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Exploring the Effectiveness of Corporate Community Engagement in Achieving Social Sustainability Outcomes in a Multinational Corporation

Yoon Wadi Oo[1], Sharmila Devi Ramachandaran[2], Urvesh Chaudhery[3], Anuradha Iddagoda[4]

[1]Faculty of Business and Communications, INTI International University, Persiaran Perdana BBN Putra Nilai, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia; i25030674@student.newinti.edu.my
[2]Faculty of Business and Communications, INTI International University, Persiaran Perdana BBN Putra Nilai, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia; sharmila.devi@newinti.edu.my
[3]Gitarattan International Business School, New Delhi, India; chaudhery.urvesh@gmail.com
[4]University of Sri Jayewardenepura; anuradhaiddagoda@sjp.ac.lk

ABSTRACT: This investigation explores the effectiveness of corporate community engagement (CCE) in promoting social sustainability at a multinational corporation (MNC) in Myanmar. It addresses an issue that is central to the challenge of learning from CCE programmes: the effectiveness of community engagement initiatives in producing sustainable social benefits for local communities. Guided by stakeholder theory and institutional theory, the study examines how an MNC's engagement with communities is consistent with stakeholder expectations and the institutional context of Myanmar. The study makes use of a qualitative case study method, with data gathered through conducting interviews, analysing documents, and observing community programmes to gather detailed information about the company's CCE initiatives. The findings indicate that the community engagement initiatives implemented by the MNC, such as local development projects, educational development programmes, and health and sanitation initiatives, have positively affected social sustainability by improving community well-being and establishing strong relationships with stakeholders. The success of these initiatives is enabled by strong stakeholder partnerships and sensitivity to local cultural and regulatory expectations. The study concludes that corporate community engagement, when responsive to stakeholder needs and institutionalised norms, can play an important role in improving social sustainability outcomes in developing-country contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's global business environment, an organization's success is more and more determined not only by its outcome financially, but also through its contribution to society in social and environmental terms. Many companies nowadays are adopting sustainable business models where social responsibility is one of the major defined elements of business operation. This has led to the concept of Corporate Community Engagement (CCE), which has been defined as the active participation of corporations in the development of the communities where they operate. CCE is about working together, empowerment, and shared value instead of short-term philanthropy. It provides an incentive for companies to link their strategy to social

progress and the accomplishment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Jimenez, Franco and Smith, 2021).

Scholarly literature emphasizes that organizations that make community engagement part of their business plan have stronger relationships with stakeholders and more effective contributions to sustainable development as a whole. Efforts to examine Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) impact, however, also show that many firms consider community engagement to still be based on charitable contributions along with educational resources, and the long-term social impact of these actions is low (Pistikou et al., 2023). This finding strengthens the case for the need for more structured engagement models based on co-creation of value with communities and the achievement of measurable and sustainable social gains.

Upon reviewing the United Nations SDG Report 2023, evidence shows that the world is still not on track to achieve many of the global objectives, highlighting the need to raise awareness of the role of the private sector in social as well as environmental development (United Nations, 2023). This has increased expectations for multinational corporations to play a more active role in achieving social sustainability outcomes through community engagement initiatives.

In the context of Southeast Asia, Corporate Community Engagement has been one of the important mechanisms to bring about inclusive growth and community welfare. Many countries in the region have moved from philanthropic CSR activities to more formalized engagement approaches aligned with national development priorities and the SDGs. However, the institutionalisation and measurement of CCE remain uneven across emerging economies.

In Myanmar, corporate sustainability practices have expanded since the country's economic liberalisation in 2013. Although international and domestic companies have introduced various CSR and community engagement initiatives, most practices remain philanthropic or compliance-based, reflecting an early stage of CCE development within a complex institutional environment. Some multinational corporations (MNCs) have introduced structured programmes focusing on women's empowerment, youth development, water access, and waste management to achieve measurable social sustainability outcomes.

1.1. Problem Statement

Globally, Corporate Community Engagement (CCE) is recognised as an important component of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) frameworks. However, studies indicate that there is limited understanding of the effectiveness of these initiatives in producing long-term social sustainability outcomes (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). While many programmes are implemented, there is a lack of systematic evaluation to determine whether these initiatives produce measurable benefits for local communities.

In Myanmar, some multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in Myanmar have introduced structured community engagement initiatives focusing on women's empowerment, water access, waste management, and youth development, aiming to achieve tangible social outcomes. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives in producing sustainable social benefits has only recently been investigated (Rao-Nicholson, Thein and Zhong, 2024). Existing studies on CSR and sustainability in Myanmar largely focus on descriptive reporting of programmes and financial investments, with limited empirical examination of the outcomes of CCE initiatives. As a result, there is a lack of academic understanding of how global sustainability commitments are translated into locally responsive and effective community engagement initiatives that achieve measurable social sustainability outcomes.

