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Examining the Effectiveness of Corporate Social Responsibility in Communities: A Case Study of Eco-Bank CSR Initiatives in Urban Communities

[1] Stellah Kapewu, [2] Lynn Kazembe
[1] Department: Human Resource Management, Information and Communication University, Lusaka, Zambia
[2] Department: Project Management, Information and Communication University, Lusaka, Zambia

Corresponding Author: **Stellah Kapewu**

Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved into a critical component of contemporary business strategy, reflecting a corporate commitment to societal well-being alongside economic objectives. In Zambia, where rapid urbanization has strained public service delivery, corporations like EcoBank have implemented various CSR initiatives aimed at addressing developmental gaps in urban communities. However, a significant problem exists in the lack of independent, empirical evidence regarding the actual effectiveness, sustainability, and alignment of these initiatives with community needs. While EcoBank's CSR activities in education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability are documented in corporate reports, their tangible impact on improving access to basic social services, the underlying corporate motivations, and the perceptions of beneficiary communities remain inadequately explored. This study, therefore, sought to examine the effectiveness of EcoBank's CSR initiatives in selected urban communities of Zambia, focusing on the disparities between corporate reporting and on-the-ground realities.

The study was guided by three specific objectives: to examine the specific CSR initiatives undertaken by EcoBank; to assess their contribution to improvements in education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability; and to investigate the motivations behind the bank's CSR engagement. A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure comprehensive data collection. A sample of 100 respondents, including beneficiaries, school administrators, health workers, environmental officers, local government officials, and EcoBank staff from Lusaka, Kitwe, and Ndola, was selected using purposive sampling. Data was gathered through surveys and semi-structured interviews, and triangulated with secondary data from CSR reports and academic publications. Thematic analysis was used for qualitative data, while SPSS software facilitated the quantitative analysis using descriptive statistics.

The findings revealed that while EcoBank has implemented a diverse portfolio of CSR initiatives, community awareness was moderate, with only 56% of respondents cognizant of the activities. Environmental and youth empowerment projects were most visible, whereas education and financial literacy programs received less recognition. The perceived impact was mixed: healthcare initiatives were viewed most positively (47% reported improvements), but significant skepticism existed regarding the sustainability of all initiatives, with only 30% of respondents believing the benefits were long-lasting. Key challenges identified included inadequate community involvement, a short-term project focus, poor maintenance, and insufficient funding. The motivations for CSR were perceived as a blend of genuine philanthropy and strategic reputation management, though a lack of deep integration into core business strategy was noted.

Based on these results, the study recommends that EcoBank strengthens community participation in the planning and implementation of CSR projects to ensure relevance and ownership. Furthermore, the bank should adopt long-term sustainability frameworks, enhance its communication strategies using both digital and traditional media, and institute robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Allocating greater resources and fostering partnerships with local government and civil society are also crucial. By aligning CSR more closely with its core business strategy and community priorities, EcoBank can transition its initiatives from short-term philanthropy to a sustainable model of creating shared value, thereby maximizing its contribution to urban development in Zambia.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a central part of modern business strategy, moving from voluntary charity to a core element of corporate governance. Global frameworks like the UN Global Compact and the SDGs encourage firms to

integrate social, environmental, and economic goals (UN, 2015) [32]. In Africa, CSR is widely used to address development challenges such as poverty, poor health, and limited education, although critics argue that many initiatives prioritize corporate image over real impact (Visser, 2006 [37]; Idemudia, 2011). In Zambia, CSR participation has grown among mining, telecom, and banking firms, especially as urban areas face rising challenges in education, healthcare, sanitation, and environmental management (CSO, 2022) [10]. EcoBank Zambia has introduced programs supporting schools, clinics, and environmental campaigns, yet concerns remain about the actual impact and sustainability of these efforts (Sibanda, 2021) [30]. Guided by Carroll's (1999) [6] CSR model, this study examines whether EcoBank's CSR aligns with community needs, the motivations behind these initiatives, and their contribution to urban development. By focusing on local experiences and empirical evidence, the study responds to calls for more accountable, transparent, and community-centered CSR in Zambia's financial sector (Chanda & Hamukoma, 2020) [8].

1.2 Statement of the Problem
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is central to business practice, but its real impact on community needs in Zambia remains unclear. Eco-Bank's urban CSR initiatives target education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and youth empowerment, yet there is limited evidence on their actual benefits or how communities perceive their relevance. Rapid urbanization has intensified challenges in these sectors, and despite growing CSR investments, little is known about whether initiatives address urgent needs or achieve sustainable change. This study therefore critically examines the effectiveness of Eco-Bank's CSR programs and their contribution to meaningful urban development.

1.3 Objectives of the Study
Main objective: To evaluate the effectiveness of EcoBank's Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives in promoting sustainable urban community development in Zambia.

1.4 Specific objectives of the study
1. To examine the specific Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives undertaken by EcoBank in selected urban communities of Zambia.
2. To assess the extent to which EcoBank's CSR initiatives contribute to improvements in access to basic social services such as education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability in urban areas.
3. To investigate the underlying motivations that drive EcoBank to engage in CSR activities within urban communities.

1.5 Research Questions
1. What specific CSR initiatives has EcoBank implemented in selected urban communities of Zambia?
2. How have EcoBank's CSR initiatives improved access to education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability services in urban areas?
3. What are the primary motivations behind EcoBank's engagement in CSR activities?

