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An Evaluation of Access Bank Nigeria Plc's Corporate Social Responsibility Practice in Nasarawa State

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) represents the ethical obligation of organizations to contribute positively to society beyond their business operations, addressing social, environmental, and economic well-being while fostering responsible engagement with stakeholders and host communities. This study evaluates the CSR initiatives of Access Bank Nigeria Limited in Nasarawa State, guided by Stakeholder Theory. Adopting a survey research design, questionnaires were administered to 365 respondents across selected Local Government Areas. The study sought to determine whether Access Bank implements CSR activities in the state, identify specific initiatives, assess community awareness, and evaluate the alignment of these initiatives with local needs. Findings revealed that Access Bank undertakes CSR interventions in education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and economic empowerment; however, awareness of these efforts among residents remains low. Moreover, opinions regarding the relevance of the initiatives were mixed, with some respondents acknowledging their benefits while others perceived them as misaligned with community priorities. The study concludes that although Access Bank's CSR initiatives hold potential for fostering community development, their limited visibility and insufficient stakeholder engagement weaken overall impact. It recommends enhanced publicity strategies and stronger community participation in the planning and implementation of CSR programmes to ensure greater alignment with local development needs.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility; Access Bank Nigeria Limited; Nasarawa State; Community Development; Stakeholder Engagement

INTRODUCTION

Before the 20th century, corporations prioritized profit maximization, often at the expense of environmental, social, and human rights concerns. Over time, the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) emerged to address these issues, advocating for businesses to consider the rights of stakeholders, environmental sustainability, and community development (Udeh & Nwadialor, 2014). According to Asemah, Edegoh, and Anatsui (2013), CSR has become a key managerial approach aimed at societal improvement alongside business operations.

Historically, CSR can be traced to medieval artisans' social obligations, but it gained formal recognition in the early 20th century United States (Webber & Wasieleski, 2018). The 1920s marked a turning point, as public pressure and legislative efforts pushed corporations to act more responsibly. Prominent industrialists like Andrew Carnegie and John Rockefeller responded by establishing philanthropic foundations, institutionalizing CSR as a business practice (William, 2018).

Udeh and Nwadialor (2014) disclose that, prior to the era of western organized CSR there were some indications that some Nigerian business engaged in some form of primordial CSR.

It is generally believed that ethnicity, language and religion are the three major context that shaped Nigerian business practices and provided vehicles for indigenous CSR. A common trend among the different tribes and peoples, which have implications for the CSR discourse, is the communal philosophy of life and concept of extended kinship, which appear deep rooted in all ethnic groups in Nigeria. They see family network as very important and almost, if not all, ethnic group in Nigeria believe that individual responsibility extend beyond the boundaries of immediate family.

In pre-colonial Nigeria, wealthy individuals and families upheld moral and social obligations to support the less privileged—a tradition recognized as an indigenous form of CSR, often referred to as extended kinship responsibility (Amaeshi, Adi, Ogbechie & Amao, 2006). This practice was widespread across ethnic groups before the introduction of Western CSR models. The modern, Western-styled CSR in Nigeria began with multinational corporations operating from the 1960s, who applied CSR policies based on their countries of origin (Jones, 1999; Vantulder & Kolt, 2001, as cited in Udeh & Nwadialor, 2014). While these early efforts focused on philanthropy, they laid the groundwork for the more strategic and structured CSR approaches seen today.

Today, corporate social responsibility is widely recognized as a vital component of corporate practice, particularly within the Nigerian banking sector (Ali, 2023). The growing acceptance of CSR presents an opportunity to foster socio-economic development in host communities. However, there remains a need to critically assess the actual implementation and relevance of these initiatives. Against this backdrop, the present study investigates whether Access Bank Nigeria Plc engages in CSR activities in Nasarawa State, the nature of such efforts, and their alignment with community needs.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Find out whether Access Bank Nigeria Plc. carries out CSR projects in Nasarawa State.
2. Identify some of the CSR initiatives by Access Bank Nigeria Plc. in Nasarawa State.
3. Ascertain the level of awareness regarding Access Bank Nigeria Plc's CSR programme implementation in Nasarawa State.
4. Ascertain the relevance of the CSR initiatives by Access Bank on host communities in Nasarawa State.

Conceptual Clarification

This section provides clear definitions and explanations of key concepts used in the study to ensure a common understanding.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to deliberate actions by businesses aimed at enhancing the well-being of those impacted by their operations (Weber &

Wasieleski, 2018). It represents a strategic management effort to incorporate socio-economic and environmental considerations into corporate policies. As Carroll (2016) explains, CSR involves ensuring that the interests of broader stakeholders—not just owners—are accounted for in business strategies. Weber and Wasieleski (2018) emphasize the universal applicability of CSR across different business sizes and societal contexts, highlighting its role in aligning corporate functions with social systems. Carroll (2016) further outlines CSR as encompassing four key dimensions: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities—forming a framework that guides how businesses relate to society.

