

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Service Failures and Recovery Strategies for Sustainable Business: The Case of Nigeria

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between CSR, service failure and recovery, and sustainable business in the context of Nigeria's oil industry. Globally, there is nowhere these problems of environmental degradation, socio-political dissonance, lack of sustainable development, poor CSR, and poverty are more visible than in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria which has been described as "the goose that lays" Nigeria's golden eggs – oil and gas. It is important, therefore, that multinational corporations (MNCs) in Nigeria provide effective service recovery strategies in an attempt to resuscitate stakeholders' satisfaction, legitimacy, and trust following a service failure, which could be achieved via the prism of CSR. As has been examined by the available literature, CSR can be an effective organizational strategy for service recovery following failure, which could engender sustainable development in the region of the world habitually known for unsustainable organizational practice and strategy. Therefore, the reason for this study is to explicate via extant literature the relationship between CSR, service failure, and recovery strategies for sustainable business in Nigeria. Consequently, this paper has developed a theoretical model premised on extending Visser's African variant of the CSR model. This study believes that effective organizational management and recovery approach can strengthen relationships amongst MNCs, the communities, and other relevant stakeholders through building relationships, legitimacy, and trust for a sustainable business.

Keywords: CSR; sustainable development; service failure; service recovery; Nigeria.

JEL Classification: M48; M14; M10; N57.

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Introduction

Although commonly considered to be the fifth oil producer in the world and the highest economy in Africa, sadly, Nigeria suffers from one of the worst forms of socio-political dissonance, environmental degradation, poverty, poor corporate social responsibility (CSR), and lack of sustainable development (Obi, 2010). Sustainable development is a comprehensive development strategy that addresses economic, social, and environmental pursuits of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generations (Steurer, et al., 2005; WBCSD, 1999). There are nowhere these issues are more prominent than in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, which has been described as “the goose that lays” Nigeria’s golden egg – oil and gas. The Niger delta comprises nine states including River state, Delta state, Edo state, Cross River state, Abia state, Bayelsa state, Ondo state, Akwa Ibom state, and Imo state. The region suffers from unsustainable business investing, which has triggered and sustained corporate-stakeholder dilemma and associated problems (Idemudia, 2010). It is noted that over 90% of the nation’s national income comes from oil, yet, Nigeria is lagging in infrastructural and developmental milestones (Frynas, 2005; World Bank, 2005). Consequently, in a World Bank assessment, roughly 90% of Nigerians are living on less than \$2 per day (World Bank, 2010, 2005). This statistic has been confirmed by Department for International Development (DfID, 2018).

Accordingly, such statistics pose a grave danger to Nigeria delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as confronting a variety of global development challenges. Therefore, this study is predicated on the assumption that embarking on a realistic and sustainable CSR strategy will enhance service recovery and boost multinational corporations’ (MNCs’) reputational and financial bases while giving them social license to operate following decades of service failure. Studies focusing on the benefits and opportunities of engaging in CSR within the context of service failures are relatively sparse and there is a need for further inquiry and widening of discourse for better organizational performance and sustainable development in Nigeria (Klein & Dawar, 2014). Therefore, the key aim of this study is to critically examine the relationship between CSR, service failure, and recovery strategies to gain stakeholders’ trust and legitimacy (Patterson et al., 2006). Issues about organizational ethics, legitimacy, and moral violations are central to service failures. So in recovering service failures, CSR strategy for sustainable business is a critical success factor (Sanclemente-Téllez, 2017).

It has been well documented (see Frynas, 2015, 2005; Idemudia, 2010), that oil and gas MNCs including Chevron, ExxonMobil, Agip, TotalFinaElf, and Shell BP (the “big five”) have contributed to the destruction and pollution of the environment in the Niger delta as well as contributed in the destruction of the region’s flora and fauna, which are the bane of service failure that requires recovery strategies (Fatma et al., 2016; Ite, 2004). CSR describes a series of non-legally binding responsibilities of organizations. Thus, when companies engage in CSR it engenders legitimacy (Lii, Ding & Lin, 2018), justice (Cho et al., 2017; Patterson, Cowley & Prasongsukarn, 2006), fairness (Du & Feng, 2010), return on investment (Visser, 2013), reputational capital (Carroll, 1991) and for the foremost part sustainable development (Lii et al., 2018). Sustainable development takes into consideration the process of achieving human development objectives whilst sustaining the capability of natural systems to continue to deliver natural capital and biodiversity. These are the ideals upon which the economy and society at large depend (Brundtland Report, 1987). Figure 1 helps to delineate the political definition of the Niger delta of Nigeria.