1.2. Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore the effectiveness of Corporate Community Engagement (CCE) initiatives in achieving social sustainability outcomes by a multinational corporation (MNC) operating in Myanmar. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To explore how CCE contributes to social sustainability outcomes.
2. To assess the overall effectiveness of CCE in creating sustainable social impact in the Myanmar context.
3. To examine the institutional and contextual factors that shape the implementation and outcomes of CCE initiatives in Myanmar.

1.3. Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, the study will answer the following questions:

1. How does CCE contribute to social sustainability outcomes in Myanmar?
2. How effective is CCE in achieving sustainable social impact in the Myanmar context?
3. What institutional and contextual factors shape the implementation and outcomes of CCE initiatives in Myanmar?

1.4. Significance of the Study

This research is necessary for the current business context because, on the one hand, it contributes to the understanding of how multinational corporations implement Corporate Community Engagement (CCE) initiatives, and on the other hand, evaluates the effectiveness of these initiatives in producing measurable social sustainability outcomes in the developing context. Hence, the study on a Multinational Corporation (MNC) in Myanmar would help in filling the gap in academic literature, which mostly lacks insights about translating the commitments of global sustainability into practical and effective community programmes in emerging economies (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). Drawing from a qualitative viewpoint of corporate employees and community partners, the study presents lived life and professional knowledge of people directly involved in community and sustainability programmes, and it provides valuable evidence on how CCE initiatives contribute to measurable social outcomes.

At the policy and global level, this research contributes to current debates on responsible business conduct and sustainable development in Southeast Asia. The study helps the Myanmar context to move towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) (United Nations, 2023). Moreover, through an analysis of a MNC's local efforts, the research provides additional understanding of the issues of scalability for policymakers, development agencies, and international organisations seeking to promote corporate participation in community sustainability.

Socially, the research will be important because it will offer insight into how corporate teams and local partners implement CCE initiatives to achieve tangible social sustainability outcomes. These findings highlight the realities of sustainability programmes operating in an environment where institutional constraints and cultural intricacy exist. The results will help corporate leaders, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and community leaders to design more inclusive and locally responsive programmes to achieve measurable social outcomes such as women's empowerment, water accessibility, waste management, and youth development (Pact Myanmar, 2018).

By doing that, the present study also encourages the private sector and communities to engage more effectively in terms of achieving sustainable social progress. Practically, the research directly produces knowledge which can be used by corporate decision-makers and sustainability professionals for programme design, monitoring, and evaluation. The insights learned from the experience of a MNC in Myanmar can be used by other multinational corporations to tailor their global corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability models to the local context, implement effective social impact measurement, and strengthen collaboration with stakeholders to achieve sustainable social outcomes.

2. MAIN THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study applies Stakeholder Theory and Institutional Theory as the main theoretical frameworks to interpret corporate engagement as a function of internal priorities and external pressures. Stakeholder Theory emphasizes the importance of managing relationships with a variety of groups that can influence or be influenced by the organization, including communities, employees, governments, and NGOs (Freeman et al., 2018). The core concept of stakeholder salience, proposed by Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997), highlights that engagement is determined by the attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency. For instance, local communities are legitimate as beneficiaries, NGOs provide technical expertise and advocacy, and government agencies have regulatory authority. In the context of a Multinational Corporation (MNC) in Myanmar, collaboration with Pact Myanmar demonstrates how stakeholder salience drives prioritization and co-development of projects such as women's empowerment and access to safe water (Pact Myanmar, 2018).

Institutional Theory complements this perspective by focusing on how organizational behavior is shaped by external institutional environments. Scott (2014) identifies three mechanisms such as regulative, normative, and cognitive that guide corporate actions to gain legitimacy and stability. In emerging economies like Myanmar, where CSR is weakly regulated and cultural norms such as parahita strongly influence social expectations, these pressures determine CCE design and reporting practices (MCRB & Yever, 2024). Multinational corporations adapt their global CSR approaches to the local institutional context, balancing international norms with domestic expectations. Regulative pressures emerge from CSR standards and

guidelines, normative pressures stem from sustainability standards, and cognitive pressures reflect cultural practices of charity. Institutional Theory thus provides a framework for understanding how CCE initiatives are implemented strategically to achieve legitimacy, resilience, and alignment with both global and local expectations (Rupp, Mallory and Skouloudis, 2024).