Access Bank Nigeria PLC

Access Bank, a Nigerian multinational commercial bank, has transformed over the past 26 years into a prominent African financial institution. Founded in 1989, the bank became a public limited company in 1998 and secured a universal banking license from the Central Bank of Nigeria in 2001. Today, it operates over 600 branches across 18 countries and serves more than 49 million customers. According to its 2021 annual report, Access Bank maintains 566 branches in Nigeria, including 7 in Nasarawa State. This steady growth reflects the bank's fulfillment of its economic mandate. However, this study focuses on evaluating whether Access Bank is equally meeting its social responsibility obligations, particularly toward its host communities in Nasarawa State.

Nasarawa State

Nasarawa State, situated in North-Central Nigeria and bordering the Federal Capital Territory, is strategically positioned as a key administrative and transit hub. The state is endowed with natural resources and hosts numerous educational institutions, healthcare centres, and small-scale enterprises, making it a prime target for development-oriented corporate initiatives. Despite its potential, Nasarawa faces ongoing challenges in infrastructure, education, health, and economic empowerment—areas where CSR interventions are critically needed. Its proximity to Abuja, where Access Bank has a significant presence, further enhances the feasibility of implementing and monitoring CSR initiatives in the state.

Literature Review

This section reviews literature on corporate social responsibility (CSR), with a focus on its application within Nigeria's banking sector. It examines the theoretical foundations guiding CSR practices and highlights the strategic role financial institutions, particularly Access Bank play in advancing sustainable development through CSR initiatives.

Literature affirms that CSR is both a recognized and expected practice among Nigerian banks and their host communities (Ali, 2023). According to Adamolekun and Ogedengbe (2020), banks allocate portions of their profits to community development projects, including the construction of schools, roads, healthcare facilities, and environmental protection efforts. However, with CSR spending typically below 3% of post-tax profits, Idowu (2014) argues that the level of commitment remains inadequate, especially when compared with practices in developed countries. Lawal et al. (2018) further note that CSR implementation by Nigerian banks is statistically weak, while Amodu (2018) attributes the ineffectiveness of CSR to poor regulation and limited corporate will. To address these challenges, Issifu et al. (2016) call for collaborative policymaking between stakeholders and government agencies to ensure sector-wide accountability. Additionally, Lawal et al. (2018) highlight the divergence in community perception regarding CSR impact—some acknowledge its benefits while others find it lacking. Emphasizing this, Ali (2023) recommends more focused, structured, and impactful CSR initiatives that genuinely improve the welfare of beneficiaries.

CSR and Community Development

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has progressed from basic philanthropy to a more strategic focus on sustainable community development (Nnodim & Eseadi, 2019). This approach allows businesses to engage meaningfully with host communities by addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. Community development, as a core CSR strategy, helps foster goodwill and long-term stakeholder trust (Carroll & Shabana, 2015). Key strategies include partnering with NGOs and government bodies, investing in education and skills training, and supporting infrastructure development such as schools and healthcare facilities (Porter & Kramer, 2014; Matten & Moon, 2014). By adopting these initiatives, businesses not only uplift communities but also create shared value that benefits both the firm and society.

Gains of CSR for Business

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is increasingly seen as a key concern in the business world, with firms seeking recognition for their social commitments (Coelho et al., 2022). CSR benefits both communities and corporations by enhancing internal culture and external reputation (Marwan, 2015). Studies show a positive link between CSR engagement and firm performance, suggesting that meeting stakeholder expectations can offer competitive advantage. Coelho et al. (2022) note that companies adopting sustainable practices earn greater trust from stakeholders such as employees, customers, and local communities. Marwan (2015) emphasizes that CSR should be viewed as a strategic investment, not a cost, with reputation serving as a proxy for CSR success. Similarly, Team Goodera (2023) stresses that in today's socially aware marketplace, consumers expect businesses to be accountable for their societal and environmental impact.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Stakeholder Theory, which advocates for organizations to account for the interests of all parties affected by their operations, not just shareholders. The term "stakeholder" was first introduced in a 1963 memorandum by the Stanford Research Institute to challenge the dominant shareholder-centric business model (Hawrysz & Maj, 2017). Edward Freeman later formalized the theory in 1984, arguing that successful businesses must engage a broader network of stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and shareholders (Freeman & Reed, 1983).

Stakeholder Theory asserts that businesses operate within a complex web of relationships, and that organizational success depends on maintaining the trust, loyalty, and cooperation of all these groups (Hartman, 2005; Idowu & Ladoke, 2014). A socially responsible company, therefore, is one that integrates stakeholder interests into decision-making processes, ensuring that its strategies create value not just for investors, but for the wider society. This perspective aligns closely with CSR principles, as it provides a practical and ethical framework for managing social and environmental obligations (Hawrysz & Maj, 2017; Nikolova & Arsic, 2017).

Moreover, the theory holds that stakeholder engagement enhances corporate legitimacy, innovation, competitiveness, and long-term performance (Nikolova & Arsic, 2017). Without the involvement of stakeholders through their knowledge, talent, feedback, and support, CSR initiatives are unlikely to succeed.

Despite its strengths, Stakeholder Theory has faced criticism. Lee (2023) argues that Freeman's broad definition of stakeholders, which can include entities as varied as governments, competitors, animals, and even terrorists, creates challenges in prioritization. This ambiguity may result in managerial confusion and ethical dilemmas, particularly when stakeholder interests conflict. Additionally, expanding fiduciary duties to a wide stakeholder base may raise questions about feasibility and fairness.