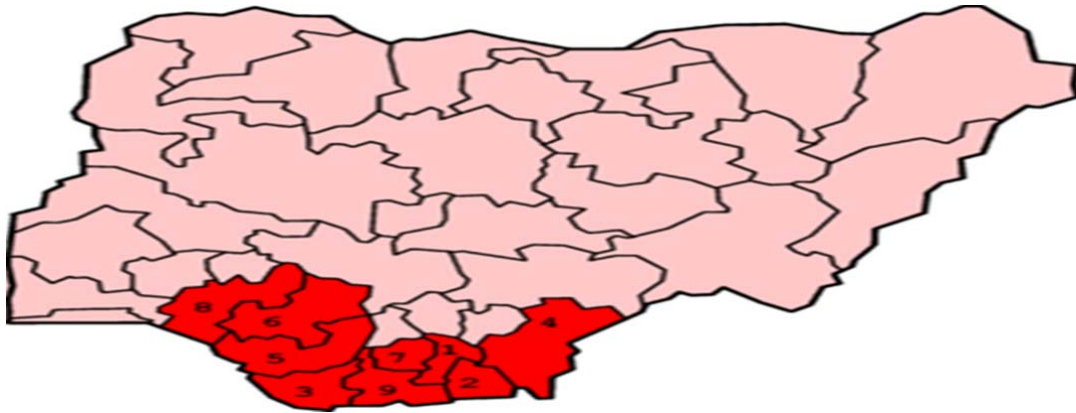


Fig. 1. Political Definition of the Niger Delta of Nigeria

Source: Idemudia (2010).

Study Context and Economic Thought Shots

According to Raimi & Olowo (2021), Nigeria is a federation of thirty-six states and Abuja is the Federal Capital Territory. The country Nigeria is an oil and gas-dependent economy, though with appreciable contributions from other sectors such as industrial, agricultural, and services. At present, Nigeria has a population of over 200 million citizens (Ibrahim & Olasinde, 2020; Kalu, 2020). FAO (2021) states that Nigeria has an area of 92377 (1000 hectares), a land area of 91077 (1000 hectares), an agricultural area of 68796.8521 (1000 hectares) and a forest area of 22280.1479 (1000 hectares). These positioned Nigeria in an advantageous situation to extract various energy resources. However, going by economic indices, Nigeria as of 2020 has a nominal GDP of \$432.29 billion and GNI per capita of \$5000 (WDI, 2021). Practitioners and scholars have argued that countries that rely solely on oil as a source of livelihood are unsustainable and could lead such countries into endemic rents dependency, underdevelopment, and failed state (Adedoyin, 2019; Agu, 2011). Presently, developing countries in Africa and Middle-East that depend on oil and have weak wealth creation capacity are experiencing deplorable situations in their public finances, and the future seems very uncertain in the instance of dwindling oil revenues accrued from rents (Anderssen & Djeflat, 2012; Raimi & Aljadani, 2020).

Understanding CSR

Extant literature suggests that CSR is something that is reflected in business strategies and self-regulation processes. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development states that “corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the continuing commitment by business to contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as that of the community and society at large” (WBCSD, 2000, p. 10). CSR helps to indicate whether businesses are responsible and accountable in their operations (Frynas, 2009, 2005). As noted by Carroll (2016) CSR is about the responsibility of a company that makes it a socially responsible organization beyond what is prescribed by law (Visser, 2013; Idemudia, 2010). Stakeholders’ views in the wake of service recovery performance are particularly important for realizing the ethical and legal aspects of CSR (Ozuem et al., 2017; Choi & La, 2013). Thus, the failure to effectively respond to service failure through organizational strategies is essential. Service failure can occur following allegations of illegitimacy, unethical venturing, and corporate irresponsibility. These will negatively impact the perceptions of wider stakeholders. Hence, currently, organizations are often deemed unethical in their activities

because it is sometimes little, or no integration between CSR and organizations (or marketing) strategies when services fail, which can be fundamental to recovery (Choi & La, 2013) and social justice in terms of organizational strategies (Kuo & Wu, 2012).

