



Dynamics of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Amongst Local Communities in Thailand: Between 2019 and 2023

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Abstract

This study explores the dynamics in understanding among local communities concerning corporate social responsibility (CSR) between 2019 and 2023. The primary objective of this study is to assess the extent to which communities understand the meaning of CSR and how this understanding affects their level of satisfaction with CSR activities conducted by companies operating within the Map Ta Phut Industrial Estate Area, Rayong province. The study sample comprises community residents within the Map Ta Phut Industrial Estate Area, living close to 20 companies. Each year, approximately 1,120 samples were collected. This resulted in a total of 5,590 samples over a five-year period from 2019 to 2023. Descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA were used to analyze the data. The findings demonstrate that community members are likely to exhibit changes in their understanding of CSR. Furthermore, their understanding of CSR correlates with the level of satisfaction expressed within the community toward CSR.

Keywords

Corporate Social Responsibility, Understanding, Satisfaction, Local Community

Introduction

The term “sustainability” was first adopted by environmentally destructive corporations and companies at the end of the 1980s in their corporate environmental reports, to present a more environmentally and socially responsible face. As such the term has been heavily criticized for deliberate vagueness, immeasurableness, and as an exercise in public relations. Nevertheless, the idea dove-tailed with the slightly older tradition of “corporate social responsibility” (CSR hereafter), Howard Bowen’s idea that companies had to recognize their relationship with the community in which they operated as a “social contract,” and this resulted in genuine initiatives to at least appear to offset the damage such companies do. The “sustainability” of a company is therefore its ability to make its product or service appear acceptable to its consumers and avoid being made a pariah. It is now conventionally recognized that the “sustainability” of a company is a part of its make-up and that it therefore can no longer rely solely on financial performance but must publicly show that it also considers people and the planet (Widyastuti & Dewi, 2020). Thus, the crucial role of CSR is to now demonstrate to a society that it can coexist with that society in an environmentally sustainable manner, i.e. that it will not destroy that society’s environment. However, these businesses are primarily profit-seeking entities and businesses that perform CSR activities must do so in a way that maintains the satisfaction of the shareholders by remaining profitable. This profit-generating priority must be publicly balanced by appearing to the community as an acceptable component of the community where the business operates. Because of the need to *perform* CSR and “sustainability”, CSR initiatives must appear to continuously grow and evolve in societies and communities in which they are located.

Because of this deliberate deployment of the discourse of CSR and “sustainability” in the last decade 2015-2025, particularly from the UN’s concoction of the notorious concept of “sustainable development goals” (SDG) in 2015, CSR has become a significant talking point for both the public and private sectors because both the public and organizations are now aware of these corporations supposed responsibility for the social impact of their activities. To ensure the survival of their businesses in the long run, to ensure their ability to continue to undertake their often destructive, extractive or exploitative operations with the consent of the community, to be able to maintain demand for their product or service through brand acceptability, they must appear to integrate business development and social responsibility in order to present an “acceptable face of capitalism” to the community in which they operate and demonstrate consideration of a “common interest.” This requires continuous effort on their part because public demonstrations of CSR do not last, are quickly forgotten, and renewed engagement of all stakeholders will be needed.

While “sustainability” is the general CSR goal, companies must also report specific Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) such as the level of “community satisfaction” to several national and international organizations in order to demonstrate success in achieving “sustainability.” Due to the gradual nature of the effects of CSR initiatives, companies have long worried that focus on the most “sustainable” KPIs, long-term sustainable CSR, might not result in ready “community satisfaction.” Sustainability in the context of CSR means that the community receives assistance to offset any malevolent effects of the company’s presence, and that the community will be able to make use of this assistance and maintain its independence in the long term, even after the company has stopped providing that support. Consequently, CSR provided by these companies fundamentally focuses on frequent philanthropic donations. Such frequent donations are considered short-term and that they do not align with the goal of CSR, which is the ever-elusive “sustainability.”

The primary objective of this research is to assess that “community satisfaction,” the extent to which communities understand the meaning of CSR, accept CSR, and perceive it as beneficial (even though the reality of environmental destruction may necessarily continue due to the nature of profit-seeking business), and how this understanding therefore raises or lowers their level of “satisfaction” with CSR activities. The findings of this study could potentially benefit subject companies in terms of CSR resource management and help guide CSR strategy adjustment to increase the perception of “sustainability” for companies and the satisfaction of their stakeholders with the company’s overall performance in an age where businesses are having to carefully navigate an environmentally aware public. This is the first study to collect data over a period of five years to explore the dynamics in understanding among local communities of the meaning of CSR and the first study to assess how this understanding of CSR affects local communities’ satisfaction with CSR activities.