By combining Stakeholder and Institutional theories, this study captures the dual influence of internal stakeholder management and external institutional pressures, offering a robust lens to analyze how a Multinational Corporation (MNC) operationalizes CCE in Myanmar and how these efforts contribute to social sustainability outcomes. Together, the frameworks help explain the rationale for the design, implementation, and prioritization of CCE initiatives and their potential impact on communities in fragile institutional settings.

2.1. Previous Research Related to Objectives

Corporate Community Engagement (CCE) has evolved globally and regionally from philanthropic practices to strategic partnerships linking business goals with social value creation. While frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have promoted corporate responsibility, there is limited knowledge on how these efforts translate to measurable community outcomes in developing economies. Myanmar is a notable case, as multinational corporations (MNCs) have implemented community-based programs with limited scholarly evidence on their social permanence and local adaptation (Rao-Nicholson, Thein and Zhong, 2024).

CCE is an integral part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), extending beyond compliance and philanthropy. Engagement includes ongoing social dialogue with local communities, ensuring cooperation and understanding between corporations and host communities (Fatima and Elbanna, 2023). Research between 2018 and 2025 highlights how corporations construct, implement, and measure engagement initiatives in areas such as women's empowerment, water stewardship, waste management, and youth development. Integration of CCE into ESG frameworks, including reporting standards like the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), has become critical for service companies, although many efforts remain philanthropic rather than partnership-based, limiting transformative impact (Pistikou et al., 2023; Fatima and Elbanna, 2023).

Globally, ESG transparency and reporting have grown. The KPMG Survey of Sustainability Reporting (2022) found that 96% of the world's largest 250 companies and 79% of the top 100 companies issue sustainability or ESG reports, showing that social and environmental accountability is now a norm. Similarly, Governance & Accountability Institute (2024) reported that 93% of Russell 1000 companies released sustainability reports in 2023. However, Pistikou et al. (2023) note that reporting does not always translate into measurable social impact. In Myanmar, CSR remains largely philanthropic, and formal evaluation mechanisms are weak (Rao-Nicholson, Thein and Zhong, 2024; Eurasia Review, 2025).

2.2. Findings, Gaps, Contradictions, and Limitations

In Myanmar, CSR and CCE are fragmented due to weak regulations and a philanthropic business culture. Historical corporate giving aligned with Buddhist parahita practices often lacks long-term strategic focus. Pwint Thit Sa (2022) reported an average disclosure score of 8%, rising slightly from 7% in 2020, reflecting limited transparency and institutional capacity. Even multinational subsidiaries often face challenges in aligning global frameworks with local needs (MCRB & Yever, 2022, 2024).

Despite these challenges, multinational corporations (MNCs) have launched structured and outcome-based engagement models. For example, a Multinational Corporation (MNC) in Myanmar implements programs on Women, Water, Waste, and Youth development through locally adapted partnerships, such as the Swan Yi initiative with Pact Myanmar, reaching over 40,000 women and establishing nearly 1,000 village savings groups (Pact Myanmar, 2018). Their WASH initiatives provide clean water to 13,000 villagers and support recycling and public awareness campaigns (The Multinational Corporation (MNC), 2024). However, empirical evidence on the long-term social impact of these programs is scarce, highlighting a gap in measurable outcomes.

Challenges persist, including inadequate institutional frameworks, limited organizational capacity, stakeholder fragmentation, cultural dynamics, and gaps in evaluation. Philanthropic approaches often create short-term benefits, whereas strategic partnerships are still developing. Consequently, the link between CCE strategies and tangible community impact remains underexplored (Leal Filho et al., 2023).

2.3. Theoretical Framework

Although previous studies have examined corporate community engagement and sustainability reporting globally, little attention has been given to the specific adaptation of these practices by multinational subsidiaries in fragile institutional environments such as Myanmar. The literature reveals that while CSR and CCE are increasingly reported and institutionalized internationally, actual outcomes in developing economies remain limited, largely due to weak regulations, resource constraints, fragmented stakeholders, and culturally driven philanthropic practices (Rao-Nicholson, Thein and Zhong, 2024; Eurasia Review, 2025).

This study synthesizes these findings to focus on measurable and strategic engagement practices. It links the theoretical perspectives of Stakeholder and Institutional theories with prior empirical research to understand how a Multinational Corporation (MNC) aligns its CCE efforts with community needs and local institutional realities. For example, the Swan Yi initiative demonstrates the combination of stakeholder inclusion, partnership quality, and institutional adaptation in operationalizing women's empowerment programs. Similarly, water and waste management programs reflect how regulatory and normative pressures influence corporate decision-making while remaining responsive to community priorities.