1.6 Theoretical Framework
Stakeholder Theory Perspective
Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) [15] argues that firms must consider the needs of all groups affected by their activities, not just shareholders. This makes the theory useful for assessing how EcoBank identifies and engages different community groups in its CSR programs. Effective CSR requires continuous dialogue with stakeholders to ensure initiatives reflect real needs (Greenwood, 2007) [17], which is crucial in rapidly growing urban areas in Zambia where social challenges are increasing (World Bank, 2022) [40]. The theory also helps examine whether EcoBank's CSR is participatory or top-down (Reed et al., 2009) [29] and whether it creates mutual value for both the bank and communities (Porter & Kramer, 2011) [28]. Evidence from African studies shows that stronger stakeholder engagement leads to more sustainable CSR outcomes (Dartey-Baah & Amponsah-Tawiah, 2020) [11].

Carroll's CSR Pyramid
Carroll's (1991) CSR Pyramid outlines four responsibilities economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic providing a structure for assessing the depth of EcoBank's CSR. The model helps distinguish between CSR integrated into core strategy and mere charitable acts (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003; Weber, 2008). It also shows how initiatives can meet multiple obligations at once, such as education or healthcare programs addressing ethical and philanthropic responsibilities (Garriga & Melé, 2004) [16]. In Zambia, where CSR regulation remains limited (Zambia Development Agency, 2021) [42], the model helps evaluate whether EcoBank goes beyond compliance to contribute meaningfully to community development.

Integrated Theoretical Framework
Combining stakeholder theory and Carroll's Pyramid provides a comprehensive framework for examining CSR in developing contexts (Visser, 2008). Stakeholder theory focuses on participation and community relevance, while Carroll's model assesses how well CSR is embedded into corporate strategy (Maon et al., 2010) [21]. This is especially important in Zambia's rapidly urbanizing environment, where communities face major education, health, and environmental challenges (UN-Habitat, 2022) [34]. The integrated approach also accounts for local social and institutional realities (Amaeshi et al., 2016) and supports analysis of corporate motivations, implementation processes, and community impacts (Dartey-Baah & Amponsah-Tawiah, 2020) [11]. Together, the theories help determine whether EcoBank's CSR initiatives are strategic, ethical, and genuinely beneficial to urban communities.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives Undertaken by EcoBank
CSR in banking has evolved from philanthropy to a strategic practice that enhances reputation, manages risk, and promotes long-term sustainability (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012) [2]. Globally, banks focus on financial inclusion, environmental sustainability, community development, and ethical governance, integrating social and environmental

concerns into core operations (D'Amato *et al*., 2009; Weber, 2017 [38]). Digital inclusion and financial literacy initiatives support underserved populations and global goals like Universal Financial Access (Diniz *et al*., 2021 [12]; World Bank, 2020). International frameworks such as the UN Global Compact further guide CSR alignment with the SDGs (UN, 2019) [33].

In Africa, CSR primarily addresses gaps in education, health, and infrastructure, though many initiatives remain reactive, short-term, and weakly monitored (Amaeshi *et al*., 2016; Idemudia, 2014 [18]; Muthuri & Gilbert, 2011 [22]). Leading banks like EcoBank have strengthened CSR through sustainability strategies, youth empowerment, and entrepreneurship programs (EcoBank Sustainability Report, 2023; Access Bank CSR Report, 2021). Governments increasingly support structured CSR via policy frameworks and partnerships (CBN, 2020) [7].

In Zambia, bank CSR focuses on education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability to address urban challenges (Bankers Association of Zambia, 2021) [5]. EcoBank Zambia has supported schools, health campaigns, and environmental projects such as tree planting and waste management (Chibomba & Mulenga, 2019 [9]; Simubali, 2020 [31]; EcoBank Environmental and Social Responsibility Report, 2023). Yet, limited community engagement, weak follow-up, and insufficient monitoring hinder long-term impact (Nyirenda, 2022; Mwanakatwe, 2022) [26, 24]. Recent efforts by the Zambia CSR Network (2023) [41] and EcoBank's increased transparency are improving strategic alignment and stakeholder participation. EcoBank's CSR combines global best practices with local priorities, but greater community ownership, strategic integration, and impact assessment are needed to achieve sustainable outcomes for urban communities.

2.2 Contribution of EcoBank's CSR Initiatives to Access to Basic Social Services in Urban Areas

Globally, CSR has shifted from charity to a strategic tool that creates shared value for both business and society (Porter & Kramer, 2011) [28]. In the banking sector, CSR efforts commonly target education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability. When aligned with business objectives and global frameworks like the SDGs, CSR programs tend to achieve more lasting impact (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012) [2].

Education-related CSR often supports financial literacy, digital skills, and school infrastructure, helping underserved communities access better learning opportunities (Diniz *et al*., 2021; UNESCO, 2019) [12, 35]. Healthcare-focused CSR includes funding clinics, medical supplies, and awareness campaigns, with partnerships improving sustainability (Jamali & Karam, 2018) [19]. Banks also invest in environmental initiatives such as renewable energy, waste management, and tree planting, though many lack long-term planning and strong community engagement (Weber, 2017 [38]; Visser, 2010).

Across Africa, banking CSR mainly targets education and health but is often short-term and fragmented, limiting its effectiveness (Amaeshi *et al*., 2016). Infrastructure-focused education programs seldom improve learning without complementary support services (Chibomba & Mulenga, 2019) [9]. Health-related donations frequently suffer from weak maintenance and limited coordination with national systems (Simubali, 2020; WHO, 2021) [31, 39]. Environmental

CSR faces challenges such as limited funding and inconsistent community participation (Nyirenda, 2022) [26].

