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Practices of Corporate Social Responsibility in the Namibian Fishing Industry and their Impact on Community Development

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ABSTRACT

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Land Reform in Namibia considers Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities as a major criterion for the allocation of fishing quotas, encouraging all fishing rights holders to implement sound CSR strategies for benefit-sharing with communities. Despite this encouragement, CSR remains voluntary, leading to concerns about the social implications of these initiatives on local communities and limited evidence of how fishing rights holders integrate CSR into their business operations. This study investigated the practices of CSR among fishing companies operating in Walvis Bay, Namibia, aiming to determine their contribution to voluntary regulatory compliance, the incorporation of CSR practices into business operations, and their engagement with locals to support community development initiatives. The research employed a descriptive mixed-methods approach, utilising open ended questionnaires completed by 31 respondents from fishing companies and interviews with 20 community members. Findings indicated that most CSR initiatives by fishing companies primarily promote social, philanthropic, and ethical considerations. Companies utilize various strategies, such as having clear plans and guidelines for CSR activity planning but face major challenges such as financial constraints and a lack of expertise during implementation. Major finding revealed that support provided by these companies to communities is largely short-term and not sustainable to meet the growing needs of the community. The study recommends that fishing companies involve communities at all levels of CSR planning and implementation to enhance effectiveness and sustainability.

Keywords: Community, Corporate social responsibility, Fishing companies

1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained increasing attention globally as an integral part of business discourse, representing an organization's commitment to its stakeholders (Carroll & Brown, 2018; Zukauskas et al., 2018). The concept is defined as a self-regulating business model, which helps a company to be socially accountable to itself, its stakeholders, and the public by voluntarily integrating social and environmental concerns into its operations for community benefit (Fontaine, 2013). Engaging in socially responsible practices can enhance an organization's brand trust and respect among stakeholders, potentially leading to a competitive advantage and increased economic returns (Mahmood & Bashir, 2020). While prevalent in Middle Eastern countries due to cultural values (Rettab & Mellahi, 2019), the concept of CSR is still emerging in many developing nations, often observed predominantly in the private sector, particularly the mining industry (Mostert et al., 2016; Ansu-Mensah et al., 2021). Globally, businesses, non-profits, and individuals participate in CSR to advance social and economic conditions, as exemplified by international COVID-19 vaccine donations (Mahmud et al., 2021).

In Namibia, the fishing industry is a cornerstone of the economy, contributing significantly to employment, export revenues, and food security. Given that Namibia's natural resources belong to all citizens, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Land Reform formerly known as the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR, 2021) considers CSR a vital criterion in allocating fishing quotas to rights holders, who exploit resources on behalf of the nation (Government Gazette, 2018). Many Namibian fishing companies have documented their commitment to CSR, aiming to improve socioeconomic status among stakeholders, and often pledge community outreach in their fishing rights applications (Erongo Enterprises, 2022; New Era, 2020). However, concerns have arisen regarding the social impact of these voluntary CSR initiatives on community development. Despite reported donations and sponsorships, former and current MFMR ministers have stated that fishing rights holders' CSR contributions are negligible compared to their profits, suggesting a lack of meaningful community support and limited benefit distribution (Immanuel, 2014; Mbathera, 2021). This perception, coupled with job losses in Walvis Bay due to reduced fishing quotas and new entrants with limited capacity, highlights a pressing need to investigate CSR commitments and practices in the Namibian fishing industry and their implications for community development (Nangolo & Alweendo, 2020). A lack of transparency and accountability further complicates the assessment of CSR effectiveness and long-term impact on local communities. Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by identifying current CSR practices, strategies, and challenges within the Namibian fishing industry, and evaluating their impact on community development in Walvis Bay.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility is rooted in the interplay of "Corporate," "Social," and "Responsibility." "Corporate" pertains to business entities (Jimenez et al., 2021), while "Social" emphasizes societal involvement and interdependence (Mertika et al., 2020). "Responsibility" refers to the obligation organizations bear towards society and the environment (Negru & Dolfma, 2022). Historically, CSR emerged from the recognition that corporations benefit significantly from society through drawing workforce, selling products, and generating profits, therefore creating an ethical obligation to reciprocate (Mahmud et al., 2021; Teasdale et al., 2013). CSR are company's initiatives that go beyond profit-making to address social, environmental, and ethical concerns (Axjonow, Ernstberger & Pott, 2018). In this context, CSR is often seen as a voluntary initiative by organizations, including fishing companies, to embed social and

environmental concerns into their operations for community benefit (Ansu-Mensah et al., 2021; Hadi & Uddin, 2021).

