



**EFFECTS OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS ON THE CORPORATE IMAGE OF THE  
WARRI REFINING AND PETROCHEMICAL COMPANY, UBEJI**

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**Abstract**

*The Corporate Social Responsibility of any public organization such as the Warri Refining and Petrochemical Company can be effectively improved by its Community relations efforts. The study investigates how effectively the WRPC community relations programmes have helped in enhancing its corporate image and providing solutions to potential problems that help in the creation of mutual understanding and cordial relationship between the WRPC and its host communities. The survey descriptive research method was employed, using the questionnaire instrument to elicit responses from a sample of 400 respondents with a return rate of ninety eight percent (393). Findings include the fact that there is a significant relationship between the community relations activities, practices and strategies of the WRPC and the corporate image of the WRPC. Efforts of effective community relations activities and practices lead to the acceptance and patronage of public organizations such as the WRPC by its host communities. The conclusion of the study is that effective community practices and activities improve the corporate image of public organizations. This study recommends that the WRPC should spend more on its community relations effort in order to enhance its already established corporate image as a responsible corporate citizen.*

**Key words:** Community Relations, Corporate Image, Effects, CSR, WRPC

**1. Introduction**

The success of organizations in a particular area is mainly dependent on the relationship between the community and the organization. The purpose of community relations practice is to establish a two-way communication channel that will help to create and sustain a mutual relationship between the organization and the host community. Community relations help to promote sustainable development and enhance business activities of corporate organizations and foster respect for culture which in turn improves the potentials of the indigenes for better livelihoods. This view of the study is in tandem with the World Bank Institute & Private Sector Vice Presidency of the World Bank's assertion (2003) which says that 'Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the commitment of business to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community and society at large, to improve quality of life, in ways that are both good for business and good for development. The above assertion of the World Bank Institute & Private Sector Development of the Vice Presidency of the World Bank (2003) explains the need for every organization to be responsible and responsive in the community to ensure a balance of business activities that promotes their corporate image. This is because good community relations increase patronage from the diverse interest in the host community.

The purpose of community relations practice is to establish a two-way communication channel that will help to create and sustain a mutual relationship between the organization and the host community. The imperativeness of community relations actually necessitates the full involvement of organizations in socially oriented programmes in their host communities. The concept of social



responsibility which stimulates community programmes in most companies is not new as the idea was initiated in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Community relations programmes by organizations got its stand from a book on 'social responsibility of business' men by Bowen (1953), who suggested that business should consider the social implications of their decisions (Koontz & Weilrich, 1988; Jefkins, 1998). Despite the available research efforts on how an organization's community relations programme affects its corporate image, the impact of community relations in public organizations like the WRPC has to be studied for a clearer understanding of the effect of community relations on their corporate image. Harris (1958) identified six image types for a company's corporate image, the institutional image, the product image, the brand image, a diffused image and the consumer demand image. Wells and Spinks (1999) had suggested that the purpose behind the promotion of a corporate image was two folds; to link the company to its social environment and to help achieve company objectives. A good organization does not wait until there is chaos before it builds a mutual relationship with its host communities. An effective corporate social responsibility practice to its host community will positively enhance the corporate image of an organization. A community is a social organism made up of all the interactions among the residents with which they identify. Community is a combination of social units and systems which perform the major functions having locality relevance (Warren, 1963). Olalekan (1995) notes that community relations is the backbone of a sustained, peaceful and productive co-existence between an organization and its community. This research will help evaluate the organization's corporate image in relation to its host community.

The Corporate Social Responsibility of any public and private partnership sector driven organization such as the Warri Refining and Petrochemical Company can effectively be improved by the Community Relations efforts of such an organization. This is premised on the fact that in its operations, conflicts such as land matters, oil spillage, arise. Community Relations units of Corporate Affairs of public entities are best positioned to relate cordially and peacefully with its host community. This is what is referred to as corporate social responsibility. Has the WRPC been corporately and socially responsible to the Ubeji community? This is the core of this study. The purpose, statement of problem of this study is: do Community Relations units of organizations such as the WRPC effectively use community relations to affect its host communities, particularly Ubeji where it is located for mutual benefits? This study seeks to find out whether the community relations efforts of the WRPC, Ubeji have effects on its corporate image. Despite the available research efforts on how an organization's community relations programme affects its corporate image, the impact of community relations in public organizations like the WRPC has to be studied for a clearer understanding of the effect of community relations on their corporate image.

Despite the available research efforts on how an organization's community relations programme affect its corporate image, the impact of community relations in most organizations like the WRPC has to be studied for a clearer understanding of the effect of community relations. This research is geared towards a more effective impact of community relations on the corporate image of the Warri Refining and Petrochemical Company. This study will help the WPRC to effectively use corporate social responsibility to make more impact on its host community, 'Ubeji'. This study will confirm or disprove Ekeopara's (2009) finding that host communities accept community relations of companies and public entities domiciled in their domain. This investigation will also find out if it is true that the corporate image of organizations such as the WRPC improves because of its Community Relations efforts, as found by Ekeopara (2009). One other significance of this study is that it will affirm or disclaim the finding of Shamsan and Otieno (2015) that Public Relations, the 'parent' of Community Relations enhances patronage by responding to comments of its internal and external public. In other



words, the findings of this study will confirm whether there is a connection between the Community Relations efforts of the WRPC, its host community, Ubeji and its Corporate image.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Conceptual Review**