In Zambia, rapid urbanization has intensified gaps in education, health, and environmental services (World Bank, 2022) [40]. EcoBank Zambia has responded through CSR programs involving classroom construction, ICT support, health facility assistance, and environmental campaigns (EcoBank Sustainability Report, 2023). While these initiatives have improved local services, weak monitoring, insufficient training, and low community ownership limit their long-term outcomes (Mwanza, 2021; Simubali, 2020; Nyirenda, 2022) [25, 31, 26].

EcoBank's CSR has contributed positively to urban social development but remains constrained by limited stakeholder involvement and sustainability planning. Strengthening community participation and aligning CSR with local development priorities is essential for achieving lasting impact (Nzekwu, 2019; University of Zambia, 2023) [27, 36].

2.3 Motivations Driving EcoBank's Engagement in CSR Activities within Urban Communities

Banks engage in CSR due to ethical, strategic, and regulatory motivations. Carroll's (1991) CSR pyramid outlines economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities that guide corporate behavior. In modern banking, CSR has become a strategic tool that aligns social initiatives with long-term business goals and creates shared value (Porter & Kramer, 2011) [28]. For example, financial literacy programs empower communities while expanding a bank's potential customer base.

Globally, CSR enhances competitiveness, builds trust, and manages reputational risks (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012) [2]. Reputation is a critical intangible asset for banks, and CSR helps cultivate stakeholder goodwill (Fombrun, 2005) [14]. International frameworks such as the UN Global Compact and the SDGs (United Nations, 2015) [32] further drive banks to integrate social and environmental concerns into their operations.

In Africa, CSR motivations reflect both global pressures and local socio-economic needs. Banks invest in CSR to strengthen reputation, meet community expectations, comply with evolving regulations, and maintain competitiveness (Amaeshi *et al*., 2016). With challenges such as poverty and weak public services, CSR helps financial institutions legitimize their operations and build trust (Muthuri & Gilbert, 2021) [23]. Many African banks, including EcoBank, prioritize education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability to reinforce their social license to operate (Nzekwu, 2019) [27].

In Zambia, EcoBank's CSR is shaped by strategic interests and community expectations. CSR enhances brand visibility, fosters trust, and supports competitiveness in the financial sector (Simubali, 2020) [31]. Urban communities expect banks to contribute to social welfare, and EcoBank responds through initiatives in education, health, and environmental protection (Chibomba & Mulenga, 2019) [9]. Its approach also reflects African values of ubuntu, which emphasize collective responsibility and community engagement (Muthuri & Gilbert, 2021) [23].

2.4 Personal Critique

Before conducting this study, I viewed CSR mainly as a public relations strategy. However, exploring EcoBank's initiatives broadened my understanding. I now see CSR as a

holistic approach that supports long-term social and economic development in areas such as education, health, and environmental sustainability. Engagement with EcoBank staff and beneficiaries showed that impactful CSR is inclusive, needs-based, and built on strong stakeholder participation.

The study also revealed gaps, particularly the lack of sustainability and follow-up in some initiatives, emphasizing the need for continuous monitoring and evaluation. Overall, this research strengthened my analytical and ethical skills and reshaped my appreciation of CSR as both a community development tool and a strategic business practice.

2.5 Establishment of Research Gaps

Despite the growth of CSR in Zambia's banking sector, major research gaps persist. Most studies describe CSR activities rather than evaluating their actual impact or sustainability, leaving uncertainty about improvements in education, health, and livelihoods (Nyirenda, 2022; Simubali, 2020) [26, 31]. Little is known about what truly motivates CSR from community, employee, or internal organizational perspectives, as corporate reports focus on image and compliance (Chibomba & Mulenga, 2019) [9]. Implementation challenges such as limited resources, weak regulation, and socio-economic constraints are also underexplored (ZEMA, 2023) [43]. Furthermore, CSR is rarely aligned with national development policies, resulting in fragmented efforts. More empirical, community-based research is needed to determine how CSR can genuinely support sustainable development in Zambia.

3. Methods and Procedures

3.1 Research Design

The study used a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. Surveys captured measurable data on awareness, satisfaction, and perceived impact of EcoBank's CSR, while interviews explored stakeholder experiences, challenges, and expectations. This approach provided both breadth and depth, enabling data triangulation and enhancing the validity and richness of the findings.

3.2 Sampling technique

The study employed a purposive sampling technique. This non-probability sampling method was used because it allowed the researcher to deliberately select participants who were knowledgeable about or directly affected by EcoBank's CSR programs. For the quantitative survey, beneficiaries from different sectors were targeted to ensure representation of multiple perspectives. For the qualitative component, key informants such as EcoBank personnel, community leaders, and local government representatives were purposefully selected due to their strategic roles in CSR activities. This approach not only ensured that participants provided relevant information but also allowed the researcher to access both grassroots experiences and institutional insights.

3.3 Sample size

The study surveyed 100 CSR beneficiaries from three urban communities to capture diverse perspectives, while 15 participants five EcoBank staff, five community leaders, and five project beneficiaries were interviewed for in-depth insights. This combination of a larger survey and a focused interview group enabled the study to capture general trends and detailed narratives, providing a comprehensive understanding of EcoBank's CSR initiatives, including awareness, effectiveness, and community engagement.