2.2 Significance of Engaging in CSR

CSR's prominence is underscored by its inclusion in high-profile platforms like the World Economic Forum and government agendas (Matten, 2006). Organizations pursue CSR for various reasons, including economic benefits, stakeholder relationship enhancement, response to pressure groups, and awareness of social and environmental impacts (Kotler & Lee, 2005; Branco & Rodrigues, 2006; Darnall et al., 2010; Azmat & Ha, 2013). It is believed that engaging in CSR can bolster corporate reputation, foster stakeholder trust, and create competitive advantages, ultimately contributing to long-term sustainability and profitability (Mahmood & Bashir, 2020; Husted, 2003).

2.3 Challenges in CSR Implementation

The CSR implementation faces significant hurdles globally, particularly in industries like mining and fishing (Mostert et al., 2016; Ansu-Mensah et al., 2021). Yuen and Lim (2016) identify barriers such as resource limitations, high costs, lack of regulatory frameworks, and absence of strategic vision. Financial resources are often insufficient, especially for small firms lacking dedicated CSR departments or expertise (Yuen & Lim, 2016). High costs associated with CSR activities can deter firms, particularly those with low profitability, from active participation (Aseghehey, 2018; Hariyani et al., 2022). Moreover, the voluntary nature of CSR in many regions, including Namibia, results in inconsistent corporate engagement due to the lack of mandated regulations or incentives (Agudelo et al., 2019). Additionally, a deficiency in strategic vision and top management commitment hampers effective CSR integration, with organizations often prioritising short-term profits over long-term societal benefits (Yuen & Lim, 2016; Ateş et al., 2020).

2.4 Impact of CSR on Community Development

CSR initiatives positively influence societal perceptions, fostering a reputation of responsibility and trustworthiness among stakeholders (Ansu-Mensah et al., 2021). It's believed that a strong CSR record can differentiate companies in competitive markets, attract customers, and strengthen community ties (Mahmood & Bashir, 2020; Husted, 2003). Carroll (1998) indicated that CSR encompasses four dimensions: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. Economically, businesses must be profitable to sustain CSR activities; legally, they must comply with laws; ethically, they should engage in fair and morally sound practices; and philanthropically, they should contribute to community welfare. These responsibilities collectively promote sustainable development and community well-being (Thacker, 2019; Lestari et al., 2019).

2.5 CSR in the Namibia Fishing Industry

Namibia's fishing sector significantly contributes to the economy, generating over N\$9 billion annually and providing employment for more than 15,000 people (Moyo, 2022). Despite its economic importance, CSR practices within this industry remain largely voluntary. Although CSR is a criterion for resource allocation and license issuance, actual contributions are minimal. Many rights holders pledge substantial contributions during licensing but deliver little in practice (Immanuel, 2014; Mbathera, 2021). Despite these efforts, industry-wide contributions remain insufficient, with government and industry stakeholders emphasizing the need for greater commitment to CSR for sustainable community development (Immanuel, 2014; Mbathera, 2021). This discrepancy highlights the need to evaluate CSR practices in Namibia's fishing industry and explore mechanisms to enhance community benefits and sustainable resource management.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study design

This study adopted an exploratory convergent mixed-method design, collecting and analysing both qualitative and quantitative data concurrently yet separately, and integrating the findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility practices in the Namibian fishing industry. The research was underpinned by a pragmatist philosophical paradigm, which acknowledges multiple realities and supports the use of mixed methods to best address the research problem (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Pragmatism research was considered appropriate for this study because it considers the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods to determine which works best for the particular research problem that is being investigated (Brierley, 2017; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

3.2 Target population

The target population included senior managers from Namibian fishing companies and community members with physical addresses in Walvis Bay. Out of a total of 298 fishing rights holders, approximately 65 companies indicated a physical address in Walvis Bay. Senior managers were chosen due to their figurehead roles in companies, while community leaders or members were selected as potential recipients of CSR initiatives. Non-probability sampling methods, specifically convenience and snowball sampling, were utilized for participant selection. Convenience sampling was used to reach fishing industry respondents who were readily accessible to the researcher, addressing limitations in accessing contact information for all companies. Snowball sampling helped recruit community leaders, building upon initial contacts to expand the sample size.