By bringing together theoretical and empirical insights, this study provides a coherent view of how multinational subsidiaries can balance global frameworks and local adaptation to achieve social sustainability outcomes. This synthesis clarifies the gaps in literature regarding the translation of corporate strategies into local impact and highlights the mechanisms through which engagement can be both participatory and outcome-oriented. It shows that effective CCE depends not only on the presence of programs but also on the quality of partnerships, stakeholder trust, and integration with institutional expectations.

2.4. Justification of Research

Despite the expansion of corporate community engagement globally, there is a notable gap in understanding the local adaptation and long-term impact of such programs in developing economies like Myanmar. Previous studies largely describe CSR activities as symbolic, philanthropic, and short-term, without evaluating their effectiveness or sustainability (Rao-Nicholson, Thein and Zhong, 2024; Eurasia Review, 2025). Although initiatives by a Multinational Corporation (MNC) such as Swan Yi and WASH projects have reached significant numbers of beneficiaries, there is little evidence demonstrating their enduring social impact or systemic change in local communities (Pact Myanmar, 2018; The Multinational Corporation (MNC), 2024).

This study applies Stakeholder and Institutional theories to bridge this gap by examining how multinational subsidiaries operationalize CCE to achieve measurable outcomes. It investigates the micro-level mechanisms of engagement, including partnership quality, participation, and trust-building, and the macro-level institutional pressures that shape corporate behavior in a fragile environment. By focusing on the effectiveness of CCE in achieving Social Sustainability outcomes of a Multinational Corporation (MNC), this research justifies its objectives and questions. The study goes beyond descriptive accounts to provide a comprehensive understanding of how CCE strategies translate into tangible social sustainability outcomes, addressing a critical gap in the literature regarding the impact of corporate programs in transitional economies.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Paradigm

The paradigm implemented by the interpretivist approach was focused on a socially constructed realities and subjective experiences of the participants involved in the MNC's CCE initiatives. Interpretivism considers knowledge as an interpretation of social actors in cultural, organizational and institutional contexts (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The concern was to understand the perspective and definition of CCE in the context of social and institutional framework of Myanmar by corporate managers, NGO counterparts and representatives of the community.

Interpretivism is appropriate for research seeking knowledge about social interactions and organizational behaviour in which results are reliant on personal perceptions. As for generalisation, it allowed representation of the variety of viewpoint without confining generalisation. The paradigm justified the qualitative case study design of focusing on contexts, meaning, and lived experience and using participant-centered methods such as semi-structured interviews and document analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Corporate community engagement was, therefore, recognised as a multidimensional social process which was influenced by organisational intent, realities of the communities and institutional legitimacy.

3.2. Research Design

3.2.1. Qualitative Research

This research applied qualitative research methodology for investigating of patterns of an MNC's CCE effectiveness. Qualitative research was suitable for this study because it allowed qualitative research to explore the subjective perception, experiences and interpretations of the subject participant in a deep form. As Creswell and Poth (2018) explain, qualitative inquiry is a method of inquiry which is more concerned with the understanding of meanings and processes, and not measurement, and is therefore an appropriate method for an inquiry into social engagement and organizational behaviour. This approach was used to delve deep into the meaning of effective CCE in the context of the employees in their professional and institutional environments.

3.2.2. Semi-Structured Interview Design

The study used semi-structured interviews as the central research method to collect in-depth qualitative research. This approach provided flexibility in being able to give the participants the space to share their professional experiences, insight and reflections and give the researcher the capacity to ask further questions and dig deeper into important themes associated with the effectiveness of CCE in achieving Social Sustainability outcomes (Kallio et al., 2016).

A total of five employees from MNC, PACS department were interviewed. These participants were directly involved in the planning, coordinating and evaluating community engagement projects. The professional involvement also ensured that the data was obtained through first-hand knowledge of how the CCE programs were developed and implemented in the organization. Each interview lasted around 20 to 60 minutes, and consisted of a flexible schedule according to the research questions.

The interview guide also contained open-ended questions probing the various conceptions of respondents in relation to CCE goals, stakeholder participation, institutional limitations and monitoring systems and perceived social impact. In this way, all major topics were covered but there was adequate space for the participants to reflect on their own experiences and to bring a powerful contextual element to their comments. The interviews were face-to-face or remote (online) with secure communications because it depended on the availability of participants and their preference for confidentiality. Data were collected through informed consent and verbatim transcribed for analysis. This design enabled the nuanced understanding of how CCE was operationalized within a MNC in a developing context (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

3.3. Research Setting and Context

The research was conducted in Myanmar and focused on the workings of the MNC's Corporate Community Engagement (CCE) within the PACS Department. Myanmar provides a useful site to study corporate engagement due to its emerging institutional systems, limited enforcement of regulation, and developing sustainability practices (MCRB and Yever, 2024). Although the private sector is playing a growing role in community development, CCE activities remain largely philanthropic and project-based, with limited long-term evaluation.