Nonetheless, the theory remains a highly relevant lens for CSR studies, especially in the context of Access Bank's CSR activities in Nasarawa State. Here, stakeholders primarily include the local communities and residents who are directly or indirectly impacted by the bank's development initiatives. By applying Stakeholder Theory, this study assesses how well Access Bank aligns its CSR practices with the expectations and needs of its host communities.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a survey research design to gather data using structured questionnaires, a method suitable for generalizing findings from a sample to a larger population (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). The questionnaire's reliability was confirmed through Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a high internal consistency score of 0.932, indicating excellent reliability (Taber, 2018).

Data were collected from four LGAs in Nasarawa State, namely; Akwanga, Keffi, Karu, and Lafia, where Access Bank operates. Using the Taro Yamane formula with a population (N) of 1,161,222 and a 5% margin of error (e = 0.05), a sample size of 400 was determined. The calculation is as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} = \frac{1{,}161{,}222}{1+1{,}161{,}222(0.0025)} \approx 400$$

A random sampling technique ensured equal representation across population groups (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2011). Respondents included Access Bank staff, civil servants, students, business owners, and community members. Of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 365 were returned and analyzed using descriptive statistics, yielding a 91% response rate.

RESULTS

The first segment of data presentation focuses on demographic data of respondents', while the second segment focuses on thematic data and how it addresses the research objectives of the study

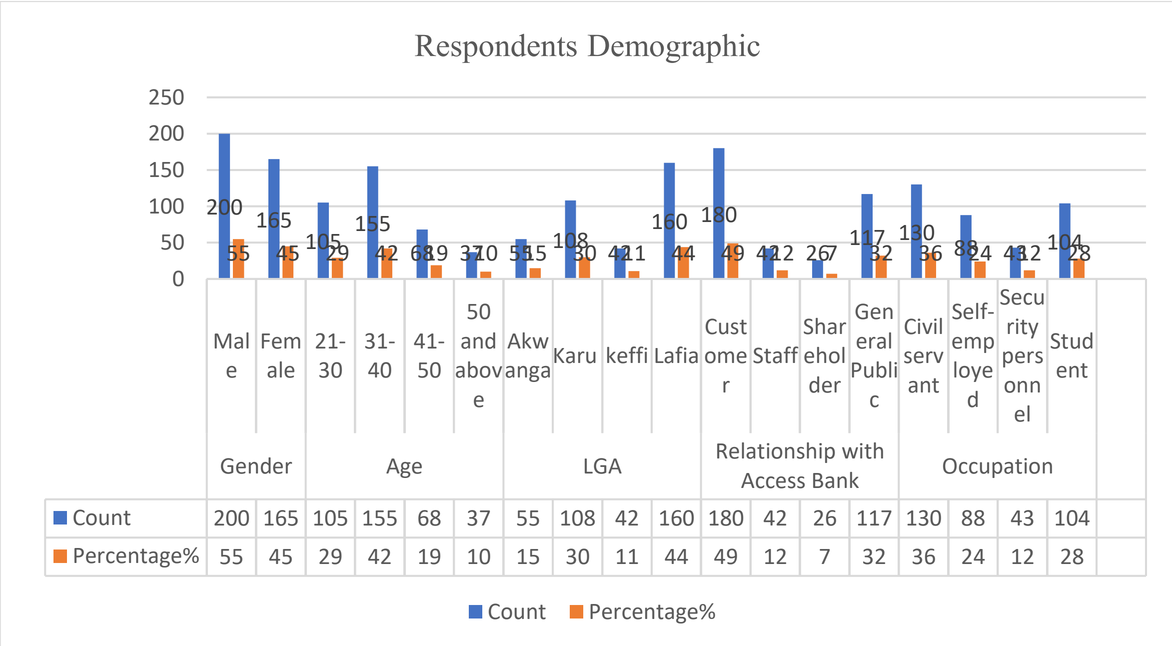

Figure 1: Demographic data of respondents

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data from figure 1 above shows that out of the 365 respondents, gender representation was fairly balanced, with 55% male and 45% female. A large majority (90%) were within the youth to middle-aged adult range, indicating active engagement from working-age individuals, while only 10% were aged 51 and above. Lafia LGA had the highest participation (44%), followed by Karu (30%), Akwanga (15%), and Keffi (11%).

Regarding relationship with Access Bank, most respondents were customers (49%), suggesting that the study captures direct stakeholder feedback. The general public accounted for 32%, Access Bank staff 12%, and shareholders 7%. In terms of occupation, civil servants (36%) and students (28%) were the largest groups, with lower representation from self-employed individuals (24%) and security personnel (12%). These demographics reflect a well-informed respondent pool capable of providing relevant insights on CSR practices.