3.3 Sample size

The sample size for the quantitative component involved 31 respondents from fishing companies out of a targeted 56 senior managers, based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table of determining sample size from a given population. For the qualitative component, 20 community members or leaders were interviewed, with saturation achieved after 15 participants. Research instruments included questionnaires with both open-ended and closed-ended questions for fishing company managers, and an interview guide administered through face-to-face semi-structured interviews for community leaders. The questionnaires comprised three sections: Section A collected biographical information (qualification, position, gender, length of service), and Sections B and C gathered qualitative data on CSR practices, implementation strategies, and challenges. The interview guide for community leaders included two sections: Section A for biographical data (institution type, position, gender, length of time in Walvis Bay), and Section B to assess the state of CSR on community development.

3.4 Data collection procedures

It involved emailing questionnaires to fishing company managers, followed by hand-delivery for non-responders, completed within 15 days. Interviews with community leaders were conducted face-to-face over 5 days, averaging 20-30 minutes each, utilising probing techniques to elicit detailed information and ensuring flexibility and consistency.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Open-ended questions were analyzed using content analysis based on Elo and Kyngäs (2008)'s framework, performed in Excel to organize, code, and categorize text data, presenting results as descriptive statistics (frequency distribution and percentages). Quantitative data from closed-ended questions was summarized using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 28.0 and Microsoft Excel, presented as means, standard deviations, or

frequency percentages. Interview data was transcribed, organized in Microsoft Excel, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke (2006)'s thematic analysis framework to identify patterns and themes. All analyses considered the study's objectives.

4.1 Validity and reliability

Respondent validation was used to ensure the accuracy of qualitative findings, where participants confirmed their responses. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Cho & Kim, 2015), yielding a value of 0.71 with 26 items, indicating acceptable and appropriate internal consistency for the research instrument. Trustworthiness in qualitative research was ensured through credibility (using knowledgeable top managers and community leaders), transferability (noting the researcher's expertise in the Namibian fishery, but limiting generalizability beyond Walvis Bay), dependability (logical documentation and academic supervision), and confirmability (deriving findings solely from respondent data and using objective software for analysis). Participant privacy and confidentiality were protected, with assurance of voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time. All collected data, both physical and electronic, is securely stored and will be destroyed after five years.

4.2 Descriptive Information of Respondents

The study achieved a 55% response rate from fishing companies (31 out of 56 targeted companies) and a 100% response rate from community members, reaching saturation at 15 participants out of 20 interviewed. The 55% response rate for fishing companies is considered acceptable for social science studies (Ali et al., 2021). For fishing companies, the majority of respondents held Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and General Manager positions (25.81% each), followed by Directors (22.58%) and Executive Managers (16.13%). The sample was predominantly male (80.6%). A significant portion of the fishing companies (32.3%) had been in operation for over 10 years, and more than 71% of respondents had been in their current positions for over 5 years, indicating substantial experience in their respective organizations. For community members, respondents represented a diverse range of institutions, including schools (30%) (principals and teachers), individuals (20%), and churches (10%). The majority of community respondents were female (75%). All community respondents had resided in Walvis Bay for at least five years, making them ideal informants.

4.3 Documentation of CSR Activities

Annual reports were the most frequently cited documentation source for CSR activities (37.04%), followed by company newsletters (16.67%) and company websites (14.81%). Notably, 7.41% of respondents indicated that their CSR activities were not formally documented beyond board resolutions, reflecting the voluntary nature of CSR in Namibia.

4.4 Components of Corporate Social Responsibility

The study revealed that the majority of CSR initiatives undertaken by Walvis Bay fishing companies aligned primarily with social (31.0%) and philanthropic (21.4%) dimensions, followed by ethical considerations (16.7%). The environmental dimension had the fewest aligned CSR activities (7.1%; Table 1).

