their strategies based on ongoing feedback and the evolving circumstances of beneficiaries (Freeman & Dmytriiev, 2017). The ability of beneficiaries to adjust their choices under the LRP further underscores Eni's commitment to ensuring that CSR projects remain relevant and effective.

The responsiveness of Eni's CSR approach is further supported by the regular meetings held at the chief's palace, where the community and corporate representatives discuss project progress and address any emerging concerns. This ongoing dialogue aligns with Ahen and Zettinig's (2015) findings, which highlight the importance of feedback mechanisms in CSR implementation. By maintaining open lines of communication, Eni ensures that its CSR initiatives can be adapted in real-time to meet the changing needs of the community.

The study also highlights the role of community engagement in fostering transparency and accountability in CSR efforts. The regular meetings between community members and representatives from Eni, Vitol, GNPC, and Technoserve provide a platform for discussing project details and addressing challenges. This level of transparency and accountability is crucial for building trust between the company and the community, as research shows that sustained engagement with local stakeholders promotes mutual understanding and shared responsibility for project outcomes (Idemudia, 2014).

Community engagement plays a critical role in enhancing the effectiveness, legitimacy, and sustainability of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Eni Ghana's CSR model in the Sanzule community reflects a commendable effort to integrate community voices through needs assessment, local leadership, and continuous feedback mechanisms. These participatory practices align with the principles of stakeholder theory and participatory governance, which emphasize the importance of inclusive decision-making for equitable development (Freeman & Dmytriiev, 2017).

However, while the findings demonstrate several strengths of Eni's approach, they also reveal the gaps between policy rhetoric and implementation realities. For example, although Eni promotes the ideal of free, prior, and informed consultation, some community members expressed concerns about limited involvement in final decision-making, particularly in large-scale project prioritization. This suggests that while consultation occurs, it may not always translate into shared control or influence, highlighting a disconnect between participation and actual power redistribution.

Moreover, the sustainability of participatory CSR efforts remains contingent on several structural factors. First, the participatory mechanisms currently in place—such as community liaison officers and local consultation meetings—rely heavily on the goodwill of corporate actors and may lack formal institutionalization. Without legal or contractual guarantees, these structures are vulnerable to policy shifts, personnel changes, or economic downturns. For example, a change in company leadership or funding priorities could erode the gains made through local engagement, especially

if community relationships are not embedded in long-term agreements.

Second, scalability presents a challenge. Eni's participatory model works well in a relatively small and cohesive community like Sanzule, but may be harder to replicate in more diverse, fragmented, or urban communities where consensus-building is more complex. The resource intensity of this approach—requiring trained liaison officers, regular consultation, and institutional partnerships—may not be feasible for smaller firms or in less profitable extractive ventures. Thus, economic scale and institutional capacity are limiting factors in applying such models more broadly.

Third, structural inequalities—such as gender imbalances, elite capture, and limited access to information—can undermine meaningful participation. The underrepresentation of women and marginalized groups in consultation forums was noted as a recurring issue. These inequalities raise concerns about whose voices are truly being heard, and whether participatory models are reinforcing, rather than disrupting, existing power hierarchies.

Finally, regulatory weaknesses in Ghana's CSR and extractive governance frameworks mean that companies have significant discretion in determining the scope, form, and content of their CSR efforts. This discretionary space creates the risk of CSR being used strategically to manage reputational risks rather than to foster genuine community empowerment. Without stronger accountability mechanisms and clearer government oversight, participatory CSR may remain voluntary and unevenly applied.

In sum, while Eni's CSR practices in Sanzule offer a promising example of community engagement in a resource-dependent context, the findings also underscore the need for critical vigilance. Ensuring that participatory models are inclusive, institutionalized, and resilient requires deliberate efforts to confront structural barriers and close the gap between policy intent and practice. These reflections contribute to a more nuanced understanding of CSR's potential and limitations in Ghana's oil and gas sector.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role of community engagement in shaping Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy design and

implementation, using Eni Ghana's collaboration with the Sanzule community as a case study. The findings reinforce the growing body of literature that emphasizes the importance of stakeholder involvement, particularly in CSR efforts in resource-rich regions (Jamali & Mirshak, 2007; Idemudia, 2014). By fostering active participation from the Sanzule community, Eni exemplifies a participatory governance model that not only aligns with contemporary CSR theory but also addresses practical and managerial challenges in ensuring the sustainability of CSR projects.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study underscores the alignment between Eni's CSR strategies and key concepts in stakeholder theory and CSR frameworks. The emphasis on free, prior, and informed consultation ensures that community members are given agency in shaping development projects that impact their lives. This participatory approach reflects contemporary CSR discourse, which advocates for the integration of local voices in decision-making to enhance the legitimacy, relevance, and sustainability of corporate initiatives (Freeman & Dmytiryev, 2017). It also supports theories suggesting that CSR is most effective when it is localized and tailored to the specific needs of the community (Muthuri, Moon, & Idemudia, 2012).

Practically, the study reveals that community engagement can significantly improve the implementation and outcomes of CSR initiatives. The active participation of the Sanzule community in needs assessments, project planning, and implementation has not only improved the targeting of CSR efforts but has also fostered a sense of ownership and accountability among beneficiaries. This practical outcome reflects best practices in CSR management, where continuous dialogue and collaboration with local stakeholders help to align corporate and community goals, leading to more impactful and sustainable outcomes (Blowfield & Murray, 2014).

The managerial implications of this study are also profound. Eni's reliance on local content, such as employing community members from Sanzule in its Local Content department and as community liaison officers, demonstrates the importance of local leadership in CSR management. This strategy ensures that CSR projects are contextually appropriate and responsive to the evolving needs of the community. Additionally, the role of continuous

feedback mechanisms, such as regular community meetings, highlights the importance of maintaining open channels of communication to address challenges in real-time and adjust CSR projects accordingly (Ahen & Zetting, 2015). Managers overseeing CSR initiatives in similar contexts can learn from Eni's approach by adopting localized management structures and ensuring that community feedback informs every stage of the CSR lifecycle.

In conclusion, the study illustrates that community engagement is not only beneficial but essential for the successful design and implementation of CSR policies. Eni's CSR efforts in Sanzule reflect a broader shift towards participatory and inclusive approaches to CSR, which prioritize local input and ensure that development projects are both relevant and sustainable. The active involvement of the Sanzule community has strengthened corporate-community relations, fostered trust, and enhanced the overall effectiveness of CSR initiatives. Ultimately, companies that prioritize stakeholder engagement and adopt flexible, adaptive CSR strategies are more likely to achieve long-term social and economic benefits, both for the communities they serve and for their corporate objectives.

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