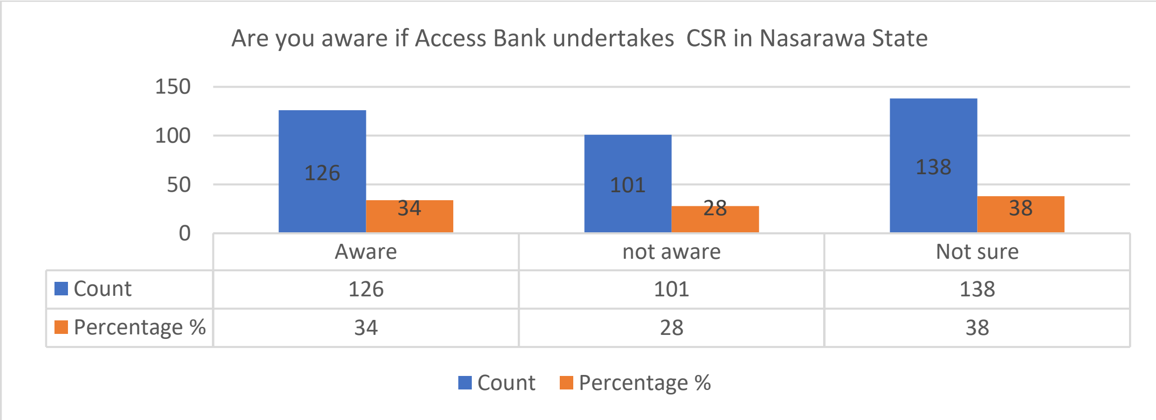

Figure 2: Respondents' awareness of Access Bank CSR implementation in Nasarawa State

Source: field survey, 2025

From the data presented in figure 2 only 34% of respondents indicated awareness of Access Bank's CSR initiatives in Nasarawa State, while 28% were unaware and 38% were unsure. This means 66% of respondents lack clear knowledge of the bank's CSR activities, highlighting a significant communication gap and poor visibility of CSR efforts within the host communities.

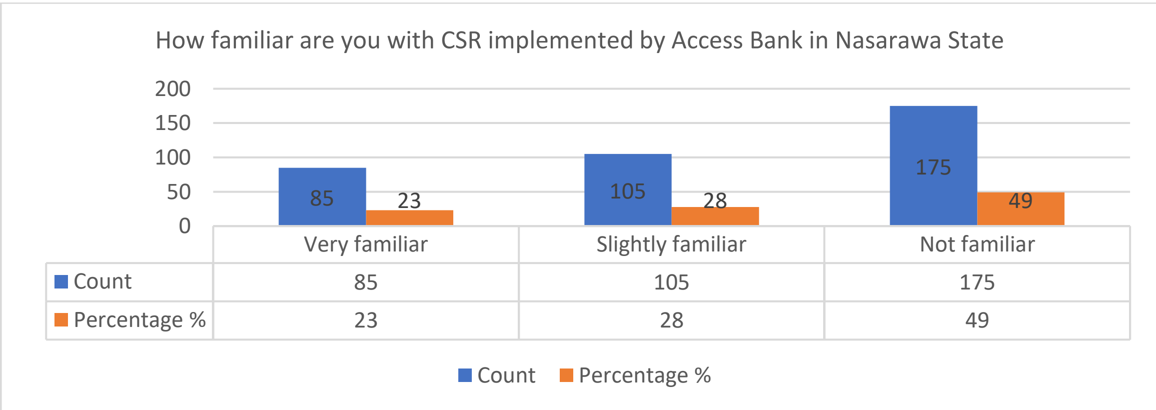

Figure 3: respondents' familiarity with CSR implemented by Access Bank in Nasarawa State

Source: field Survey, 2025

From the chart above only 34% of respondents indicated awareness of Access Bank's CSR initiatives in Nasarawa State, while 28% were unaware and 38% were unsure. This means 66% of respondents lack clear knowledge of the bank's CSR activities, highlighting a significant communication gap and poor visibility of CSR efforts within the host communities.

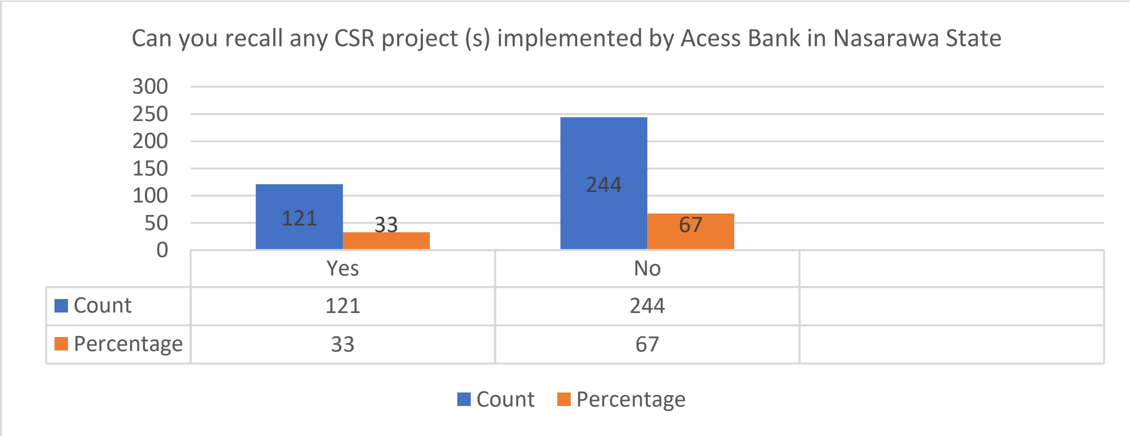

Figure 4: Respondents' Recall of CSR project (s) implemented by Access Bank in Nasarawa State

Source: Field Survey, 2025

In figure 4 above, the data reveals that only 33% of respondents could recall any CSR project by Access Bank, while 67% could not. This low recall rate aligns with earlier findings of limited awareness and familiarity, suggesting that the bank's CSR efforts may lack visibility, scale, or direct community impact. It points to a need for more impactful and well-communicated CSR initiatives in Nasarawa State.