The main reason for studying the Map Ta Phut Industrial Estate in Rayong province is that it is the largest industrial estate in Thailand and the world’s eighth-largest petrochemical center (Funatsu, 2021). The Map Ta Phut Industrial Estate has been a key economic driver of the Thai economy since its establishment in 1988. It has significantly increased Rayong’s economy through investments and job creation. According to the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) in 2022, Rayong province had the highest per capita income in Thailand (NESDC, 2022). The presence of such industrial companies will have a beneficial economic impact on the region such as local employment, an increase in local people’s income and overall economic development. However, it can also have a significant negative impact such as environmental problems, exploitation and discrimination, shifts in lifestyles and in social values

(Yanti, and Nasution, 2023). Thus, most companies in the area must engage in publicly performative CSR to appear to offset the social costs and demonstrate the companies' responsibility for environmental conditions in their development area, for the social dimension, and community welfare (Samer, Rawan, & Omar, 2018). The average annual number of CSR projects conducted by the companies participating in this study is six, with a total accumulated budget of nearly one hundred million baht each year. These figures indicate the level of importance these companies give to their CSR activities and to placating the local community in Map Ta Phut.

Literature Review

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Because of its deployment by corporations as discursive power, a variety of definitions of CSR exist (Bhatia, 2015). Bowen's (1953) CSR began in the 1950s as businesses having a clear responsibility to act legally and ethically in line with regulations. However, it has since evolved to incorporate activities that ensure a business can appear to minimize adverse social and environmental consequences of its operations through positive action and so-called "stakeholder engagement" which is corporate jargon for consultation with those affected by its actions and the consent for any non-profit making activity from its shareholders (Carroll, 1979; Dahlsrud, 2008). An assortment of academic frameworks to describe CSR have been imaginatively modelled, such as Carroll's (1979) CSR Pyramid, which classifies the CSR responsibilities of a business into four areas: the ethical, legal, economic, and philanthropic categories. Meanwhile, the stakeholder theory proposed by Freeman (1984) holds that instead of considering only the interests of shareholders, businesses should focus on the interests of every stakeholder, which now includes the workforce, its customers, and those affected by the company's presence (though not necessarily equally). The real or primary motivations behind CSR are unrelated to altruism, and range from enhancing financial performance (brand improvement, marketing), improving corporate reputation, and reducing risks (Porter & Kramer, 2006). Other scholars have argued that CSR is motivated by a corporation's need to meet societal expectations, and less persuasively, to genuinely address social and environmental concerns (Wood, 1991). Where profit-seeking remains the priority, the latter seems unlikely unless publicly and conspicuously demonstrating concern can work as a marketing ploy and help to generate demand and profit.

For this reason, one of the most common and visible forms of CSR is outright philanthropic donation. These contributions are often in the form of publicly performed charitable giving, sponsorship, and a public act or gift that demonstrates support for the community's needs. Such public philanthropy is also considered a mainstay of so-called "corporate citizenship" (Saiia, 2001),

another variant on the theme of CSR, as philanthropy is seen as an essential component of CSR (Carroll, 1991). Without public philanthropy CSR is an empty vessel. A growing body of empirical research has explored the impact of philanthropic donations on corporate performance, with evidence suggesting a positive relationship across diverse national and cultural contexts. For instance, studies by Yu (2020) and Turner & Lee (2024) have demonstrated that companies engaging in strategic philanthropy have enhanced brand reputation, strengthened stakeholder relationships, i.e. relations with the community from which they draw their workforce and make their environmental impact, and their all-important customers, which has improved financial performance. While this may work in certain settings, in an entrapped middle-income, unequal economy like Thailand, philanthropic donations are considered ineffective, or less effective, as such short-term, superficial, gesture-like actions are seen clearly for just that by the community because they do not address the root causes of underdevelopment and relatively low-incomes faced by those communities. Such philanthropy is therefore not considered properly “sustainable” for the purpose of winning over the community and avoiding conflict.