Different organizations over the years have put up several strategies to maintain their identities in their areas of operations and this quest has led to the development of Community Relations as a major tool for fostering good relations between the communities and an organization (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006). Hillery (1955), found no fewer than 94 definitions of community relations. One common element in these definitions deals with people. Community is a set of interrelationships among social institutions in a locality (Bell & Newby, 1973). A community is said to exist when interaction between individuals has the purpose of meeting individual needs and obtaining group goals. A limited geographical area is another feature of a community. The features of social interaction, and structures for the gratification of physical, social and physical needs, and limited geographical area are basic to the definitions of community (Bell & Newby, 1973). Community refers to a structure of relationships. A Community is a body of people living in the same locality. Alternatively, a sense of identity and belonging shared among people living in the same locality, including the set of social relations found in a particular bounded area (Gale, 1990). Relations are the way in which two or more people or things are connected; a thing affects or is relevant to another. Relation is a person who is connected by blood or marriage; a relative. It also refers to a relationship between sets of values, an existing connection; a significant association between or among things; the relation between cause and effect. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines community relations as the relationship that a company, an organization has with the person who lives in the area in which it operates. While the Business Dictionary refers to relations as a firm's interactions with the people constituting the environment it operates in and draws resources from to foster mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence with the residents of the location in which it operates.

Daramola (2003) says community relations is devoted to creating a relationship of good neighbourliness between an organization and other companies as well as groups within the community it is physically located. This agrees with the position of Wilson and Jibrin (2014), who aver that:

*every society, irrespective of its size, desires and works towards attaining some level of development especially in the present changing social, political and economic climate where everyone wants to grow, wants to succeed, wants to be heard and recognized, wants to be involved in the daily activities of his or her locality.*

A company engages in Community relations activities by taking an active role in the wellbeing of its community. Nwanne (2015) opines that community relations may therefore be seen as all efforts to establish and maintain a cordial and mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and its host community. This process of relating with host communities is not an easy endeavour; the host communities are usually complex and diverse. Host communities consist of traditional rulers and chiefs, market women, youths, opinion leaders, political, economic and intellectual elite. Conflicts often arise because the needs, aspirations, interests and expectations of these diverse groups are not the same. In order to functionally operate in a community, a company must employ an effective community relations strategy. This is why Dilenschneider (2000) advises companies and organizations to be savvy about their relationship with these diverse interest groups. He asked that companies be



intimately familiar with their needs and how to fulfil them; he cautions that it is essential to understand the customs and laws of the community the companies operate in. This is why Nwanne (2015) admonishes that in reality, organizations must work closely with their publics, keeping their ears to the ground in order to detect threats and spot opportunities for the display of corporate social responsibility which is somewhat similar to public interest. The core of this study is to find out how community relations can be used by organizations such as the Warri Refining and Petrochemical Company to create and sustain an acceptable and respectable corporate image.

### **2.1.1 Benefits of Community Relations**

Nwanne's (2015) six benefits of community relations: (A) respectful of its host community in line with the concept of corporate social responsibility; (B) engender peace and good neighbourliness for a fruitful and functional operation of its activities; (C) enhance proactive public relations as the company takes into account its responsibilities to its host community and responds accordingly; (D) amasses goodwill that comes in handy in times of crisis; (E) encourages giving back a token or a little from where much has been lifted; and (F) a sign of good corporate manners. The Reference for Business.com says, a comprehensive community relations programme can help a company achieve visibility as a good community citizen when it supports programmes that improve the quality of life in the community including crime prevention, employment, environmental sanitation and beautification, scholarship programmes, performing arts programmes and children activities. Such visibility engenders goodwill through financial support or employee participation in sports and cultural activities. Other benefits of Community relations are that community relations enhance employee loyalty, reduce labour and production cost, and, increase patronage from the diverse interest in the host community. This is because a company with happy employees is likely to attract highly qualified new employees.

### **2.1.2 What is Corporate Image?**

Corporate identity is a primary goal of corporate communication for the purpose of maintaining and building identity to accord with and facilitate corporate business objectives. According to Ekeopara (2009), organizations nowadays are becoming conscious of their corporate image. They are beginning to realize that patronage of their goods and services not only lies in effective and efficient marketing strategy but also to a great extent on their corporate image. For this reason, organizations devote serious attention to the issues of their corporate image. Nwosu (1996), sees corporate image as a reputation of an organization as determined by the various pictures, knowledge, information and perception that the publics of that organization have about it. This is in agreement with what Rayner (2003) says, that corporate image confers clear cut advantages and privileges on companies. It proves different to imitate, at the same time, it creates responsibilities. This is why Villanova, Zinkhan and Hyman (2000), say that corporate image is an overall perception of the company held by different segments of the public. The diverse interests and publics of an organization such as WRPC are seen as having personal and social meaning in addition to functional utility and expectations. In particular, the company as well as the community is interested in the comparative performance of an organization and its role as a corporate citizen.