Table 1: Corporate social responsibility components executed by fishing companies in Walvis Bay

CSR dimension /levels	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Economics (make a profit)	6	14.3
Ethical (be ethical)	7	16.7

Legal (obey the law)	4	9.5
Social (achieve society's interest)	13	31.0
Philanthropic (be a good corporate citizen)	9	21.4
Environment (environmental stewardship)	3	7.1
Total	42	100

In terms of specific activities performed by fishing companies, education received the highest priority (30.4%), including support for pre-primary education, stationery, back-to-school bags, university work-integrated learning, and classroom construction. Community development initiatives were second (17.4%), encompassing donations to needy individuals and informal settlements, cash assistance, event sponsorships, and healthcare item donations. Other supported areas included youth development (10.9%), health (10.9%), women empowerment (8.7%), agriculture (6.5%), and environmental activities (6.5%), with water and sanitation receiving the least support (2.2%).

4.5 Strategies for Implementing CSR Programs

Using Hermansson and Olofsson (2009)'s framework, the study assessed CSR implementation strategies. Key strategies agreed upon by respondents (mean scores > 4.0) included having defined goals, plans, and guidelines for the planning phase of CSR activities ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.77$), CSR commitment from all levels of management ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.74$), and reporting progress to improve CSR implementation ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.84$). However, respondents disagreed that their companies offered ongoing CSR training and education ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.09$) or utilized reward systems to motivate employees in CSR ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 0.89$). Overall, the average mean for strategies was 3.32, indicating a neutral sentiment. Furthermore, companies generally keep records of CSR activities ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.84$) and records of beneficiaries ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.73$). However, it was reported not adequately collecting data on the effects of CSR initiatives on stakeholders ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 0.77$) or effectively communicating CSR commitments with stakeholders ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 0.91$).

4.6 Reasons for CSR Engagement

The primary reason cited by fishing companies for engaging in CSR initiatives was to improve the company's image (32%). Other significant reasons included fulfilling requirements for fishing rights applications (23%) and satisfying stakeholders (19%). Only 16% indicated reducing environmental impact as a reason (Figure 1).

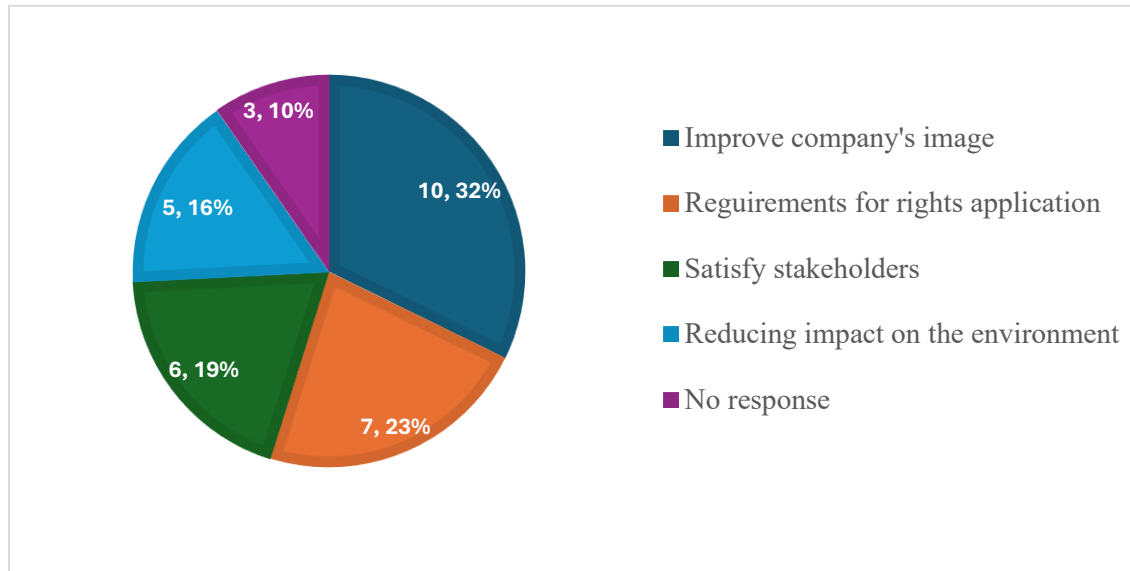


Figure 1: Major reasons why fishing companies in Walvis Bay participate in CSR initiatives

4.7 Challenges in Implementing CSR Initiatives

Financial constraints were identified as the major challenge to effective CSR implementation ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.86$). Other challenges, reflected by neutral responses (mean scores around 3.0), included lack of human knowledge and expertise ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.11$), time required for implementation ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.03$), lack of strategies for CSR projects ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.23$), and absence of clear CSR guidelines ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.09$). Respondents strongly disagreed that their companies did not recognize the values or benefits of CSR or had a narrow perception of such initiatives.