Additional to the expression of CSR as philanthropic donations, CSR is also expressed in the concept of creating shared values (CSV), meaning that the company and the community it operates should develop a shared value system. This vague and faintly promising discursive acronym has gained broader attention in educational institutions and businesses as a strategy for sustainable development and organizational success. CSV replaces traditional CSR approaches by emphasizing integrating social needs into core business strategies, in contrast to traditional CSR which was regarded as an addendum to the company’s main purpose: pursuit of profit. The concept’s authors, Porter and Kramer (2011), argued that proper integration of consideration for the community’s needs into the production process would in fact lead to better efficiency and economic value for organizations as well as “social value” for communities. According to Porter and Kramer, CSV proves that coping with social needs can bring new opportunities for innovation and growth (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Porter and Kramer additionally suggested that shared value refers to policies, practices, and activities that increase a company’s competitiveness while advancing the economic and social conditions of the communities in which it operates. The ideal of CSV focuses on finding and extending the connection between economic and social growth. Businesses must connect their success with social progress, ensuring that shared value extends across all sectors of the economy and society. CSV focuses on long-term growth through social investment that creates business value by coping with social problems and transforming them into significant business opportunities (Odia, 2018). CSV was therefore a reboot and intensification of the CSR ethic and reflected anxiety that without such integrative approaches, which meant more intensive action, corporate activities might be unable to avoid critical scrutiny.

More recently, a view of CSR as a tool for sustainable development has been emphasized. The term “sustainable development” came out of the experience of rapid, uneven and environmentally destructive economic growth in the non-Western world in the 1970s and 1980s, which saw communities upended and societies radically restructured. Sustainable development has been defined as a form of development that allows human activity to expand and progress, allowing people to meet their present needs without bringing about adverse consequences that may lead to problems for future generations in maintaining the status quo (Brundtland Report, 1987). For sustainable development to occur, three factors must be taken into consideration. These are a reconciliation between the need for economic growth, the need for social inclusion, and the need for the protection and preservation of the environment. The goal of sustainable development is to balance these components. The Brundtland Commission report made the conceptual link between “sustainable development” and the actions of corporations and implied the need for them to integrate the concept with their corporate social responsibility mantra. By the 1990s, CSR and “sustainable development” had been formally linked in the growing corporate environmental discourse.

Because the damage to the environment came increasingly associated with the actions of corporations in the public’s mind over the 1990s, corporations sought to influence public opinion and more systematically survey their attitudes towards them. The aforementioned CSR concepts have therefore been applied to measure “community understanding” of CSR. The local community’s understanding of what CSR means would be reflected in their beliefs about what companies should do in regarded to CSR activities. The Likert-type statement/questions posed by companies in their surveys of community attitudes were modified into three levels to elicit three differing perceptual emphases. This was done to ensure that the local community would be able to readily comprehend CSR concepts while still maintaining the accurate complexity of the concepts. The questions posed were as Likert-type statements as follows: 1) companies should deliver CSR activities which directly address community needs. Agreement with this statement represents the community view of CSR as a philanthropic donation; 2) companies and communities should collaborate for the improvement of residents’ well-being. This relationship should not be one-way, whereby the company gives and the community receives. Both should equally participate (whatever that means in practice). Agreement with this statement represents that the community views CSR from a CSV perspective. In this study, this variable is named “social investment” to match the original term used by companies in the area; and 3) companies should support the development of community business initiatives managed by local residents to promote sustainable development within the community. Sustainable businesses can be supported without the reliance upon other companies or external resources, external economies of scale. Agreement with this statement represents

that the community views CSR as a tool for “sustainable development.” In this study, this variable is named “commercial initiatives” to match the original term used by companies in the area.

Community Satisfaction

The measurement of “satisfaction” has been notoriously hard with economists resorting to the theoretical unit of pleasure or utility. “Satisfaction” has been broadly defined in marketing literature as a positive evaluation or an impact that people have regarding an experience, product, service, or situation compared to their expectations or desires (Oliver, 1980). It is at base a natural phenomenon that comprises aspects related to emotion, cognition, and behavior. It can be described as a feeling of happiness arising when someone meets their needs or accomplishes their goals (Wolman, 1973). More narrowly, it can be explained that satisfaction occurs when the expectations relating to goods or services match the quality received (Zifko-Baliga, 1998). Similarly, Kotler (2000) explained that satisfaction is the emotional consequence of expectations being met or exceeded.