As noted in the literature, failure to apply appropriate service recovery strategies or approaches can lead to missed opportunities in terms of brand building, social license to operate and return on investment (Klein & Dawar, 2004). Thus, unless CSR becomes central to marketing agendas it will not have the desired effect and can potentially create a backlash in service recovery. These insights are critical for business success given the current landscape of corporate practice and ethics following global business scandals including WorldCom, Lehman Brothers, Parmalat, and Enron, amongst others (Nwagbara & Reid, 2013). CSR is known to comprise multiple aspects (Carroll, 2016) including philanthropic aspects, which is a dimension of cause-related marketing. However, in contrast with the philanthropic aspect, the ethical-legal aspect of CSR is more closely concerned with organizational ethics and service failure and recovery and deals essentially with various contexts in which the organization's sense of ethical responsibility can be tested (Choi & La, 2013). Consequently, this paper focuses on the ethical and legitimacy aspects of CSR to examine perceptions of CSR activities amongst stakeholders about MNCs' operations in Nigeria for sustainable business.

Service Failure and Recovery Nexus

Many researchers and practitioners in service marketing and strategy have indicated that the quality of a customer-organization nexus impacts customers' responses to service failures (Kelley & Davis, 1994). Some suggest that customer relationships provide a significant buffer to service organizations during the occurrence of service failures, which results in less customer dissatisfaction (Choi & Lai, 2013). For example, Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekar's (1998) research found that positive prior service experience alleviated or buffered the negative impacts of poor complaint handling on customer trust and commitment. Similarly, Weun et al. (2004) found that service failure severity has a significant impact on stakeholder trust, satisfaction, commitment, and negative word-of-mouth. Other researches have stressed that firms, which have a history of high-quality performance delivery as well as ethical venturing, are protected when service failure occurs customers (Hur & Jang, 2016; Hess et al., 2003; Fornell, 1976). In contrast, other researchers have demonstrated that customer relationships can amplify the negative customer responses consequent upon service failure. For example, Goodman, Fichman, Lerch, & Snyder (1995) found that customer discontent with the service led to greater dissatisfaction with the firm for highly involved customers than less involved customers.

Broadly, extant literature endorses the significance of relationships in times of service failure and recovery; however, there are no consistent or consensus findings on whether relationships serve to amplify or buffer the negative effects of service failures on overall satisfaction (Goodman et al., 1995). Furthermore, until recently (see Krishna et al., 2011) these researches have neglected to incorporate the relationship between service failure and recovery with CSR, a perspective of inquiry that may be essential to understand how corporate initiatives and strategies aimed at considering the interest of wider stakeholders and engaging in responsible business for customer satisfaction and social license to operate (Fatma et al., 2016; Idemudia, 2010). Furthermore, the literature so far is limited in terms of unpicking and exploring the processes fundamental to these relationship effects (Wirtz & Mattila, 2004). Although service failure and recovery is at an embryonic stage (Azemi, 2017), to date no known study in Nigeria has investigated the relationship between CSR, service failures, and recovery strategies for sustainable business. This is the mainstay of this paper. Accordingly, researchers have emphasized the need to understand the role played by CSR strategies in achieving service recovery when a firm fails to meet a customer's expectation (Fatma et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, extant literature suggests that service failure and recovery strategies are a five-fold process (Keaveney, 1995) including the occurrence of service failure (Gustafsson, 2008); generation of recovery expectations (Weun et al., 2004); provision of service recovery (Lewis & McCaan, 2004); recovery evaluation (Wirtz & Mattila, 2004); and involvement of customers in post-recovery behavior and actions (Kim, Yoo & Lee, 2012; Kuo & Wu, 2012). Scholarship on service failure and recovery approaches these phenomena from diverse dimensions and aspects. For example, Bell & Zemke (1987) identified two forms of failure including *process failure* and *outcome failure*. Other researchers have investigated these phenomena from the perspectives of the triggers including if failure is caused by customers, employers or providers, or other intermediate issues (Krishna et al., 2001; Tax et al., 1998). Other researchers have explored the issue of failure and recovery in different ways. However, leading thought on these phenomena includes the prior relationship between an organization and its wider stakeholders (Fatma et al., 2016), the severity of service failure (Cho, Jang & Kim, 2017), trust (La & Choi, 2010), managerial intervention (Lewis & McCaan, 2004) the nature of compensation (Wirtz & Mattila, 2004) and acknowledgment (Lewis & McCaan, 2004). Other writers have indicated that there are essentially four main recovery strategy typologies that can shape one's evaluation. They are financial, psychological, co-creation, and downward social comparison strategies (see Bonifield & Cole, 2008). The relationship between failure and recovery has been explained using different and comprehensive perspectives, theories, and persuasions (Krishna et al., 2011). However, upon close examination, research dealing with the interface between service failure and recovery strategies and processes is scarce and needs to be broadened (Fatma et al., 2016).