### **2.1.3 Community Relations and Corporate Social Responsibility**

Community relations as an aspect of public relations, is closely tied to the concept of social responsibility. According to Ajala (2005), community relation is the responsibility to plan and manage an organization's relationship with all those involved in and or affected by its activities. It is an excellent opportunity to bank good will in the community. As social investment, socially responsible companies refrain from taking actions that might be perceived by the public as insensitive



or callous. This agrees with Sharphin (1985), who had stated that the concern about the role of business in the community and the society at large has persisted and this has led to the emergence of “Corporate social responsibility”. Sharphin (1985) had argued that the complex relationship between business and society should be redefined within a new form of “social contract” or set of written and unwritten rules, regulations and assumptions about the pattern of behaviour among various elements in society.

Ajala (2005) categorizes corporate social responsibility to include; *Product Lines*: Not producing dangerous products, maintaining good product standard that are environmentally safe; *Marketing Practices*: Responding to consumers’ complaints, setting fair prices and maintaining fair advertising message contents; *Employees safety and health*: setting effective work and environment policies, accident safeguard, food and medical facilities; *Employees Services*: Training, counselling, granting allowances for welfare of employees; *Obligation to Individual*: These include equitable wages/salaries and remuneration “packages”, suitable working conditions in return for the duties and responsibilities carried out by the employees; *Obligation to Society*: The expectation that organizations would automatically abide by both the letter and spirit of the law in dealing with consumer groups; and, *Obligation to Government*: Recognition that a mutually beneficially exchange exist between the organization and government constituents requiring payment of taxes and implementation of health and safety standard etc.

#### **2.1.4 Common Community Relations Activities**

Common Community Relations activities include; *Cash*: This is money in coins or notes as distinct from cheques, money orders or credit, and it is given to improve, or for setting up development programme for its host community.

*Sponsorship/Philanthropy*: This is money or support that is given, usually by a company to support a person, organization or activity. It is the act of sponsoring someone or something; *Environmental stewardship* refers to the responsible use and protection of the natural environment through conservation and sustainable practices. *Employee volunteerism* is an important part of an organization’s corporate social responsibility efforts (corporate volunteering). It is a simple and effective way for businesses to contribute to the community. Companies give their employees an allowance of paid time off annually, which they use to volunteer at a charity of their choice. *Sharing*, which is an activity through which knowledge (information, skills, expertise) is exchanged among people, friends, communities or organization, is another common community relations activity. Other community relations include economic renewal project, sourcing practices and supply chain management, employee behaviour, facilities management and maintenance, hiring and employee wellness programme, memberships etc. Meaning that the Warri Refining and Petrochemical Company Limited, WRPC is expected to continue to promote a healthy relationship with its host community (Ubeji). The Managing Director of the Company, Mr Muhammed Abali, gave the assurance at the 7<sup>th</sup> graduation ceremony of 56 persons sponsored by WRPC in various skills acquisition programmes. Some of them were trained in catering and hotel management, welding and fabrication, hairdressing, barbing, tailoring/fashion and design and auto-engineering. Abali explained that the trainees were drawn from five of the communities playing host to the refinery, adding that the company would sustain its robust relationship with the communities.



### **2.1.5 Tactics and Strategies of Community Relations**

According to the Community Relations Resource Kit of the Queensland Government (2000), there are many different strategies for good community relations planning, They include; community relation audit, consultation, development, implementation and evaluation. The tactics and strategies of community relations explained in this study will therefore be based on the explanations and elucidation of this kit. The first step in community relations planning is to establish suitable mechanisms within the initiating organization to manage the development of the plan. They include setting up a special working group or committee with specific terms of reference and responsibilities. Recommendations of the working group will need to be endorsed by the management to make sure that the suggested mechanisms are in line with overall administrative and resource framework of the organization's community relations audit. A community relations audit assesses local issues and needs with respect to community relations. The main purpose of a community relations audit is to collect essential baseline information on the current state of affairs which will inform the development and subsequent evaluation of the plan. The scope of the audit should include existing planning information on the topic concerned as well as general information on the demographic and social characteristics of the community. It may be necessary to conduct a survey to gather more detailed information such as the needs of particular target groups.

Consultation with the community is important to ensure that the views of the wide range of stakeholders are included in the plan. Consultation in a culturally diverse community like Ubeji must be designed to include indigenous people and people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds both in the planning and conduct of the consultation. Consultation targeting specific cultural groups must be designed and implemented in a culturally appropriate way. Development Needs and issues identified through the community relations audit and consultation will need to be prioritized in order of importance. These needs and issues will then inform the scope of the WRPC community relations plans and define the key aims to be achieved. The plan may include long term aims such as improvement of community relations and social harmony as well as more immediate specific aims such as enhancing awareness of and access to specific services. A good community relations plan should focus on practical and effective strategies aimed at addressing the needs and issues identified through the earlier steps in the planning process. The plan should identify the processes required for implementation and how the outcome is to be measured and assessed. A simple and clear implementation strategy will be useful in monitoring progress and ensuring that important milestones have been achieved within the planned time line. A good implementation plan will include all steps required to initiate and implement the strategies, identify the persons or agencies responsible for managing different components of the plan, and schedule periodic reviews to ensure that essential adjustments are made. Issues and feedback identified during consultation and implementation of the plan should be recorded for use as a reference in evaluating the plan and for development of future strategies.