In the same way, “community satisfaction” towards CSR is an emotional reflection whether expectations are met or not. Satisfaction of communities as key stakeholders in community empowerment closely connects with companies’ reputation and the perceived success of their CSR programs (Sugiarto & Sulaiman 2021). Fonseca et al. (2012) noted that it is essential for companies to place a high degree of emphasis on the interests of the stakeholders or the community so that community satisfaction will follow. Below is a conceptual framework of this study.

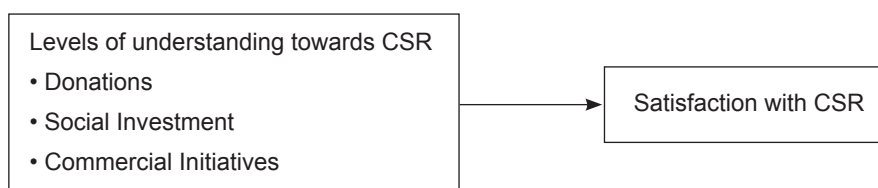


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Source: Authors

As the primary objective of this study is to assesses changes in community understanding towards CSR between 2019 and 2023 as well as to examine how this understanding affects their satisfaction. This study posed two hypotheses as follow:

H1: There is a declining view of CSR as donations and a growing view of CSR as social investment or commercial initiatives

H2: Levels of understanding towards CSR amongst local communities relates to their level of satisfaction with CSR

Methodology

Population and Samples

The study population comprised residents, community leaders, and government officials who lived and worked within the Map Ta Phut Industrial Estate, including Map Ta Phut, Map Kha, Ban Chang, and Ban Chang Subdistrict municipalities, and included a varying number of companies participating in the study each year. The required sample size is calculated using the G* Power program based on Cohen's formula (Cohen, 1977), which indicates a minimum of 42 participants per company is needed to achieve a power of 0.95 at an alpha level of 0.05. To enhance data accuracy, account for potential data loss, and increase the reliability of the findings, between 50 to 60 samples of data were collected per company. The data was collected retrospectively over a five-year period from 2019 to 2023. The number of participating companies and the corresponding sample sizes varied each year, reflecting the operational landscape of the industrial estate. The detailed breakdown of the total of 5,590 samples is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Annual Sample Distribution

Year	Number of surveyed companies	Samples per company	Annual total samples
2019	17	50	850
2020	18	60	1,080
2021	19	60	1,140
2022	21	60	1,260
2023	21	60	1,260
Total			5,590

Source: Authors

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection process began with a comprehensive mapping of all CSR activities undertaken by the participating companies between 2019 and 2023. The sample of 5,590 participants was then drawn from the community with direct experience of these CSR activities. The study employed a systematic random sampling technique. This method involved randomly selecting an initial household, and then choosing subsequent households at a regular, fixed interval until the desired sample size for each area was achieved. The questionnaire is divided into four

sections: 1) “screening questions” to select suitable respondents, 2) questions about understanding the meaning of CSR, 3) questions about satisfaction with CSR, and 4) questions gathering general demographic data from the respondents. In this study, the ‘understanding of CSR’ was treated as a categorical variable, while ‘satisfaction with CSR’ was operationalized using Likert-type rating scales anchored by 1 = ‘strongly dissatisfied and 7 = ‘strongly satisfied’. The questionnaires were distributed to households in person. The questionnaires were self-completed with data collectors available to assist in case of any clarification with the questions if needed. In regard to research ethics, no identity of respondents were collected and data would only be presented in aggregated form to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

To analyze the data, the present study utilized SPSS to examine the measurement and test the two hypotheses. Prior to the analysis, multivariate assumptions were diagnosed. The results revealed that multivariate assumptions were not a concern in this study. As the variable “Understanding of CSR” is a “categorical” level, means and standard deviation values were not possible to calculate. Thus, percentages were used to test Hypothesis 1. Fluctuations in the proportions in donations, social investments and commercial initiatives between 2019 and 2023 would indicate changes in understanding of CSR amongst local communities. With regards to Hypothesis 2, one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether a community’s understanding of CSR affected their level of “satisfaction.”