CSR as Service Recovery Strategy?

In times of service failure, CSR can be a business strategy to trigger recovery (Siu, Zhang & Yau, 2013; Grewal, Roggeveen & Tsiros, 2008) for sustainable business (Kolk & Tulder, 2010). Accordingly, Fatma & Rahman (2016, p. 584) have noted that in times of service failure or unsustainable business CSR can serve as “insurance protection” for organizations, which can influence stakeholders' (or customers') perceptions, trust, and loyalty (Thomassen et al., 2019; Grewal et al., 2008). For Carroll & Ahuva (2006) a sustainable CSR strategy can lead to “brand love”, which is about customer loyalty, satiation, and affection based on the mutual benefits of CSR approaches (He & Li, 2011; Nan & Heo, 2007). Thus, the preoccupation of the present research is to interrogate how CSR strategies can be used as a corporate strategy to address recurrent corporate–stakeholder conflict (Freeman, 1984) in Nigeria for justice and fairness in the eyes of stakeholders (Du & Feng, 2010).

CSR activities focused on meeting stakeholders' expectations constitute an important aspect of a stakeholder orientation (Fatma et al., 2016) and can be taken to be imperative in securing continued support, loyalty, and attraction of stakeholders (Thomassen et al., 2019). Such strategy and/or activity can take the forms of social development, ethical conduct, and human rights protection in business practice and/or environmental impact of business activities. As argued by Thomassen et al. (2019, p. 1) these measures and activities can be called “prosocial compensations” on the heels of service failure for fairness, justice, and ethical philanthropic responsibilities. It is therefore imperative that CSR-related activities after service failure are geared towards effective recovery processes and strategies for continual and sustainable business operation (Gustafsson, 2008). Several studies (Thomassen et al., 2019; Carroll, 1991) support the supposition of a positive market effect stemming from CSR-related activities and strategies, in particular, activities following service failure (Fatma et al., 2016). Nigerian oil companies should thus match their organizational activities about recovery strategies after service failure with stakeholder expectations to serve its objective.

Activities to sustain CSR and sustainable development in the long haul require strategies and tools (Aras & Crowther, 2009). Such strategies are conceived and implemented to support and

increase accountability, transparency and managerial commitment, and genuine explanation for service failure for recovery. Beyond apology or mere acknowledgment of service failure, also other significant tools or actions include firm's ethical standards, effective corporate governance procedures, codes of conduct, internal control systems, and result-oriented CSR initiatives, which are critical success factors that can facilitate recovery measures (Fatma et al., 2016). These essentials can safeguard and endorse "socially responsible" business strategies (Kuo & Wu, 2012). Nevertheless, legitimacy and accountability are integral to earning the trust of external stakeholders, and CSR implies that organizations are socially responsible in their conduct to deserve the trust and loyalty of stakeholders specifically in the recovery activities.

Conceptual Framework: towards Extending Knowledge on the CSR-Recovery Strategy Dynamics

Extant literature has emphasized the role CSR can play by serving as a marketing tool in service recovery following failure (La & Choi, 2019). In a bid to extend relevant, prior research on the outcomes of service failure performance, this study suggests that customers' attitude, trust, and loyalty about CSR can change consequent upon service recovery performance and strategy (Fatma et al., 2016), and this is true based on customer perceptions of the ethical, legal and philanthropic aspects and/or involvement of CSR (Carroll, 1991). Therefore, MNCs in Nigeria should engage in CSR as an organizational strategy through philanthropic contributions (UNEP, 2011; Visser, 2006), which will positively impact sustainable development in Africa, a continent in dire straits for development and assistance as governments on this continent retreat owing to poor governance and political leadership (Idemudia, 2010).