Evaluation is an important final step in community relations planning as it will assist in assessing the effectiveness of the plan. Evaluation usually focuses on what was done, what was achieved and what improvement could be made in future work. There is no prescribed standard model or framework for community relations evaluation. However, an evaluation would usually consider the following factors. Evaluation can be undertaken at the conclusion of the plan or at suitable stages during its implementation. However, it would be ideal if community relations plans and strategies in WRPC are guided by the core principles of the multicultural Queensland policy. The core principles of the multicultural Queensland policy are: Leadership: Improving community relations requires a clear vision. Public statement of such a vision will build support for community relations initiatives and





provide the basis for long term positive effects in the community. **Planning:** Careful and thorough planning is critical to an effective community relations plan. The planning should also be informed by extensive and inclusive consultation with the Ubeji community and the involvement of other relevant stakeholders. **Integration:** Community relations strategies work best when they are integrated with existing process and procedures and do not require added arrangements for their implementation. This is particularly important for consultation and information dissemination about the project as people generally feel more comfortable participating in existing or familiar networks and structures. **Inclusion of diversity:** An underlying objective of any community relations strategy is to improve social harmony and cohesion through inclusion of people of diverse backgrounds in all stages of the community relations planning process. Good community relations strategies must by their nature value and respect diversity and aim at addressing the needs of a diverse community. **Ongoing effects:** There is no quick, one-off solution to community relations issues and problems. Good community relations strategies should be sustainable in order to have long term effects in the community. **Holistic Approach:** Good community relations strategies should take account of the complex factors that impact on community relations. Issues raised in community relations discussions may be symptomatic of other underlying problems that require further investigation and analysis. For this reasons community relations projects are frequently multi-pronged and require the cooperation of a number of groups and agencies.

#### **2.1.6 The Importance of Effective Community Relations on an Organization Corporate Image**

Karadeniz (2009) opines that corporate image comprises evaluation and interpretation of information coming from different channels that can be explained by objects, situations, concepts, and signs engendered by imagination. He adds that the importance of a good corporate image is dependent on corporate philosophy, corporate behaviour, corporate design and corporate communication. Corporate communication, in essence is the application of all communication precautions systematically integrated, which aims to impact public opinion, patronage and acceptance. Corporate communication is the core of community relations, especially in an organization such as the WRPC.

Lewis (1973) had emphasized that first impression can go a long way in the success of an organization which is not easily achievable and oil companies are no exceptions. This is why Omavowan (2016) had argued that:

*Constant oil exploration which caused the displacement of people from their place of work and habitation would have continued to be a fact ... without the efforts of community relations in the public relations or corporate affairs office of such corporations like the NNPC.*

The importance of community relations in an organization such as the NNPC in Ubeji, Warri can be seen in the following: Community relations guides and strengthens an organization as a responsible corporate ally and citizen. Community relations establish and sustain mutual coexistence. Community relations create a conducive working environment for the operations of the organization. Community relations increase the respect and acceptability of the organization. These advantages agree with Budd (1995) who avers that managing community relations is one and the same with managing corporate reputation which is a delicate and sensitive process. He adds that managing judgement, attitude and a sense of feeling rooted in a person's mind. Good relations just like reputation, is hard to build and cannot be bought. Cornelissen (2011) agrees when he asserts that the more organizations focus on managing relations with non-customers, publics or reputation management as their guiding philosophy the more likely they were to have a strong reputation. This is in tandem with Kim and Reber (2008) who had opined that corporate social responsibility is a central relationship building



activity within organizations). Richard and Holly (2014) opine, in support levels of volunteerism, more media coverage and a better public image will enhance community relations. Honey and Rim (2010) suggest that corporate social responsibility has an indirect influence on positive word of mouth communication that contributes to reputation, organizational value and stakeholder loyalty. This is why Kruckeberry and Starck (1988, xi) say “our theory is that public relations actively defined and practiced is an active attempt to restore and maintain a sense of community”. They are credited as being the first to argue that public relations ought to be conceptualized as the active attempt to restore and maintain a sense of community. Community relations place a premium on a caring attitude towards others. It is a humane and altruistic function, but one based on sound and pragmatic philosophy. It is a role, to a very great extent of non-manipulation. If practiced should result in a more human and mutually supportive society.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

The European Commission says Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interactions with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis. This is what Grayson & Hodges (2004) says “entails managing effectively the company’s actual and potential environmental and social impact on the communities in which the firm operates and society as a whole. The Corporate Social Responsibility theory posits that every corporate organization such as the WRPC should act, behave and operate like a responsible and good citizen, in a way to promote peace, harmony, progress and development of the community in which it is situated (Ogan, 1994). This theory originated from the work of the United States of America’s initiated Hutchins commission of 1947, called the Commission on the Freedom of the Press. This is the origin of the theory of social responsibility in Mass Communication. It is now globally referred to as global social responsibility. The European Commission says Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interactions with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis. This is what Grayson & Hodges (2004) says “entails managing effectively the company’s actual and potential environmental and social impact on the communities in which the firm operates and society as a whole. This is why the World Bank (2003) says organizations must be involved in long – term investments, work in cooperation with governments, civil society groups, development institutions and citizens. For a public entity like the Warri Refinery and Petrochemical Company (WRPC), “being a socially responsible company means demonstrating an enduring commitment to improving people lives Coleman (nd) adds that CSR is about delivering sustainable growth, supported by a firm foundation of principles that preserve human dignity, enhance the quality life and reduce environmental impact. As a responsible citizen, an organization like the WRPC must always feel the need to give back to society. Carrol (1999) proposed a four parts definition of corporate social responsibility suggesting that corporations such as the WRPC have four responsibilities or “four faces” to fulfil to be good corporate citizens: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. Carrol (1999) explains that economic responsibility is profitable when principals deliver good quality products at fair prices due to customers. Legal duties entail complying with the laws and playing the rules of the game. Ethical duties overcome the limitations of legal duties. While Philanthropic responsibility- “giving back” time and money in the form of voluntary service, voluntary association, and voluntary giving is where most of the controversy over the legitimacy of corporate social responsibility lies.