Results

The data presented in Table 2 show how community perceptions of CSR have altered during the period from 2019 to 2023. It can be seen that in 2019, donations directly addressing community needs were seen to be the principal form of CSR by 33.41 percent of community respondents. However, in the subsequent years, this proportion decreased, so that by 2023, only 8.33 percent of respondents considered CSR to equate to community donations. An increasing proportion, in contrast, began to understand that CSR could take the form of social investment, and might bring about independent commercial benefits to the community. Thus, Hypothesis 1 which posited that there is a declining view of CSR as donations and a growing view of CSR as social investment or commercial initiatives during this time period can be accepted. This change aligns with changes in the types of CSR activities implemented by the companies during the period. In 2019, most of the companies focused solely on providing immediate aid and assistance and responding to short-term needs of the local communities, which were highly visible but by nature short-lived. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 when activities were restricted due to government containment policies, companies realized that communities were not sufficiently

self-sustaining and that this impacted on the community's view of the dominant presence of these companies. As a result, in 2020, CSR budgets were allocated to activities which were deeper rooted, more long-term and had potential to enhance local community self-efficacy such as product development and vocational skills training, as well as market organization to support the sale of community products.

Table 2 Community Understanding of CSR between 2019-2023

Community's understanding of CSR (%)	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Donations	33.41	23.24	16.30	16.59	8.33
Social Investments	49.88	52.69	64.07	76.27	50.42
Commercial Initiatives	16.71	24.07	19.63	7.14	41.25
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Authors

In order to test Hypothesis 2, which posits that levels of understanding of CSR amongst local communities relates to their level of satisfaction, "values of satisfaction" between 2019 and 2023 were derived. In addition, one-way ANOVA was employed to statistically test whether there were significant differences in satisfaction amongst people with varying levels of CSR understanding. Table 3 shows an increase in community CSR satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 onwards. The level of "satisfaction" increased even though there was a change of CSR activities during that period.

Table 3 Community Satisfaction with CSR

	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
Community Satisfaction with CSR	4.51	0.44	4.31	0.37	4.56	0.38	4.52	0.33	4.62	0.48

Source: Authors

Table 4 presents the results of one-way ANOVA testing whether community satisfaction with CSR statistically differ based on their understanding of CSR between 2019 and 2023. Overall, the findings suggest that the relationship between community understanding of CSR and their satisfaction has varied over the five-year period. In 2019 and 2020, there were statistically significant differences in satisfaction levels among groups with differing levels of CSR understanding, indicating that greater understanding may be linked to higher satisfaction. This trend was especially pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, when companies shifted their CSR strategies toward more long-term and “sustainable” efforts. However, in other years, no significant differences were observed, suggesting that the influence of CSR understanding on satisfaction is not consistent over time. Further post-hoc analysis reveals that in 2019, community residents who perceived CSR to be donations had higher levels of satisfaction than those who perceived CSR to be commercial initiatives ($p < 0.05$, MD = 0.095). Also, in 2020, community residents who perceived CSR to be donations had significantly lower levels of satisfaction than those who perceived CSR to be commercial initiatives ($p < 0.05$, MD = -0.214). Altogether, these findings suggest that if a larger proportion of the community understands that CSR is not merely about donations, then companies engaging in more “sustainable” CSR activities are likely to have a positive impact on the satisfaction levels across all community groups. As a result, Hypothesis 2 was partly accepted.

Table 4 The Findings for Community Satisfaction Levels Through Understanding Using the F-test (2019-2023).

Community Satisfaction with CSR	Source of Variation	F	P-value
2019	Between Groups Within Groups Total	3.054	0.041
2020	Between Groups Within Groups Total	26.438	0.000
2021	Between Groups Within Groups Total	0.587	0.556
2022	Between Groups Within Groups Total	0.665	0.561
2023	Between Groups Within Groups Total	0.152	0.859