4.8 Impact of CSR on Community Development

Community members reported receiving various forms of voluntary donations, primarily food donations (42.31%) such as canned fish, hake fillets, fruits, and vegetables. Other contributions included protective gear during Covid-19 (26.92%), clothing and blankets (15.38%), and consumables (7.69%), with only 7.69% receiving cash donations. While 100% of community respondents agreed that CSR initiatives had an impact, they unanimously stated that the contributions were insufficient and temporary, not meeting the community's growing needs. The majority (82%) received donations only once, typically during emergencies or fundraising events, with only a few receiving monthly donations for limited periods. A significant finding was that 54% of community members were not consulted by fishing companies before initiating CSR projects, and 48% were not invited to preparatory meetings. However, 29.16% reported being contacted by fishing companies during the quota application process for reference letters. Furthermore, 85% of respondents indicated no formalized agreements between recipients and fishing companies, suggesting potential beneficiaries are merely listed. Community members universally appreciated any assistance but stressed the need for long-term commitment, consistent donations, and genuine engagement to identify community needs. They also made an unequivocal call for the government to mandate CSR participation among fishing companies.

5. DISCUSSION

This study provides critical empirical insights into Corporate Social Responsibility practices within the Namibian fishing industry, particularly in Walvis Bay, offering a comprehensive understanding of their motivations, implementation strategies, challenges, and perceived impact on community development. The findings confirm that while CSR is recognized and engaged in, significant gaps exist between stated commitments and actual, sustainable benefit for communities. The prevalence of social, philanthropic, and ethical dimensions in the fishing companies' CSR activities aligns with broader global trends, particularly noticeable during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, where businesses often prioritize immediate social welfare. The high emphasis on education and community development as primary targets for CSR initiatives is consistent with findings from other developing countries, such as India, where education is also a leading focus (Bala, 2018). However, the notably low focus on environmental stewardship among fishing companies, despite their direct reliance on marine resources and the pressing issue of climate change in Namibia, raises concerns (Keja-Kaereho & Tjizu, 2019). This indicates a potential misalignment between corporate responsibility and ecological sustainability in the industry, which is crucial for its long-term viability.

Regarding implementation strategies, fishing companies demonstrate a foundational understanding of CSR planning, evidenced by having defined goals, plans, and guidelines, along with management commitment and reporting processes. This suggests a degree of internal organization for CSR. However, significant weaknesses emerged, particularly the lack of ongoing CSR training and education for employees and the absence of reward systems to motivate CSR engagement. Furthermore, a critical deficiency lies in companies' failure to collect data on the effects of CSR initiatives on stakeholders and to effectively communicate CSR commitments with the general public. This lack of monitoring, evaluation, and transparency is a major impediment, as highlighted by Hermansson and Olofsson (2009)'s CSR implementation framework, which underscores the importance of communication and evaluation for process improvement. The limited communication with stakeholders also contradicts the fundamental principles of stakeholder theory, which posits that corporations should engage with all stakeholders and consider their interests in decision-making processes.

The primary motivation for CSR engagement, cited by fishing companies as improving company image and fulfilling requirements for fishing rights applications, aligns with broader literature suggesting that CSR is often driven by perceived benefits such as enhanced reputation, competitive advantage, and stakeholder satisfaction (Bowen et al., 2020; Barauskaite & Streimikiene, 2021; Mahmood & Bashir, 2020; Bahta et al., 2021; Costa & Fonseca, 2022). The emphasis on fulfilling fishing rights application requirements suggests that CSR may sometimes be treated as a compliance checkbox rather than a deep, intrinsic commitment to community development. This is further reinforced by the concerns raised by the MFMR and the general public about the "negligible" contributions relative to company profits. While some scholars argue that companies might prioritize financial value over CSR due to high implementation costs (Hariyani et al., 2022; Chairer et al., 2005), this perspective may not be sustainable in an era demanding greater corporate accountability.

The study's findings regarding challenges, particularly financial constraints, resonate with obstacles commonly encountered in CSR implementation globally, as noted by Yuen and Lim (2016), Aseghehey (2018), and Hariyani et al. (2022). The reported lack of human knowledge, expertise, dedicated time, and clear CSR guidelines further indicate structural and operational barriers to effective CSR integration, similar to issues found in other contexts (Yuen & Lim, 2016).