Despite the link of corporate social responsibility theory to the freedom of the press social responsibility theory, the phrase corporate social responsibility has been traced to Bowen (1953) whose publication of social responsibility of business men that posed the question of what





responsibilities to society can business people reasonably be expected to assume. The thrust of the postulates of the theory is “the desire to establish a strategic relationship with the state, or society that led some corporate bodies to invest in the establishment of institutions that fulfil the specific requirement of the community and the establishment of trusts and foundations for tax benefits, which also support socially beneficial activities. There have been various amendments, perspectives and schools of thought about CSR since then: there is corporate social responsiveness (Ackerman & Baucer, 1976). A comprehensive idea is the concept of corporate social performance (Carrol, 1979). Wood (1991) presented a model of corporate social responsibilities processes of corporate social responsiveness and outcomes of corporate behaviour. The essence of anchoring this theory on the corporate responsibility theory is the need for WRPC to give back to the Ubeji community something out of the much it gets from their God endowed natural resource - crude oil. This implies that the WRPC, using the corporate social responsibility, also known as corporate social performance should look at how it integrates its business operations with the social demands of the Ubeji community based on the fact business depends on society (community relations) for its existence, growth and continuity. This is what Jensen (2000) say that responsibilities are accepted as enlightened value maximization since they lead to long term value maximization or value seeking as WRPC’s objectives. This is what Soderberg (1986) says that companies such as the WRPC can become involved in their communities by taking active interest in community problems, sponsoring youth activities; participating in local government (affairs); joining business and source groups; purchasing supplies and materials from local companies; encouraging community education and culture; making offices and other facilities available to community organizations, supporting local charity drives and taking part in civil activities. This agrees with O’keefe (2013) who says extractive companies can do a lot to manage and improve their community relations. Effective Community Relations often lead to successful outcomes. This can only be effectively achieved using the asymmetric public relations model based on corporate social responsibility.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Methods**

The research design used for this study is the survey research method. The population of this study is the entire staff of WRPC and residents of Ubeji community, Warri, Delta State. The sample of the study is taken from the Warri South because Ubeji is in the Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State. According to the National Population Commission Census of 2006, there are three hundred and eleven thousand, nine hundred and seventy (311,970) people in the Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State. The sample size of this study is 400 persons purposively selected from both residents and staff of the WRPC and the Ubeji community, Warri. The sampling technique for this study is the purposive sampling technique which Wimmer and Dominic (2006) say includes subject selected on the basis of specific characteristics or qualities and eliminates those who fail to meet those criteria. This agrees with Obaze and Onosu (2009) who opine that purposive sampling is based on personal consideration of the researcher to provide the researcher with the required information or data. The data collection instrument used in this study is the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two sections. Section A elicited information about the respondents’ demographic variables such as age bracket, occupation, marital status, educational attainment, and gender (sex). Section B contains thematic questions pertaining to the research questions. The researcher with the assistance of research assistants administered the questionnaire copies on person-to-person basis. This afforded the researcher and his assistants the opportunity to explain to respondents questions that the respondents could not easily understand.



### 3.2 The WRPC: A Brief History

Warri Refining and Petrochemical Company is located in Ubeji in the Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State. According to the National Population Commission (web) Census of 2006, there are three hundred and eleven thousand, nine hundred and seventy (311,970) people in the Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State. The WRPC was incorporated as a limited liability company on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 1988 after the merger of the then Warri Refinery with the Ekpan Petrochemical plants. It was essentially built to add value to some of the refinery's by products such as propylene rich stock and decant oil. The Warri Refinery, the first Nigerian government wholly owned refinery was commissioned in 1978, by Muhammadu Buhari. It was built to process 100,000 barrels of crude oil per day but was later debottlenecked to process 125, 000 barrels per day in 1987. It was essentially built to add value to some of the refinery's by products such as propylene rich stock and decant oil. Its mission statement is to efficiently and profitably process crude oil into petrochemical products through effective resource utilization, while exploiting new business opportunity and its vision statement is to be a leader in the petroleum processing business in Africa and its quality policy, quality excellence in the foundation of our goal of customer satisfaction; it is therefore our policy to: Produce and supply petroleum and petrochemical products in conformity with customer requirements; Continually improve our quality management system, processes, products and services to ensure customers satisfaction; continually upgrade technology, knowledge and skill for improved business performance; vigorously promote a safe and environmentally healthy work place; and, promote teamwork in the organization and harmonious relationship worth our host communities.