Source: Authors

Discussion

This study exploring community understanding of CSR in the context of companies operating in the Map Ta Phut Industrial Estate, Rayong province, during the period from 2019 to 2023 showed that the levels of understanding changed over time as members of the community gradually came to an understanding that CSR played a crucial role in a community's self-efficacy. This was a significant change from the traditional perception of CSR, as occasional philanthropic donation and a passive giving from companies to communities without community agency, input or participation while those communities only receive a short-term benefit, a pattern often observed in the early stages of CSR development in developing countries (Jamali & Mirshak, 2007). The current CSR model more readily focuses on cooperation between companies and communities to create "shared value," meaning that the community will generate its own value alongside that of the company as a result of the company's "social investment." The reported change in understanding may reflect the breadth of CSR activity and its emphasis on "sustainability" across numerous dimensions, by being seen to benefit society, the local economy, and the environment conspicuously. There is currently greater cooperation in this area between communities and companies since there is a greater understanding of the need for long-term social investment to build better perceptions of corporate activity over the longer term for both businesses and their surrounding communities. Short-term measures will no longer suffice. Because of the need for more visibly "sustainable" corporate social activity, companies require two-way contributive cooperation to incorporate the community into their discourse of sustainable development and generate acceptance of their presence and their activities, reflecting the importance of so-called "stakeholder engagement" in designing effective CSR strategies (Maon, Lindgreen, & Swaen, 2009). This concept is connected with the "social investment" ideology by which companies intensively involve communities in their CSR performance through projects of cooperative development. In line with this, there is more financial and non-financial support from the Thai government to help set up community enterprises and other structures that allow communities to become more self-reliant, which has amounted to a form of outsourcing welfare and social development to the private sector. Initiatives established on a commercial basis ostensibly seek to ensure that communities become less reliant upon company donations and will instead be capable of driving their success. However, the patronage of the company, and the source of initial funding is always made clear to fulfill the purpose of such activities, to improve the image of the company. In this manner, sustainable systematic economic benefits are theoretically promoted, purportedly benefiting the community over the long term, while at the same time entrenching the company's apparently benevolent presence in the community's conscious.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, CSR was perceived by local communities as a concept that primarily expressed as philanthropic donations. Accordingly, they expected companies to make donations comprising cash or other items. These donations were appreciated because they brought immediate benefits. This traditional view of CSR created an expectation that company involvement in communities should focus on giving donations. As a consequence, people at that time were generally satisfied with CSR efforts that gave them these quick fixes. However, when some companies began to change their CSR focus to on “sustainability” and long-term benefits instead, communities started to react negatively. They were dissatisfied because they felt that such indirect and contextual investment would reduce the immediate support they usually received. A number of community inhabitants did not fully understand the value of sustainable CSR and preferred direct assistance. The findings of this study revealed that individuals whose perception of CSR focused on the commercial stimulation of longer-term CSR activity, opening up of external economies of scale, with an emphasis on self-reliance and development over the long term, were less satisfied than those whose perception of CSR remained rooted in the idea of donations. This lack of satisfaction resulted from a difference in outcomes, comparing short-term and long-term benefits because some residents showed a preference for the type of CSR that provides immediate financial gain or similar tangible advantage rather than the type that delivers sustainable gains over an extended period, a dynamic that aligns with findings on how different types of CSR activities are evaluated by stakeholders (Lii & Lee, 2012).

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 onwards resulted in a framework shift in CSR policies and practices in the area of study, a phenomenon consistent with broader analyses of the pandemic’s impact on corporate social responsibility (He & Harris, 2020). Many businesses were obliged to curtail their CSR activities because of financial difficulties or practical restrictions due to health concerns. For this reason, the communities started to see the potential benefits of commercial initiatives, with self-sufficiency as the goal. With fewer donations and company-driven activities, the communities began to realize the value of assistance projects and the value of becoming more independent, e.g., support for local businesses and skill training. This period of limited CSR led to a change in understanding of CSR, as the pandemic acted as a critical test of corporate social responsibility, forcing both companies and communities to re-evaluate priorities (Carroll, 2021). Over time, the inhabitants started to perceive the significance of sustainability-oriented activities, of which the key goal was to facilitate communities to become less dependent on corporate donations. By 2021, more inhabitants began to appreciate the long-term benefits of these sustainable CSR projects. Consequently, their satisfaction increased. The data from the pre-, concurrent-, and post-COVID-19 periods revealed this likelihood. In 2020, when there were

fewer traditional CSR, the communities became more aware of the benefits of sustainable initiatives. When normality resumed by 2023, it became apparent that companies could engage in sustainable CSR without the fear that this might result in a decline in community satisfaction levels. While community members did not necessarily fully understand the new approach to sustainable CSR, it was apparent that support for long-term initiatives promoting self-reliance, growth, and sustainability was strengthening, even though short-term financial gains were still welcome. It can be inferred from this shift that companies should not fear declining satisfaction levels as they introduce CSR practices based on sustainability and longevity. The communities started to value the long-term benefits of these initiatives more than the short-term compensation they had used to expect.