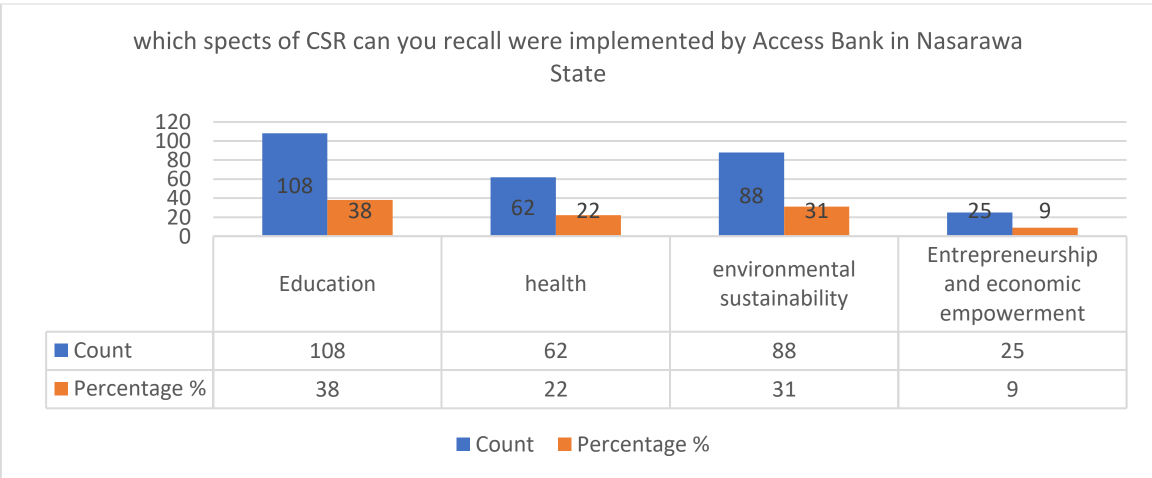

Figure 5: Aspects of CSR implemented by Access Bank in Nasarawa State as recalled by respondents

Source: Field Survey 2025

The data from figure 5 shows that among respondents who recalled CSR activities, education was the most identified area (38%), followed by environmental sustainability (31%) and health (22%), while economic empowerment ranked lowest at 9%. Although only 34% initially reported awareness of Access Bank's CSR, some who previously claimed no awareness could still identify specific initiatives. This suggests a level of passive or indirect recognition—where people notice CSR efforts but do not associate them with the bank or label them as "CSR."

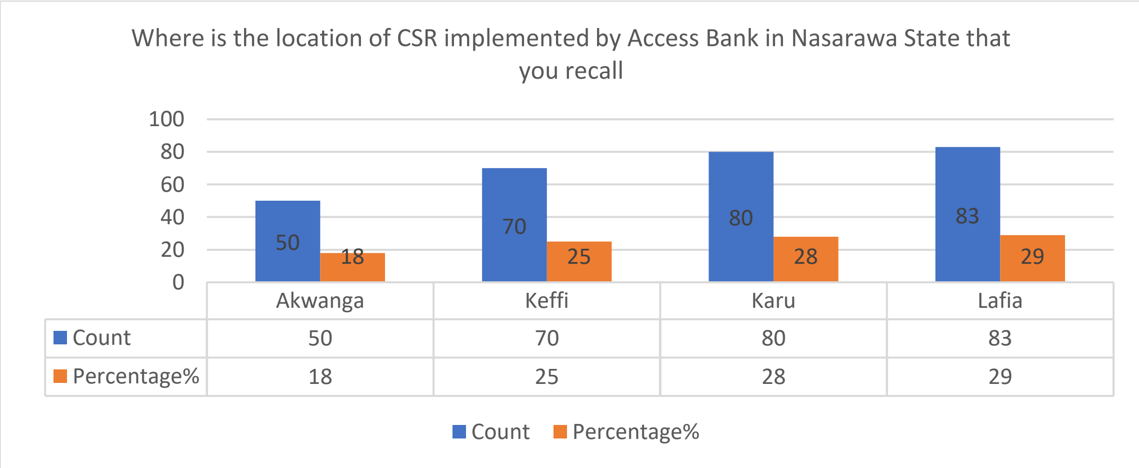

Figure 6: Location of CSR implemented in Nasarawa State as recalled by respondents

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data in the above chart reveals that CSR activities by Access Bank were most recognized in Lafia (29%) and Karu (28%), followed by Keffi (25%), while Akwanga had the lowest recall at 18%. This suggests that CSR visibility or impact is highest in areas with larger respondent representation. Although distribution appears relatively balanced, the stronger recognition in Lafia and Karu may reflect either more projects or greater community awareness in those LGAs.