### 4. Results

Data collected were analyzed using frequency tables, simple percentages and explanation building techniques. This was to ease computation and uniformity for easier comprehension and understanding. The three hundred and ninety-three copies of the questionnaire are analyzed in order to fulfill the objectives of the study.

**Table 1: Demographics of the Respondents**

Variable	No. of Respondents	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	183	47%
Female	210	53%
<i>Age Bracket</i>		
18-21years	102	26%
22-25years	96	24%
25-29years	74	19%
30-33years	83	21%
34years and Above	038	10%
<i>Educational Attainment</i>		
SSSCE/GCE	95	24%
OND/NCE	101	76%
HND/BA/BSc	157	40%
MSc/MA/PhD	41	10%
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single	177	45%
Married	131	33%
Separated/Divorced	66	17%
Widowed	19	05%



<i>Occupation</i>		
Business/Self-employed	168	43%
Civil Servant	94	24%
Teacher	76	19%
Driver	18	05%
Other	37	09%
Total	393	100

*Source: Field work, 2019*

The table above contains: Gender, Age Bracket, Educational Attainment, Marital Status and Occupation of the 393 respondents whose copies of the research instrument were retrieved and found useable. .

**Table 2: Perception of WRPC Community Relations, CSR, Tools and Activities of WRPC**

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	209	53%
No	178	45%
To an extent	06	02%
Total	393	100

*Source: Field work, 2019*

The Table 2 above indicates that Ubeji residents perceive the WRPC community relations CSR tools and activities as effective. This is in tandem with the finding of Ekeopara (2009), which is that the community relations practice of an organization improves the corporate of such an organization.

**Table 3: Perception of the Relationship between Ubeji and WRPC**

Perception	No of Respondents	Percentage
Positive	271	69%
Negative	108	27%
Undecided	14	04%
Total	393	100

*Source: Field work, 2019*

Majority of the respondents perceive the relationship between Ubeji community and the WRPC as positive. This confirms what Shamsan and Otieno (2015) found, that when host communities accept and patronize an organization, it implies that the organization listens to the comments of its customers and responds responsibly. In other words, there is a positive connection between an organization's Public Relations (Community relations) practice, its corporate image and mutual understanding with its host community.

**Table 4: Contributions of the WRPC to the development of the Ubeji community**

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	196	50%
No	189	48%
To an extent	08	02%
Total	393	100

*Source: Fieldwork, 2019.*

Many of the respondents felt that WPRC had contributed to the development of the Ubeji community.



**Table 5: Belief in the cordial and progressive relationship between WRPC and Ubeji community**

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	197	50%
No	190	48%
To an extent	06	02%
Total	393	100

*Source: Fieldwork, 2019*

Many of the respondents believed that the relationship between WRPC and Ubeji community had been cordial and progressive.

**Table 6: Belief in the cordial relationship being due to CSR**

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	211	54%
No	107	27%
Not Really	75	19%
Total	393	100

*Source: Fieldwork, 2019*

Over half of the respondents believed that the cordial relationship that existed between the WRPC and the Ubeji community was due to the corporate social responsibility of the WRPC.

**Table 7: Community relations strategies of the WRPC increased the mutual understanding and corporate image building.**

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	198	50%
No	145	37%
To an extent	50	13%
Total	393	100

*Source: Fieldwork, 2019*

Many of the 393 respondents felt that the community relations strategies employed by the WRPC increased mutual understanding and corporate image building.

**Table 8: Most effective tactics of community relations suitable for enhancing the corporate image of WRPC**

Tactics	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Sponsorship/Philanthropy	83	21%
Employee/volunteerism	108	27%
Environmental/Stewardship	105	27%
Economic Reversal Project	97	25%
Total	393	100

*Source: Fieldwork, 2019*

The above table contains the views of respondents on the most suitable community relations tactics of the WRPC



**Table 9: Potential problems of WRPC Community Relations drive for better corporate image**

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	165	42%
No	207	53%
To an extent	21	5%
Total	393	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

There was no clear cut difference between the number of respondents who felt there were potential problems facing or likely to obstruct the WRPC drive for a better corporate image of the WRPC and those who did not. No organization is perfect in its operations, that is why proactive and far sighted organizations prepare for crises and how to handle them when and if they do occur.

**Table 10: Types of probable problem likely to reduce effective Community Relations drive of the WRPC**

Type of problem	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Poor corporate communication	94	24%
Lack of responsiveness	106	27%
Unwillingness of invest	119	30%
Poor community relations tactics and strategies	74	19%
Total	393	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

The 393 respondents had their preferences for the probable problems that could reduce the effective community relations practice of the WPRC. Even though community relations tactics improve the corporate image of organizations such as WRPC, there are still potential problems. Therefore, it is imperative for community relations unit of organizations to be more proactive than reactive in order to nip in the bud such potential problems.

**Table 11: Extent to which community relations tactics of WRPC contributed to the social and economic development of Ubeji**

Extent	No. of Respondents	Percentage
A very significant extent	158	40%
A significant extent	102	26%
A very insignificant extent	75	19%
An insignificant extent	58	15%
Total	393	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

Table 11 above shows that most respondents felt that WRPC community relations tactics contributed to the social and economic development of Ubeji to a very significant and significant extent respectively. This finding agrees with Ekeopara (2009) who had found that community relations tactics of organizations such as WRPC contribute to the socio economic development of its host communities. In other words, the tactics enhances the corporate image 'a little more favourably' more than perceived by the various publics of such organizations.