3.4 Techniques for data collection

The study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected via structured questionnaires from 100 CSR beneficiaries and semi-structured interviews with key informants, capturing awareness, satisfaction, and perceptions of EcoBank's CSR initiatives. Secondary data from CSR reports, academic journals, and government documents provided context and supported triangulation. This mixed-methods approach allowed for comprehensive analysis, capturing both quantitative trends and qualitative insights, and strengthened the reliability and validity of the findings on CSR effectiveness in urban communities.

3.5 Instruments for data collection

Research instruments are mechanism that the researcher will use to capture data and include the following; questionnaires, inter-view schedule, observation and focus group discussion. Concerning this study, the researcher will use only four instruments: interview guide, questionnaires, and the researcher herself as a human instrument.

3.6 Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a data collection instrument and usually involves asking a subject to answer a number of oral or written questions. Even though a questionnaire has some disadvantages such as: misunderstanding of questions by respondents, bias by respondents and cannot capture emotional responses or feelings of the respondents, a questionnaires will be used in this study because the advantages of using a questionnaire outweigh the disadvantages. Some of the advantages that will be gained by using a questionnaire in this study are: they are inexpensive, they are convenient, they are quick, they are scalable, they are simple to analyze and do not require statistical expertise, they provide user anonymity and they can be designed to cover all aspects of the topic. So, a questionnaire will be used to collect data from 100 individuals.

3.7 Participant observation

Observation is the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts (objects) in the social setting selected for study. Observation is a basic and essential method in all qualitative research. Thus, it will be used in this study to explore complex interactions in natural social contexts. Observation will also be useful as it will enable the researcher to probe further, see through the eyes of the research group, see the same perspective as group members, create new ideas, get the truth and also get information from hard to reach groups. But the researcher will be very cautious and will not fall into the following pitfalls of biasness as well as affecting the behaviour of the research group.

3.8 Human Instrument

Unlike non-human instruments, a human instrument can adjust to the different situations in the study, interpret and assess the interactions. The human element is necessary in qualitative research because contextual inquiry requires a

human instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 187) [20]. Thus the human instruments that will be used in the study is the researcher herself.

3.9 Procedure of Data Collection
Data is the most essential part of this study, the fundamental element in statistical analysis. Data for this study were collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary data was data collected by the researcher for the purpose of this study. It was critical in answering the research problem the study was undertaken. Therefore, the primary data were tailored to the study's objectives and were gathered by the researcher and analyzed. Primary data were more reliable as they were more accurate, current and represented first-hand information from the population of study.

On the other hand, secondary data was the data that was collected by other researchers or organizations for their own purposes but was helpful in this study. Such data were inexpensive and easily accessible when primary data were unavailable. Secondary data assisted the researcher in gaining a better understanding of the problem, served as a basis for comparison with the primary data, and increased the completeness of the study.

3.10 Document review
Document review was used as a key method for collecting secondary data in this study. The researcher reviewed various documents, including EcoBank's CSR reports, government publications, academic journals, and other relevant policy documents. These sources provided valuable background information on the nature, scope, and objectives of CSR initiatives in Zambia. The document review allowed the researcher to verify, supplement, and triangulate the primary data collected through questionnaires and interviews. It also helped in identifying trends, gaps, and best practices in CSR implementation, thereby supporting a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The use of document review ensured that the study was grounded in existing knowledge and provided a robust framework for analyzing EcoBank's CSR activities in urban communities.

3.11 Data analysis techniques
After gathering data, there is need to process the data before it is analyzed. This involved data 3organization in line with the above themes set to capture the research's specific objectives. Data organization in this study will involve 4 stages as follows:

1. Data Preparation and Cleaning
In this stage, the collected data from questionnaires and interviews were first organized. Questionnaires were checked for completeness, coded, and cleaned to remove errors or inconsistencies. This ensured that the data were accurate and ready for analysis. Qualitative interview responses were transcribed and arranged for thematic coding.

2. Data Entry into SPSS
After cleaning, the quantitative data were entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Each variable was assigned a numerical code to facilitate statistical analysis. The data entry process included double-checking entries to minimize input errors and ensure reliability.

3. Descriptive and Inferential Analysis
Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarize the quantitative data. Visual representations like tables and graphs were generated to identify trends and patterns. If applicable, inferential statistics could also be performed in SPSS to examine relationships between variables.
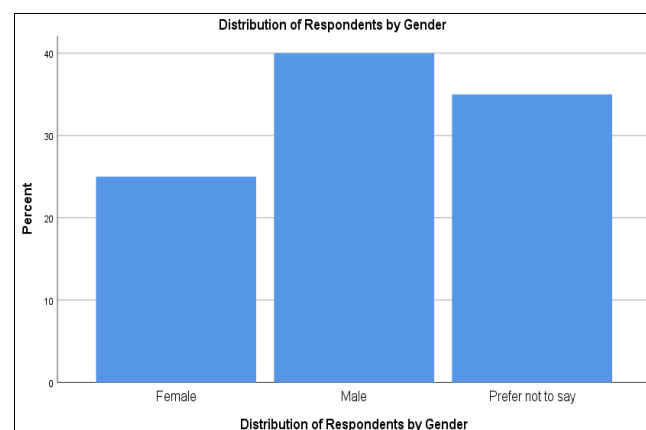
3.12 Qualitative Data Analysis
Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed manually using thematic analysis. Responses were grouped into themes and sub-themes aligned with the research objectives. This provided in-depth insights into participants' perceptions, experiences, and motivations regarding EcoBank's CSR initiatives.