Building on Carroll's (1991, 1979) classical model of CSR (Matton & Moon, 2008) (see Figure 2 below), Visser (2006) proposed an African variant of the CSR model, which will guide more contextual, developmental, and sustainable business venturing on the continent.



Fig. 2. CSR Pyramid

Source: Carroll (1991).

Carroll's four-part CSR model generally known as CSR Pyramid is perhaps the most popular CSR model. These four parts indicate the relative significance of "economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities respectively" (Visser, 2006, p. 29). Nevertheless, Visser (2006) indicates that Carroll's CSR Pyramid may not be the best model for interpreting,

contextualizing, and understanding CSR in Africa because of the continent's unique context – the dynamics of crushing poverty, poor legal enforcement, institutional problems, governance failure and poor regulatory regime challenge moral and ethical implementation of CSR, which poses a challenge to sustainable business and development (Maconachie, 2016). This conceptualizing has implications for service failure and recovery (Choi & La, 2013) in Nigeria.

Consequently, this study will leverage Visser's (2006) Africa's CSR Pyramid model, which emphasizes that in Africa (Nigeria) economic responsibilities still get the most emphasis (Visser, 2006). Nevertheless, philanthropy is given second-highest priority, and subsequently legal and then ethical responsibilities (see Figure 3).

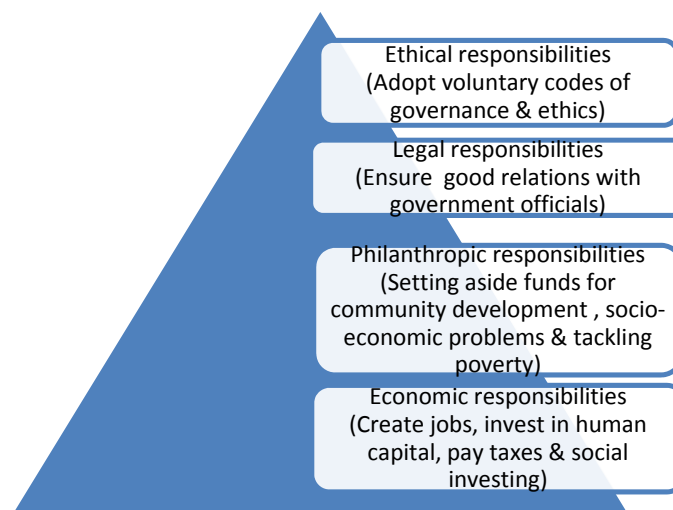


Fig. 3. African-centred CSR

Source: Modified from Visser (2006).

Crane & Matten (2004) revealed that philanthropic responsibility in Europe is more compulsory through the legal framework than philanthropic/discretionary initiatives of successful firms or capitalist companies in the USA. In this sense, Africa shares a lot in common with the American model; though philanthropy gets higher priority manifesting CSR in Africa (Idemudia & Ite, 2006). The first rationale for this situation is the rising socio-economic needs prevalent in African societies, like Nigeria, in which MNCs operate are so huge “that philanthropy is an expected norm”. Philanthropy is thus considered as the right thing to do by firms especially in context with institutional voids (Nwagbara & Kalagbor, 2021; Idemudia, 2010).

Additionally, MNCs have come to appreciate that they cannot thrive in failed and/or fragile societies (Scherer & Pallazo, 2011) like Nigeria, and philanthropy is therefore considered as the most direct method to improve the prospects of the communities in the Niger Delta, where MNCs operate (Frynas, 2005). The second justification for this contention is that CSR is often equated with philanthropy given the spate of poverty and early stage of CSR in Africa (Idemudia, 2010). Third, many African societies rely on foreign aid (Maconachie, 2016). As a result, Fox (2004) notes that “the prescriptive and Western-centred CSR is skewed by the dogma that often confines it to voluntary business initiatives, given its focus on large MNCs as well as domination by actors in the North, which tends to universalize the concept of CSR, downplaying contextual disparities (Frynas, 2005).