Crucially, the study uncovered that while fishing companies provide donations in various forms (e.g., food, protective gear), this assistance is predominantly short-term and unsustainable, failing to meet the communities' growing needs. This temporary nature of support, often provided only during emergencies or fundraising events, underscores a significant disconnect between corporate efforts and community aspirations for long-term development. The lack of consultation with community stakeholders prior to initiating CSR projects is a critical failing. This practice, where communities are approached for reference letters during quota applications but excluded from project planning, suggests a transactional rather than a truly participatory approach to CSR, directly conflicting with stakeholder theory's emphasis on building relationships and genuine engagement. The absence of formalized agreements between companies and beneficiaries further compounds the issue, contributing to the perception of inconsistent and arbitrary support. The strong call from community members for mandatory CSR initiatives from the government reflects a societal expectation for fishing companies to contribute more meaningfully and sustainably to national development, moving beyond voluntary discretion.

In summary, despite some positive intentions and documented efforts, the Namibian fishing industry's CSR practices are characterized by a focus on image, short-term donations, and limited community engagement. This highlights a need for greater transparency, accountability, and a shift towards more sustainable, community-driven development initiatives to truly leverage the industry's significant economic contribution for broader societal benefit.

5.1 Implications for Theory

In general, organisations engage in CSR activities to enhance their public image, strengthen stakeholder relationships, and promote awareness of social and environmental issues. In the context of fisheries, some companies are motivated by regulatory criteria, though not mandatory in Namibia, such as quota allocation, while others view CSR as their moral responsibility. This suggests that incorporating CSR into business strategy can influence brand development, stakeholder trust, and competitive advantage, thereby supporting theories that link corporate social responsibility with long-term value creation. However, considering the high costs associated with CSR engagement can lead to strategic trade-offs, such as cost reduction, which may challenge existing theoretical models that emphasize CSR's positive impact. Therefore, this highlights the need for further theoretical refinement to account for cost-related barriers and contextual factors influencing CSR adoption in the fishing industry.

5.2 Implications for Management, Policy and Practice

The government, specifically the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Land Reform, should consider developing policies that make CSR initiatives mandatory for fishing companies. These policies should include clear assessment frameworks to monitor and evaluate all new initiatives and engagements promised during fishing quota applications. This will compel fishing companies to be more responsible and meaningfully contribute to community and national development. There is also a need for fishing companies should develop sustainable strategies that foster consistent support for communities through binding commitments. This shift from temporary, once-off donations to long-term agreements will significantly improve the general living standards in Walvis Bay and surrounding areas. Moreover, to enhance the effective implementation of CSR activities and ensure they are more beneficial for the development of the Walvis Bay community, fishing companies should actively involve community members in the planning, formulation, implementation, and evaluation of CSR activities. This participatory approach will bridge information gaps, address specific community needs, and ensure that all community members, including those currently feeling neglected, receive appropriate support.

5.3 Implications for Future Research

It is argued that CSR improves company's image, resulting in competitive advantage and improved financial performance. However, this study only examined the impact of CSR on community development. As a result, it is suggested that future research investigate the relationship between a fishing company's CSR engagement and its financial performance. In terms of the methodological approach used in this study, it is suggested that future research should attempt to use an interview guide as a research instrument to collect data from fishing company managers. This will aid in probing their responses and gaining a thorough understanding of the CSR initiatives, as well as combating nonresponse bias to the survey or some questions in the questionnaires, as observed in this study.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable empirical evidence on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices within the Namibian fishing industry, particularly focusing on Walvis Bay. The findings demonstrate that while most CSR activities by Namibian fishing companies support education and community development, they are primarily organized around social, philanthropic, and ethical dimensions. Companies utilize strategies such as clear plans and guidelines for CSR planning, and exhibit commitment from all management levels, along with reporting progress. However, companies continue to face challenges in implementing these strategies effectively. Financial constraints were identified as a major impediment to effective CSR implementation in the community. Other challenges included a lack of human knowledge and expertise, the time required for CSR activities, a lack of clear strategies, and an absence of well-defined CSR guidelines. From the perspective of community leaders and members, while any assistance from fishing companies is appreciated, it is often not sustainable. Therefore, there is a clear need for fishing companies to enhance their investment in CSR activities, engage more deeply with communities to identify their needs, and make long-term commitments to support sustainable community development.

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