By following these stages, the study ensured a systematic, reliable, and comprehensive analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for robust conclusions about the impact and effectiveness of EcoBank's CSR programs.

4. Presentation of Findings
4.1 Gender

Out of the 100 respondents, 40% were male, 25% female, while 35% preferred not to disclose their gender. This indicates that while both men and women participated in the study, a significant proportion of respondents (over one-third) opted not to reveal their gender. This could suggest sensitivity in disclosure or reluctance to provide personal details.
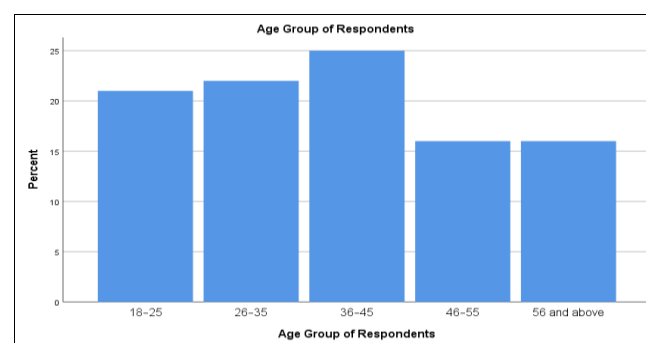

Fig 2: Age Group of Respondents

Respondents were distributed across all age groups: 21% were between 18–25 years, 22% between 26–35, 25% between 36–45, 16% between 46–55, and another 16% were above 56 years. The majority of participants (47%) were between 26–45 years, representing the economically active and socially engaged population likely to interact with CSR activities.

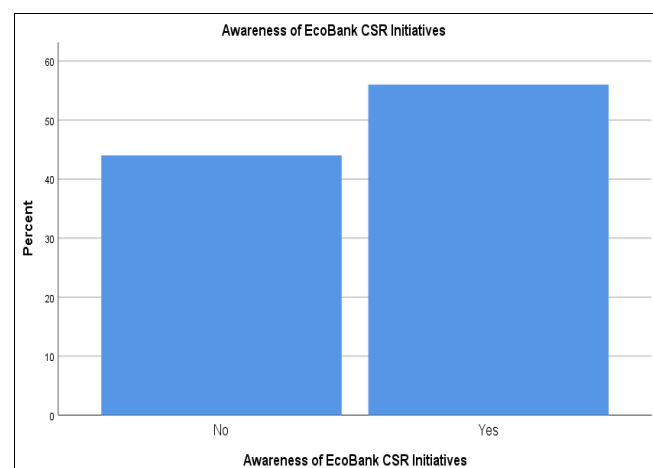**Respondents' Roles in Relation to EcoBank CSR Initiatives**

Respondent Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Beneficiary (Community member)	15	15.0
EcoBank Staff	12	12.0
Environmental Officer	16	16.0
Health Worker	16	16.0
Local Government Official	15	15.0
Other	10	10.0
School Administrator/Teacher	16	16.0
Total	100	100.0

Respondents' Roles in Relation to EcoBank CSR Initiatives
Respondents held diverse roles in relation to EcoBank's CSR initiatives. These included Environmental Officers (16%), Health Workers (16%), School Administrators/Teachers (16%), Beneficiaries (15%), Local Government Officials (15%), EcoBank Staff (12%), and Others (10%). This diversity shows that EcoBank's CSR programs engage not only direct beneficiaries but also institutional stakeholders.

4.2 To examine the specific CSR initiatives undertaken by EcoBank in selected urban communities
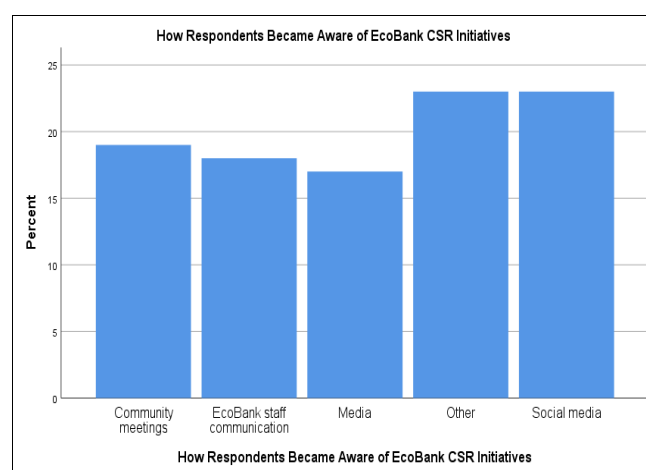**Awareness of EcoBank CSR Initiatives**

The findings revealed that slightly more than half of the respondents (56%) were aware of EcoBank's CSR activities, while 44% reported being unaware. This suggests that although the bank has made efforts to implement CSR programs, visibility and communication remain moderate. Limited awareness could reduce the potential benefits of CSR, as community members may fail to engage with or take full advantage of the initiatives available. The results highlight a communication gap, indicating the need for more effective publicity strategies, community sensitization campaigns, and stronger outreach efforts to ensure that CSR programs reach a wider audience and achieve greater impact.