Relying on Visser's (2006) postulation of the African CSR model, the current study maintains that CSR is conceived about service recovery as corporate sustainability, corporate citizenship, stakeholder management, business ethics, and corporate social performance. This is because the magnitude of the challenges for CSR in the Niger Delta becomes even clearer when given the scale of social and environmental needs in this part of the world as well as the failure of MNCs

to make their operation sustainable to gain stakeholders' trust and loyalty (Ozuem, Howell & Lancaster, 2014; Idemudia, 2010). The track record of MNCs in the Niger Delta is steeped in corporate-stakeholder conflict, corporate complicity in political corruption, social disruption, environmental destruction, and labor exploitation for nearly 100 years (UNEP, 2011). However, equally, there are glaring examples of business involvement in providing social good through CSR by creating jobs, infrastructure development, capital investment, skills transfer, and social responsibility programs (Idemudia & Ite, 2006; Frynas, 2005). Notwithstanding this polarisation of the argument, there is a consensus that the private sector (for example MNCs) remains one of the best-placed institutions to make a meaningful, positive contribution to socio-economic, environmental, and sustainable development in Africa (Visser, 2006).

CSR is known to have a range of aspects (Choi & La, 2013) and prior research has emphasized the philanthropic dimension, which is an element of "cause-related marketing" (Choi & La, 2013, p. 223; Creyer & Ross, 1997). Following from Visser's (2006) theorization of CSR in the context of developing countries like Nigeria, the philanthropic element of CSR is more closely connected with business sustainability, and as a result "service failure and recovery constitute one context in which" MNCs' sense of philanthropic responsibility may be tested (Choi & La, 2013). Thus, this study narrows its focus to the philanthropic element of CSR in examining perceived CSR as well as related issues associated with service recovery in Nigeria's Niger Delta region for sustainable development (UNEP, 2011; Visser, 2006). It is argued in this research that if this argumentation guides MNCs' operations, they will gain the communities' trust and loyalty and have social license to operate, which are the hotbed of sustainable development. From the foregoing, in a bid to deepen knowledge and understanding of how stakeholders' perception of MNCs' CSR activities is linked with other customer-related outcomes during service recovery, this study suggests a model of CSR mediated by Visser's model (focusing on philanthropic responsibilities) and other vital concepts including stakeholder loyalty, trust and recovery satisfaction (Fatma et al., 2016; Choi & La, 2013).

Based on the preceding argument, this study is therefore premised on the concepts and assumptions of Visser (2006) and others Crane & Matten (2004) and advocates that the African centered CSR practice in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is needed for sustainable development and a win-win situation for corporations (MNCs) and other wider stakeholders including the people of the region. Nevertheless, this can only be possible when a process is put in place such that the MNCs' will embed or incorporate CSR activities into their budget, and the community liaison officers (CLOs) and the community development committees (CDCs) working in collaboration with the MNCs in implementing the CSR activities effectively and collaboratively. Thus, the African-centred CSR is crucial for development and sustainability in the Niger Delta and Nigeria by extension.

Conclusion

Following from the above, there is no gainsaying the fact that failure-recovery nexus can be achieved via the lens of effective CSR strategy. Also, it has been noted here that refuelling interest in Visser's contention and model of African-centred CSR model is essential for sustainable development, which the current paper has extended. Thus, the failure of organizations (in the context of this research oil and gas MNCs in Nigeria) to effectively respond through appropriate CSR strategies would lead to allegations of illegitimacy, unethical venturing, and corporate irresponsibility. Hence, currently, these MNCs are often deemed unethical in their activities because there is little or no integration between CSR and organizational strategies when services fail, which can be fundamental in recovery (Choi & La, 2013) and social justice of organizational strategies (Kuo & Wu, 2012)

Although, this study is limited to the nine states that produce oil and gas in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Even when there are several other industrial associates in Niger Delta, the selected five MNCs' are the major extractors of oil and gas in Nigeria. The research is also limited to secondary information, suggestion, therefore, is that further research is conducted through empirical data collection to ascertain the root cause of the lingering stakeholders' conundrums in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, and proffer a solution that will usher in a lasting peace between the MNCs' and other stakeholders in Nigeria oil and gas industry.

A practical implication is that this research supports and validates the hypotheses/theories that MNCs' operating in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria can use CSR as a mandatory recovery tool to correct a failed service and gain sustainable business and development.

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