**Table 12: Support of the view that more can still be done to improve the relationship between Ubeji community and WRPC**

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	275	70%
No	118	30%
Total	393	100

*Source: Fieldwork, 2019*

Many respondents believed that more can still be done to improve the cordial relationship between the WRPC and Ubeji community. The diverse publics of public organizations are always in need of one project, amenity, expectations, aspirations and interests to be met and or provided for (Nwanne, 2015). That is many PR scholars advocate proactive Public Relations (Community Relations) approaches. Most scholars have advised that Public Relations and or the Corporate Affairs Departments of organizations such as the WRPC should be involved in Management or headed by management personnel in line with global practices.

**Table 13: Factors likely to increase WRPC Community Relations practices**

Factors	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Government Policy	125	32%
Staff of the WRPC	55	14%
Involvement and consultation	105	27%
More funding	108	27%
Total	393	100

*Source: Fieldwork, 2019*

All respondents agreed that the above factors would likely increase the WRPC community relations practices. This agrees with Kim and Cha (2013) who had found that the size and formality of Public Relations Units, amongst other factors listed in the above table affect the corporate reputation of an organization such as the WRPC.

**Table 14: Relationship between the Community Relations practices of WRPC and its corporate image**

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	259	66%
No	134	34%
Total	393	100

*Source: Fieldwork, 2019*

Many respondents believed that there is a significant relationship between the community relations practices of WRPC and its corporate image. This confirms Ekeopara's (2009) finding that the corporate image of an organization improves with effective community relations. Two hundred and fifty nine (66%) respondents agreed that there is a relationship between the Community Relations practices of WRPC and its corporate image.

The discussion of findings of this study is premised on using the responses of the 393 respondents who returned copies of their questionnaire to provide answers to the research questions posed to realize the objectives of the study. Therefore:





*Research Question One*

*How effectively has the community relations of the WRPC helped in enhancing its corporate image proffering solutions to potential problems that can reduce its Community Relations practice?*

The answer to this research question was provided by data analyzed in tables 2, 8 and 9. In table 2, two hundred and nine respondents returned that the community relations activities, CRS and tools were effective. Therefore, it can be inferred that the effectiveness of the practices, activities and CSR had indeed helped in enhancing the corporate image of the WRPC. This agrees with Budd (1995) who avers that managing community relations is one and the same with managing corporate reputation which is a delicate and sensitive process. Holly & Rim (2010) concurs when they opine that corporate social responsibility has an indirect influence on positive word of mouth communication that contributes to reputation building. Data analyzed in table 8 corroborates the above finding. In this table, sponsorship/philanthropy had the least score of 83 (21%) respondents indicating that this community relations tactics was effective. Employee volunteerism and environmental stewardship had 108 (27%) and 105 (27%) respondents respectively and economic project renewal had 97 (25%). The effectiveness of these practices of community relations will definitely culminate into a better corporate image for the WRPC. These should guide and strengthen the WRPC as a responsible corporate ally and citizen. Table 9 confirms that community relations activities, CRS and tools enhance the corporate image of an organization such as the WRPC. In this table, 207 (53%) respondents did not support the view that there were problems that could reduce the impact of the drive for a better corporate image. This is what Kruckeberry and Starck (1988, xi) mean when they stated that public relations actively defined and practiced is an active attempt to restore and maintain a sense of community. They see community relations as a humane and altruistic function (practice). Table 6 contains some of the suggested problems likely to be encountered by the WRPC in its community relations drive for the sustenance and enhancement of its corporate image. The researcher, based on preliminary personal observations and interactions listed poor corporate communication, lack of responsiveness, unwillingness to invest in the development of the community (Ubeji) and poor community relations strategies and tactics as the potential problems likely to be encountered by the WRPC. This reminds one of Kim and (2013) who had found that the size and formality of Public Relations (Corporate Affairs Department) affect the corporate reputation of any organization. Unwillingness to invest got the highest score of 119 (30%) respondents. This is a reminder of Nwanne (2015) who had reminded organizations that conflicts often arise because the needs, aspirations, interests and expectations of diverse groups in host communities are not the same. This is why Dilenshneider (2000) advises companies to be savvy about their relationships with the diverse interests of host community residents. Nwanne (2015) lends his support by admonishing that organizations such as WRPC must work closely with their diverse publics, keep their ears to the ground in order to detect threats and spot opportunities for the display of corporate social responsibility which is somewhat similar to public interest. This is what Villanova, Zinkhan and Hyman (2000), say corporate image is an overall perception of the company (WRPC) held by different segments of the public. These diverse interests have personal and social meaning in addition to functional utility and expectations. This is why community relations planning culminates into evaluation which focuses on what was done, what was achieved and what improvement could be made to avoid likely problems.