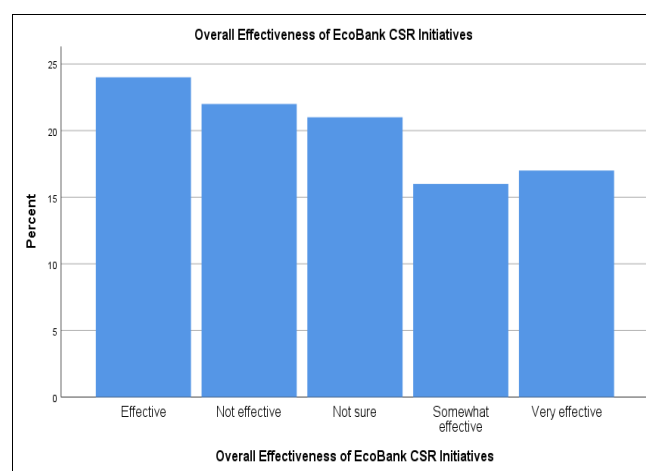| CSR Initiatives Observed or Benefited From		
CSR Initiative / Activity	Frequency	Percent (%)
Education support	12	12.0
Environmental sustainability	27	27.0
Financial literacy programs	11	11.0
Healthcare support	17	17.0
Other	14	14.0
Youth empowerment / skills training	19	19.0
Total	100	100.0

Survey results showed that respondents most recognized environmental sustainability projects (27%), youth empowerment and skills training (19%), and healthcare support (17%), followed by other initiatives (14%), education support (12%), and financial literacy programs (11%). The focus on environmental and youth activities, such as tree planting and vocational training, reflects EcoBank's emphasis on high-visibility interventions. Education and financial literacy initiatives were less prominent, suggesting smaller-scale efforts or limited awareness, highlighting the need to strengthen these areas for long-term socio-economic impact.

How Respondents Became Aware of CSR Initiatives
Respondents reported learning about EcoBank's CSR mainly through social media (23%), community meetings (19%), staff communication (18%), and traditional media (17%), with other channels at 23%. Social media plays a key role in reaching urban and younger audiences, but reliance on selective channels may exclude groups without access. A more integrated approach combining digital and traditional outreach is needed to ensure broad and inclusive awareness.
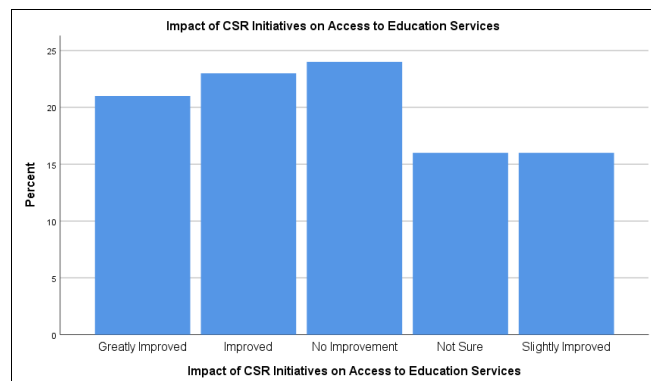

Overall Effectiveness of CSR Initiatives
When evaluating EcoBank's CSR, 41% of respondents viewed initiatives as effective or very effective, while 22% considered them not effective, 16% somewhat effective, and 21% were unsure. This indicates that CSR efforts are recognized but deliver uneven benefits across communities.
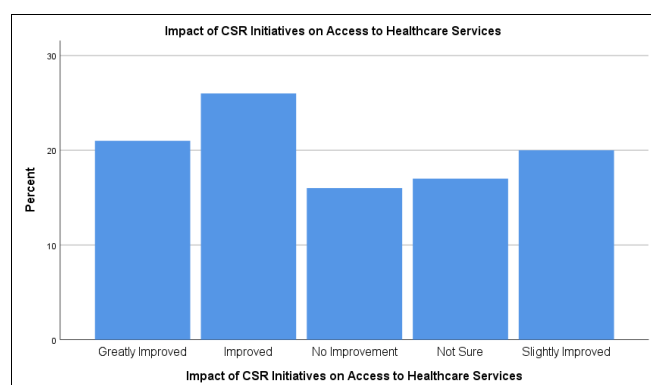
The uncertainty highlights gaps in visibility and communication, suggesting a need for stronger impact assessment, reporting, and feedback mechanisms to enhance both effectiveness and community perception.

4.3 To assess the extent to which EcoBank's CSR initiatives contribute to education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability
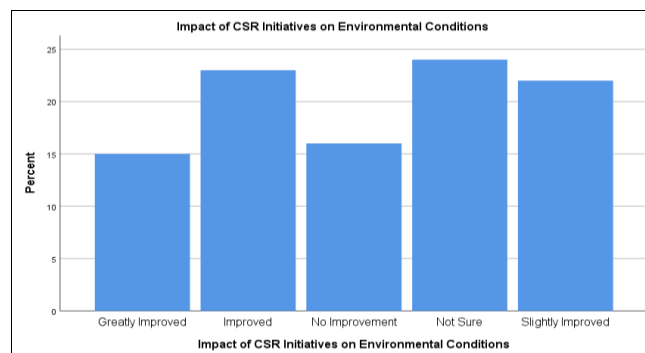