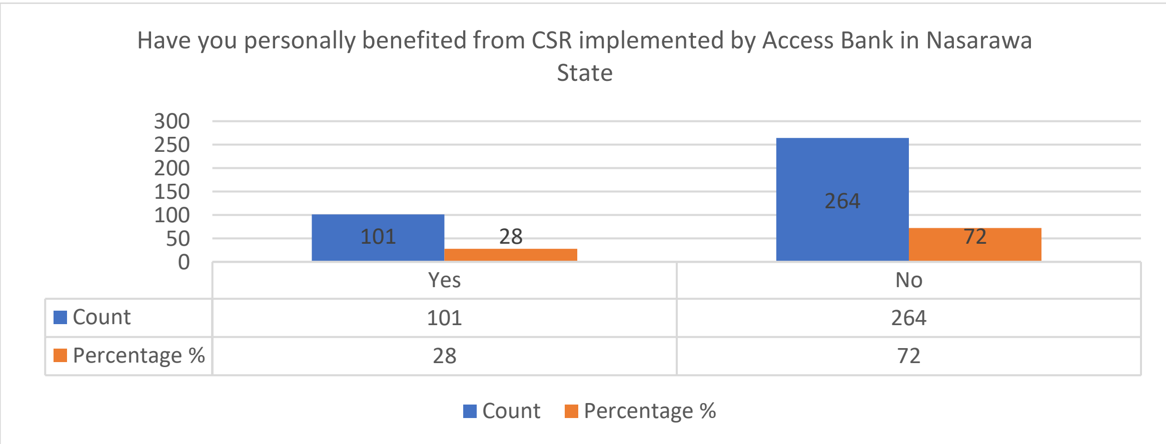

Figure 7: Respondents who personally benefitted from CSR implemented by Access Bank in Nasarawa state.

Source: Field survey, 2025

From the data in figure 7 only 28% of respondents reported directly benefiting from Access Bank's CSR initiatives, while 72% had not. This indicates a limited reach or impact at the individual level. The gap between CSR recall and personal benefit suggests that while some initiatives are visible, they may not be widespread, personal, or well-communicated to the broader community.

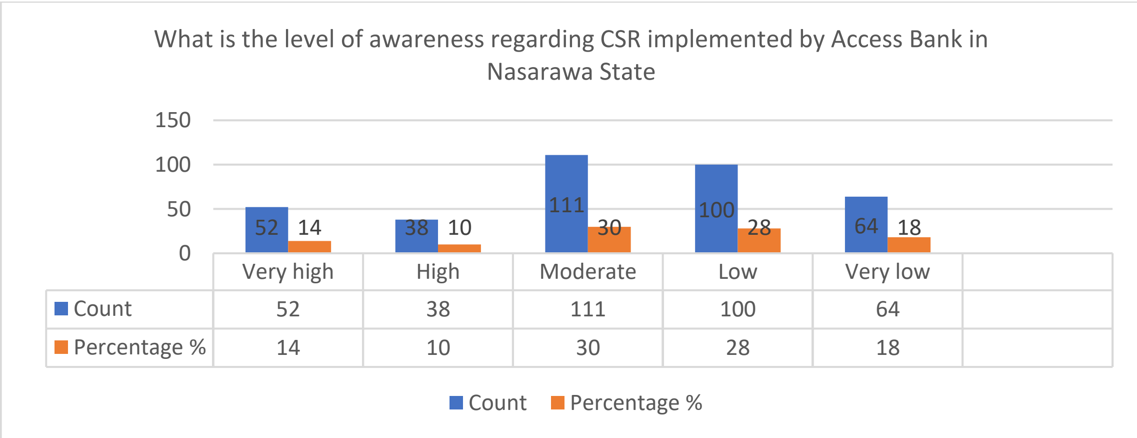

Figure 8: The level of awareness regarding CSR of Access Bank in Nasarawa state

Source: Field survey, 2025

From the data presented in figure 8 only 24% of respondents rated awareness of Access Bank's CSR as high, while 30% perceived it as moderate, and 46% believed it was low or very low. This suggests that public awareness of the bank's CSR in Nasarawa State is generally weak. The findings highlight a communication gap and limited visibility, indicating that current efforts may not be effectively publicized or reaching the broader community.