*Research Questions Two*

*How do residents of Ubeji community perceive WRPC and how has their perception impacted the corporate image of the WRPC?*

The answer to this research question was provided by data analyzed and tabulated in Tables 2, 3 and 4. In table 2, two hundred and nine (53%) respondents perceived the WRPC Community relations, CRS, tools and practices as effective. This agrees with the Hampshire Business for social responsibility which says community relations is the method that companies use to manage relationships with the communities in which they operate. A community (WRPC) engages in community relations activities by taking an active role in the wellbeing of the community. Nwanne (2015, p 177) adds that relating with host communities is not an easy endeavour. Ekeopara (2009) opines that organizations are beginning to realize that patronage not only lies in effective and marketing strategy but also to a great extent in their corporate image. For this reason, organizations devote serious attention to the issues of their corporate image. In table 7, two hundred and seventy nine (69%) respondents perceived the community relations practices of the WRPC as positive and this has impacted the corporate image of the WRPC. This reminds one of Daramola (2003, p 70) who had opined that every person or corporate organization has one kind of affinity with the members of the environment where he or she operates. This implies that where the right attitude is exhibited there will always be a mutually benefitting relationship between the organization, individuals and the country. That is why Wilson & Jibrin (2014) assert that every society irrespective of its size, desires and works towards attaining some level of development especially in a fast changing social, political and economic climate where everyone wants to grow, wants to succeed, wants to be heard and recognized, and wants to be involved in the daily activities of his or her community. This confirms the saying 'that no man is an island'. Table 4 corroborates the finding above where 196 (50%) respondents agreed that the WRPC had contributed to the development of the Ubeji community. Community relations practice is an excellent opportunity to bank good will in the community (Ajala, 2005, p 13).

*Research Question Three*

*What are the Community Relations strategies employed by WRPC for maintaining mutual understanding and corporate image building?*

Table 8 contains a summarized list of the strategies employed by WRPC, like most organizations in its community relations practices. They include sponsorship, philanthropy, employee volunteerism, economic renewal project. As is the practice based on government policy, the WRPC according to its corporate affairs/human resources managers, the WRPC also employs indigenes, establish skills acquisition centres, gives contracts to indigenous companies and attend Ubeji community development meetings where issues are discussed. Table 9 affirmed this where 198(50%) respondents returned that the Community Relations practices and strategies increased WRPC's and Ubeji community mutual understanding and corporate image building. This is corroborated by data tabulated in table 9, where 158 (40%) and 102 (26%) respondents submitted that the community relations, tools, tactics and strategies used by the WRPC had contributed to the social and economic development of Ubeji community to a very significant and a significant extents respectively.

The summary of analysis, discussion of findings shows that participants in the study (sample) were mostly single and enterprising young men and women who were educated whereby many were self-employed (168). This maybe because where public organizations sited often attract diverse publics with different interests Many respondents perceived the community relations practices, tactics and strategies as effectively sufficient that it established and led to a sustained cordial relationship



between the WRPC and the Ubeji host community. The perception of many respondents about the WRPC was positive. Many believed that the community relations activities contributed to the cordial and progressive relationship that existed between the WRPC and Ubeji community. One interesting finding is that the community relations practices of the WRPC enhanced, significantly, the corporate image of the WRPC. This confirms that community relations help to promote sustainable development and enhance business activities of corporate organizations culminating into a better corporate image. Findings also affirm that corporate social responsibility and responsiveness not only enhances the corporate image of an organization, CSR also increases the acceptance and patronage of an organization such as the WRPC. The study confirms that community relations planning and evaluation premised on sponsorship philanthropy, environmental stewardship, economic project renewals, establishment of skills acquisition centres all lead to a better corporate image. The study also finds that there are likely problems that can obstruct a more desirable and successful corporate image drive. However, these obstacles are surmountable. Towards a more effective corporate drive more funding for the WRPC was identified as a crucial factor. Most importantly, the study finds that there is a significant relationship between the community relations activities, practice, and strategies of an organization such as the WRPC and the enhancement of its corporate image.

#### **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that Community Relations had effects on the corporate image of the WRPC. As found from the analysis of data, the relationship between WRPC and the Ubeji was cordial, progressive and positive. Community relations activities have a tremendous effect on the corporate image of an organization such as the WRPC. There is a positive connection between the corporate social responsibility activities of the WRPC and the social and economic development of Ubeji that culminates into a positive corporate reputation. This informs that the theoretical anchor of the study is applicable not only to media organizations but to all corporate citizens..

Based on findings, it is recommended that the Federal Government, a major stakeholder of the WRPC should provide more funding for the WRPC to enable the WRPC invest more on its community relations activities, planning, execution and involvement in the affairs of the Ubeji community. The WRPC should make the community relations unit autonomous through employing mostly trained professional public relations practitioners and Mass Communication graduates to handle its community relations activities. This will ensure that information dissemination to its external and internal publics are professionally conceptualized, produced and properly disseminated. The Human Resource/Corporate affairs department of the WRPC should appoint personnel knowledgeable in human resources management, industrial relations, organizational communication ensure a more effective community relations practices drive for a more acceptable corporate image. There should be provision for the retraining of professionals handling the community relations activities of the WRPC in line with global best practices. The WRPC should invest more in sponsoring media and other events to enhance its corporate image via seminars and workshops to keep the community relations personnel up to speed in global best practices for a better and more respectable corporate image. The community relations personnel should be certified PR professionals so that they can be members of the management team of the WRPC..

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