Impact on Education Services
The results indicate that EcoBank's CSR initiatives in education have had a modest perceived impact. While 21% of respondents reported great improvement and 23% noted some improvement, a significant proportion expressed skepticism, with 24% seeing no improvement and 16% each reporting only slight improvement or being uncertain. This distribution suggests that although some beneficiaries recognize positive changes, such as improved learning resources or school support, the overall scale and visibility of educational CSR interventions may not be strong enough to produce widespread recognition. It highlights the need for more targeted and sustained investment in education-focused programs.
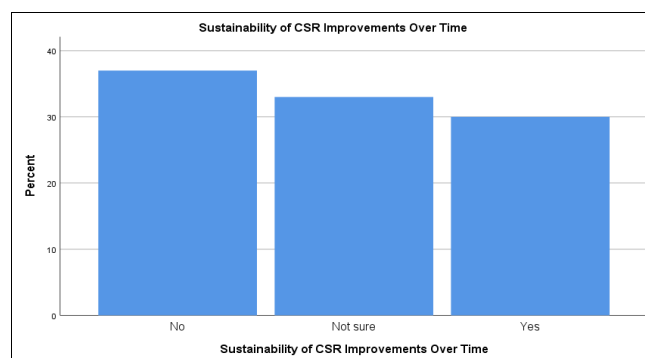

Impact on Healthcare Services
The healthcare sector appeared to benefit more strongly from EcoBank's CSR programs compared to education. Here, 26% of respondents reported improvement and 21% great improvement, showing that nearly half perceived noticeable progress. However, 16% saw no change, 20% indicated slight improvement, and 17% were unsure. This mixed response suggests that while CSR interventions such as healthcare donations, equipment support, or awareness campaigns are visible, they may not consistently reach all intended beneficiaries. Nonetheless, the relatively higher positive response reflects healthcare as a sector where EcoBank's CSR has been comparatively impactful.
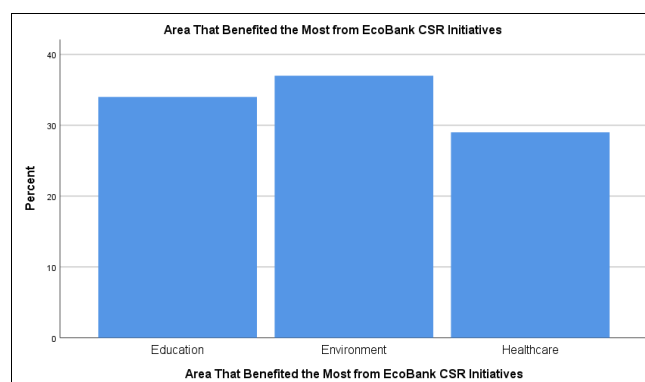

Impact on Environmental Conditions
Responses regarding environmental initiatives revealed mixed perceptions. A total of 38% (23% improvement and 15% great improvement) acknowledged progress, but nearly an equal proportion expressed doubts, with 16% reporting no improvement, 22% only slight improvement, and 24% unsure. These findings suggest that while EcoBank's environmental CSR activities, such as tree planting or conservation campaigns, are noticed, many respondents remain uncertain about their effectiveness in bringing about long-term environmental change. This points to a challenge of demonstrating measurable sustainability outcomes in environmental programs.

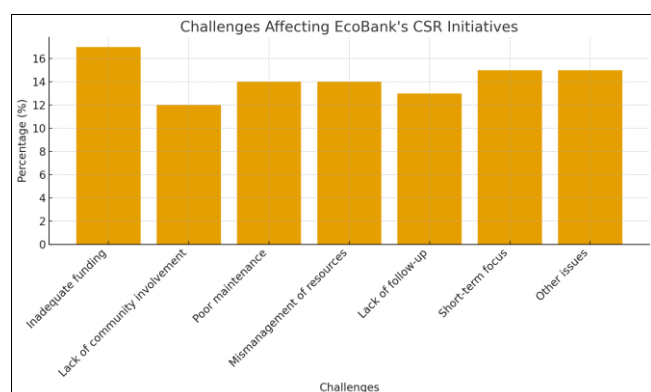

Sustainability of CSR Improvements Over Time
When asked about the sustainability of CSR outcomes, respondents expressed considerable doubt. Only 30% believed the initiatives were sustainable, whereas 37% felt they were not, and 33% were unsure. These findings highlight a key weakness: even where CSR initiatives have brought improvements, many stakeholders question whether the benefits will last. This lack of confidence may be linked to challenges such as poor maintenance, limited follow-up, or short-term project design. Ensuring that projects are built on long-term strategies will be essential for strengthening stakeholder trust in CSR sustainability.
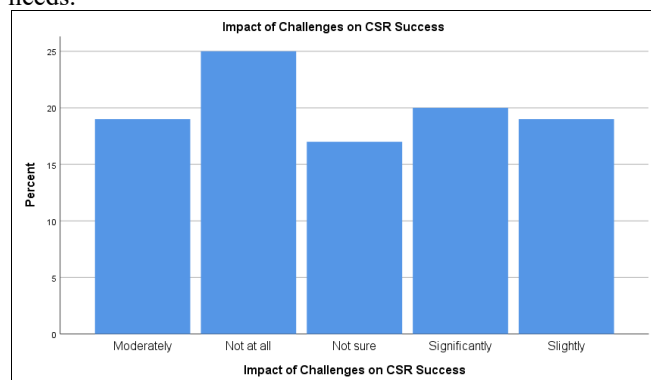
Area That Benefited the Most

When comparing across sectors, the environment (37%) and education (34%) were viewed as the main beneficiaries, with healthcare following at 29%. Although differences are relatively small, these results suggest that CSR initiatives have been most visible in environmental and educational areas, possibly due to highly noticeable activities such as tree planting campaigns or support for schools. Healthcare, while still significant, may be less consistently recognized, perhaps because its benefits are concentrated in specific facilities or programs. Overall, the findings indicate that EcoBank's CSR has a broad spread across sectors, but with the greatest perceived gains in education and environmental sustainability.