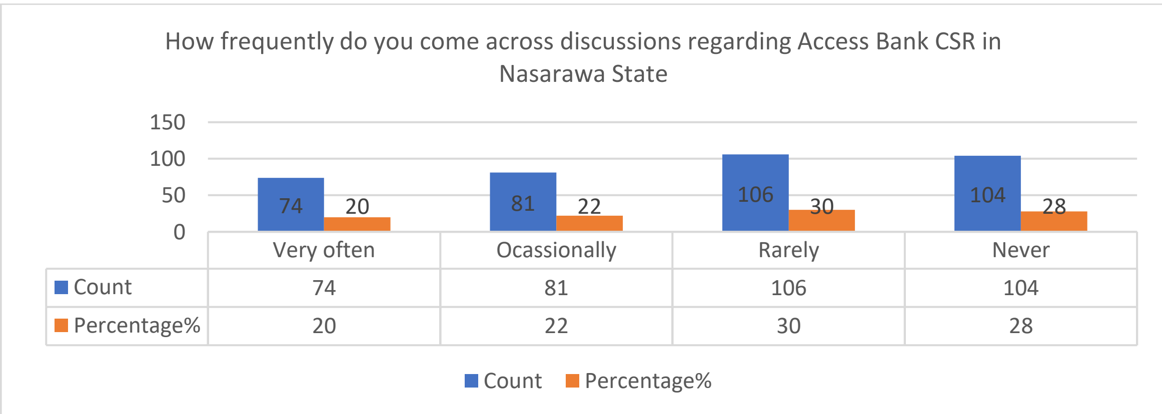

Figure 9: How frequently respondents came across discussions regarding Access Bank CSR in Nasarawa State.

Source: Field survey, 2025

From the chart above the data reveals that only 42% of respondents reported hearing discussions about Access Bank's CSR initiatives, while 58% said such conversations were rare or nonexistent. This indicates that CSR is not a common topic among the public in Nasarawa State. The limited discussion suggests low engagement and visibility, implying that many people either lack sufficient information or do not view the initiatives as impactful enough to talk about.

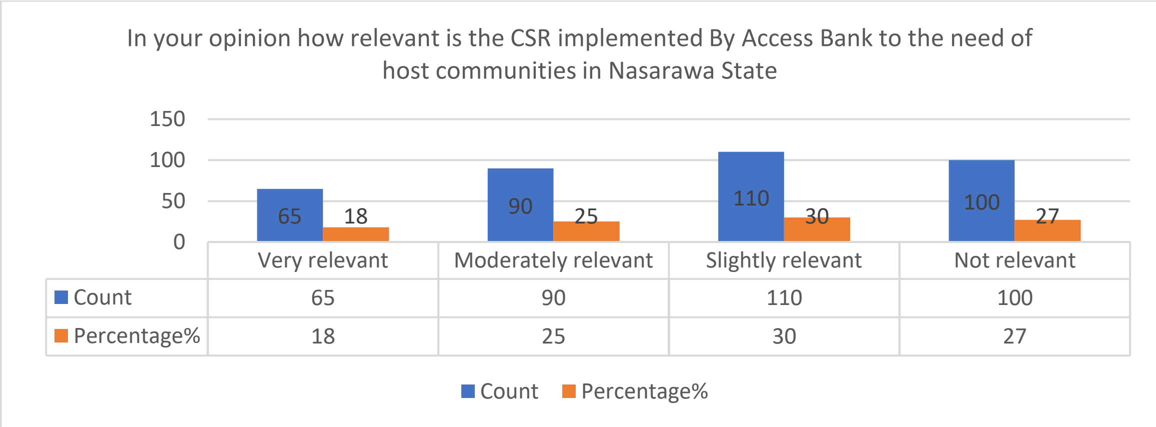

Figure 10: Relevance of the CSR implemented by Access Bank to the need of the host communities in Nasarawa State.

Source: Field survey, 2025

Data from the study shows that 43% of respondents viewed Access Bank's CSR activities as relevant to community needs, while 57% felt they were only slightly relevant or not relevant at all. The highest response category "slightly relevant" (30%) suggests that while some efforts exist, they fall short of expectations. The 27% who found CSR efforts irrelevant highlights a disconnect between community priorities and project focus. This points to a need for greater community involvement in CSR planning to ensure initiatives are better aligned with local needs.

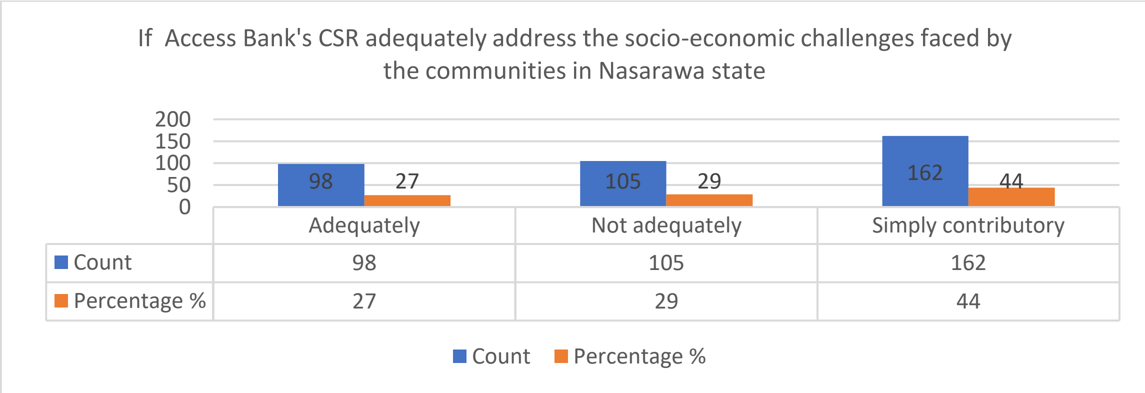

Figure 11: Does Access Bank's CSR adequately address the socio-economic challenges faced by the communities in Nasarawa State.