In sum, the understanding of CSR in the Map Ta Phut Industrial Estate changed from focusing on short-term donations to a deeper appreciation for sustainable projects. Accordingly, companies would be wise to continue their pursuit of sustainable and self-sufficient CSR practices because communities now have a better understanding of the advantages associated with such approaches over the longer term. This shift offers further support for the aims of a more mutually beneficial approach for the companies and their wider communities, and it can act as a form of social investment and stimulant to independent commercial activity within the community which will advance society as a whole economically (in terms of the area's GDP) and induce community consent for the company's profit-seeking activities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Such a study of CSR activity in an area of intense environmental damage and social dislocation emphasizes the importance for companies to manage the expectations of local communities concerning CSR, and to work to ensure that communities understand the different types of CSR and the benefits which might arise from their implementation. For a company to effectively implement CSR, they must also understand the views of the community and must address the key issues which will help to build favorable perceptions and therefore a stronger relationship with community members. This is achieved by calibrating CSR activities to meet both the needs, which may not be at first obvious to the community, and the expectations of the communities. It is first necessary, however, for companies to ensure that community members understand their interpretation of CSR. The findings in this study revealed that community satisfaction was not significantly adversely affected by a reduction in philanthropic donation-type CSR, so it can be inferred that if companies help to educate local communities to perceive CSR as a form of more deep rooted social investment rather than simply superficial pay-off-like donation,

this can be effective in persuading communities to participate in CSR initiatives on corporate terms which will bring about select long-term benefits for both company and community. Community understanding that CSR involves “sustainability” rather than just donations will potentially lead to community members taking greater pride in their own apparent self-sufficiency while acknowledging initial company guidance and support, leading to greater legitimization of the company’s presence and profit-seeking activities.

Earlier studies have indicated that communities tend to develop their understanding of CSR as time passes, so an ongoing corporate education program would bring this understanding into alignment with the long-term company goals for CSR. Education should therefore be a part of the activities carried out by the company in its interactions with the local community. Educational activities should be sufficiently enjoyable to capture the interest and attention of the community and should inculcate community members with the ideology that CSR involves “sustainable” long-term schemes rather than just compensatory donations, i.e. that the company is a benevolent paternal figure in the community. The creation of the perception of equal community participation in CSR activities encourages members to see themselves as building an independent future for themselves through the patronage of the company’s CSR. However, in practice, the implementation of CSR is seldom straightforward and has a strong influence upon the extent to which the community understanding of CSR develops. Staff involved in CSR must therefore work to change community understanding by finding ways to propagate CSR goals clearly, setting seemingly well-defined targets, and sending trained CSR staff members to visit the community in order to impress them with their superior expertise, inducing trust, as well as fostering direct interactions so that with that trust, CSR activities can be seen to be implemented more conspicuously and therefore more effectively.

From the perspective of the company, the management of their CSR activities should be carefully structured on an annual basis by categorizing each activity as either donation, social investment, or commercial initiative and determining when, where and to what extent each is strategically deployed for maximum effect. The long-term goal should be the reduction of the former, so there are fewer activities based on giving money or other items, and an increase in the latter, since social investment can improve the appearance of communities overall by performing cooperation with the local residents and making them feel greater agency. This should bring about the sense of mutual benefit and increase overall satisfaction with CSR. Commercial initiatives are also an important part of the overall CSR strategy, with the goal of supporting local businesses to further the independence and “sustainability” of the communities in the long term. Moreover, it can be advantageous for companies to address each community on the basis of their underlying

understanding of CSR. For instance, where communities have a good understanding of CSR, the compensatory-type donations can be reduced and an emphasis instead placed upon social investment. Through this consideration of community understanding of CSR, companies can adjust their strategies to fit each community, steadily shifting the priorities away from donations and towards CSR categorized as “sustainable” social and commercial investment when the communities are ready to participate.

Community readiness and motivation are crucial factors in determining the success of CSR activities, but achieving this readiness is something which must be supported, or elicited, rather than dictated by companies. Not even the most carefully constructed CSR projects will succeed if communities are neither ready nor willing to participate. Monitoring community readiness is thus a crucial part of the CSR process, along with cooperative planning where communities and companies work together to develop plans which fit community needs. Companies must also be willing to forego short-term community satisfaction when pursuing “sustainable” and strategic long-term CSR aims. The benefits of building relationships through sustainable long-term projects will outweigh any short-term disappointment in communities who do not yet fully understand the CSR objectives and mutual benefits which will result from participation in well-designed long-term projects.

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