4.4 To identify challenges affecting the implementation of EcoBank's CSR initiatives

Challenges Observed

The study identified key challenges hindering EcoBank's CSR, including inadequate funding (17%), short-term focus (15%), poor maintenance (14%), mismanagement (14%), lack of follow-up (13%), and limited community involvement (12%). These issues reflect both structural barriers, such as resource constraints and weak accountability, and operational barriers, including poor project maintenance and low stakeholder engagement. Effective CSR requires not only funding but also strong planning, execution, and community participation to ensure initiatives are sustainable and aligned with beneficiaries' needs.

Respondents were divided on how challenges affect CSR success: 25% saw no effect, 19% slight, 19% moderate, 20% significant, and 17% were unsure. Nearly 40% perceived moderate to significant negative impacts, indicating that structural and operational barriers can limit effectiveness and long-term outcomes. These findings

underscore the need for EcoBank to address challenges proactively to strengthen program sustainability, stakeholder trust, and overall CSR impact.

Most Significant Challenge Affecting CSR Initiatives

Challenge	Percentage (%)
Lack of community involvement	19
Short-term focus / lack of sustainability	19
Poor maintenance	17
Inadequate funding	10
Lack of follow-ups / monitoring	10
Mismanagement	11
Others	14
Total	100

Respondents identified lack of community involvement (19%) and short-term, unsustainable project focus (19%) as the main CSR challenges, followed by poor maintenance (17%) and inadequate funding (14%). This suggests that beyond financial resources, sustainability and active community participation are crucial for CSR success. Without engagement, projects risk poor ownership and limited impact, while short-term approaches fail to address systemic issues. To enhance outcomes, EcoBank must prioritize long-term planning, stakeholder involvement, and adequate resourcing.

Suggested Measures to Overcome CSR Challenges

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	More involvement, funding, and monitoring	100	100.0	100.0	100.0

Suggested Measures to Overcome CSR Challenges

All respondents (100%) agreed that increased community involvement, better funding, and stronger monitoring are key to improving EcoBank's CSR initiatives. Community participation ensures projects align with actual needs, enhancing ownership, relevance, and sustainability. Adequate funding would support long-term projects, proper infrastructure, and continuity, addressing challenges such as limited outreach and maintenance. Strengthened monitoring and evaluation would improve accountability, track progress, and enable timely adjustments. Collectively, these measures provide a clear pathway for making CSR programs more effective, sustainable, and trusted.

4.5 Discussion of Research Findings

The study found that EcoBank implements diverse CSR initiatives across education, healthcare, youth empowerment, financial literacy, and environmental sustainability. This aligns with broader literature emphasizing the importance of multi-sector CSR engagement in developing countries (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Simubali, 2020) [2, 31]. Environmental programs such as tree planting and clean-up campaigns were the most visible, while youth skills training and school support were also significant. However, awareness was uneven, with only 56% of respondents aware of these efforts, indicating communication gaps consistent with findings by Du *et al*. (2010) and Diniz *et al*. (2021) [12], who argue that digital channels can exclude marginalized populations.

The impact of CSR varied across sectors. Education interventions were appreciated but mostly infrastructure-focused, reflecting similar limitations highlighted in Zambia's CSR context by Chibomba and Mulenga (2019) [9]. Healthcare programs improved access and awareness, while environmental projects, though highly visible, were perceived as less sustainable echoing concerns raised by Lungu and Kaoma (2019) about short-term CSR activities in urban Zambia. EcoBank's CSR appears to be driven by both philanthropic motives and strategic goals, consistent with Carroll's CSR framework (Carroll, 1991) and Porter and Kramer's (2011) [28] shared value concept. Although the initiatives deliver community benefits and enhance the bank's reputation, their limited integration into long-term strategy weakens systemic impact, a challenge also noted by Nzekwu (2019) [27] in African CSR contexts.

While EcoBank's CSR is recognized and valued, effectiveness is constrained by uneven sectoral focus, weak sustainability mechanisms, and partial strategic alignment. Strengthening education, financial literacy programs, inclusive communication methods, and long-term planning could enhance CSR impact and promote meaningful urban development in line with global sustainability expectations (United Nations, 2015; World Bank, 2022) [32, 40].

5. Conclusion and Recommendations
5.1 Conclusion
EcoBank's CSR initiatives in education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and youth empowerment have contributed to community welfare and enhanced its public image. However, impact is moderate due to limited coverage, weak sustainability, uneven distribution of projects, and reliance on digital communication that excludes some groups. Sustainability challenges such as short-term focus, weak monitoring, and low community participation limit long-term effectiveness. Greater stakeholder engagement, strategic integration, and inclusive planning are needed to move CSR from philanthropy toward a sustainable, shared-value model that maximizes social and economic benefits.

5.2 Recommendations
To improve CSR effectiveness, EcoBank should:
- Enhance Community Participation: Involve communities in planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- Diversify Communication: Use both digital and traditional channels for broader reach.
- Adopt Long-Term Planning: Ensure continuity and sustainability in projects.
- Strengthen Monitoring & Evaluation: Establish indicators, reporting, and feedback systems.
- Increase Funding & Resources: Provide sustained financing for project maintenance.
- Integrate CSR with Core Business: Link initiatives to financial literacy and entrepreneurship support.
- Foster Strategic Partnerships: Collaborate with government, NGOs, and private partners to expand impact and avoid duplication.

6. Acknowledgements

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