Source: Field survey, 2025

Data from the study reveals that 27% of respondents felt that Access Bank's CSR adequately addresses socio-economic challenges in Nasarawa State. A larger portion (44%) viewed the initiatives as merely "contributory," implying that while helpful, they are not transformative. Meanwhile, 29% believed the CSR efforts were inadequate. The close margin between "adequate" and "not adequate" reflects divided public opinion, with a slight lean toward dissatisfaction. Overall, the findings suggest that Access Bank's CSR provides short-term support but lacks the depth and scale needed for lasting socio-economic impact.

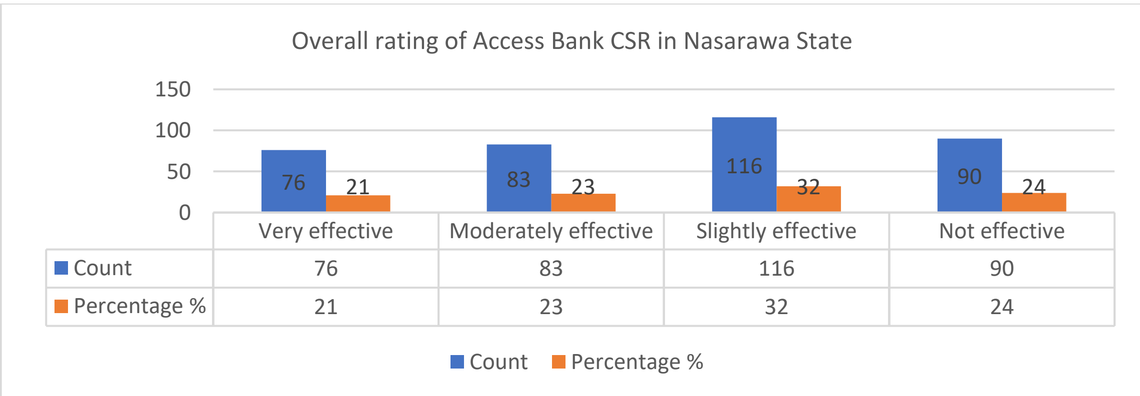

Figure 12: Respondents overall rating of Access Bank's CSR in Nasarawa State

Source: Field survey, 2025

From the data presented in figure 12 Respondents rated Access Bank's CSR in Nasarawa State as mostly underwhelming: 32% said it was slightly effective, 24% viewed it as not effective, and 23% rated it moderately effective. Only 21% considered the CSR efforts very effective. These results show that public perception of the bank's CSR is generally lukewarm, with most respondents believing the initiatives lack strong impact. This highlights the need for improved planning, visibility, and alignment with community needs.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study have been discussed thematically to answer the research questions as raised by the study.

The study confirms that Access Bank conducts CSR activities in Nasarawa State, but their visibility and impact are limited. While initiatives exist in areas such as education, health, environmental sustainability, and economic empowerment, the reach is narrow and often goes unrecognized by many residents. This reflects findings by Ali (2023), Idowu & Ladoka (2014), and Lawal et al. (2018), who observed that Nigerian banks engage in CSR but at relatively low levels of visibility and impact.

Education was the most recalled CSR area (38%), followed by environmental sustainability (31%), and health (22%), with economic empowerment trailing at 9%. These findings align with Adamolekun & Ogedengbe (2020) and Celik et al. (2019), who highlighted similar CSR focus areas among corporate organizations.

Awareness levels of CSR efforts were generally low, only 24% of respondents rated awareness as high or very high, while 46% rated it low. This indicates that despite possibly impactful initiatives, poor communication and outreach hinder public recognition and appreciation of CSR efforts.

On relevance, respondents were divided: 43% rated CSR as relevant (very or moderately), while 57% saw it as only slightly or not relevant. This suggests that although some projects address community needs, many do not align with local priorities. The study supports Lawal et al. (2018) and Oruaze et al. (2022) in recommending a reevaluation of CSR projects to better reflect community development challenges and improve their effectiveness and acceptance.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms Access Bank's involvement in CSR initiatives in Nasarawa State, especially in education and healthcare. However, limited public awareness, weak publicity, and minimal community engagement have reduced the perceived relevance and effectiveness of these efforts. Despite addressing some community needs, the lack of visibility has restricted impact. These findings highlight the need for stronger communication strategies and deeper community involvement to enhance CSR outreach and effectiveness.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Enhance Communication and Visibility: Access Bank should adopt more effective communication strategies such as targeted media campaigns, community outreach programs, and active social media engagement to improve public awareness of its CSR activities.

2. Community-Informed Project Selection: Involving community members in identifying CSR priorities will help ensure that initiatives reflect actual needs, increasing both relevance and acceptance.

3. Expand Economic Empowerment Efforts: Given the low recall of economic empowerment projects, the bank should scale up initiatives in entrepreneurship, skills development, and financial literacy, alongside stronger publicity to boost impact and visibility.

4. Strengthen Partnerships: Collaborating with local NGOs, community-based organizations, and government agencies can help improve CSR project implementation, reach, and sustainability.

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