The selection of PACS Department employees as participants was chosen because of their direct involvement in the design, implementation and monitoring of CCE projects in a range of different regions of the country. Their perspectives offer important insights into the interpretation and localization of global corporate sustainability principles in the institutional context of Myanmar. By locating the research in such an environment, the study helped to capture the organizational practices as well as the contextual difficulties that determine the effectiveness of CCE strategies in terms of attaining social sustainability outcomes.

3.4. Participants and Sampling Strategy

Participants were PACS employees who were directly involved in CCE projects. Inclusion criteria included at least 1-year experience in the field of PACS; the sample was heterogeneous with respect to gender, seniority, and level of involvement in the projects. This provided an opportunity to have informed, practical knowledge about CCE strategies, and the effectiveness of these approaches.

One of them, called purposive sampling, inducted participants having special knowledge pertinent to the research aims (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Invitations were through formal communication and explained the aims of the study, the issue of confidentiality, and voluntary participation. The sample contained both field-level and management employees to provide rich and contextualised data reflecting the interpretivist paradigm (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

Five participants were chosen and this number was adequate enough to conduct an exploratory qualitative research study with a focus on depth, rather than breadth. Data collection was carried out until thematic saturation in order to ensure that there was representation of various experiences and opinions within the PACS Department.

3.5. Data Collection Methods

3.5.1. In-depth Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to express experiences and perceptions about CCE. Interviews lasted 20–60 minutes, conducted face-to-face or online, with audio recording and informed consent. The semi-structured format encouraged open discussion on project implementation, partnerships, institutional barriers, and lessons learned.

3.5.2. Field Notes and Reflexive Memos

Field notes captured contextual information and nonverbal cues beyond transcripts, while reflexive memos documented emerging ideas and researcher biases. This triangulation enhanced credibility, validity, and iterative development of interview questions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

3.5.3. Pilot Interview

A pilot interview tested and refined the guide for clarity and contextual fit. Feedback led to reordering questions to start with practical experiences and progress to program effectiveness. Minor procedural adjustments, such as testing online platforms and ensuring clear audio, improved data collection reliability.

3.5.4. Interview Protocol

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with a guide that was intended to elicit participants' professional roles, engagement with Corporate Community Engagement (CCE), perceptions of issues, implementation strategies, and perceptions of program effectiveness. The interview guide was structured as an introduction including background and responsibility of participants, followed by open-ended questions about stakeholder collaboration, institutional constraints and social sustainability outcomes. Open-ended questioning was used to include probing questions.

3.6. Data Analysis Method

A thematic analysis approach was used to analyze qualitative data from interviews. This inductive and iterative method identified patterns and themes directly from participant narratives, consistent with the interpretivist paradigm (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

3.6.1. Processing Data and Feasible Data Interpretation

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Names and identifying details were replaced with pseudonyms. The transcription process enabled immersion in the data and early identification of recurring ideas on stakeholder collaboration, project management, and institutional challenges.

3.6.2. Reading and Initial Coding

Transcripts were read multiple times with notes in margins. Open coding identified key statements and phrases from participant language, including coordination with NGOs, resource limitations, measurement gaps, and stakeholder relationships.

3.6.3. Sensing Important Statements and Themes

Similar codes were grouped into broader themes. Institutional barriers included weak local capacity and fragile arrangements, while stakeholder collaboration encompassed trust-building and partnerships. Themes were iteratively compared with research objectives and theoretical frameworks.

3.6.4. Policing Themes and Interpretation

Themes were refined for conceptual clarity, putting a focus on positive outcomes as well as increasing access to water and hygiene results, improving the skills and economic confidence of women and positive impacts on the community awareness and practices related to waste and on the monitoring systems and sustainability of such efforts. Institutional Theory and

Stakeholder Theory were used to interpret the translation of corporate engagement practices into tangible social benefits. Participant quotations were used to emphasize some examples of successful participation and meaningful community outcomes.

4. RESULTS

The participants act sustainably management, project coordination & communication, as well as the views give a balance between traditional strategic decision-making and practical experiences. The research set out to examine the effectiveness of CCE in achieving Social Sustainability outcomes. These findings are read with the context of institution and socio-cultural context of Myanmar, though regulatory uncertainty, local capacity limitation and community factors reveal the massive influence on the effectiveness of corporate engagement (Rupp, Mallory & Skouloudis, 2024).

The findings are organized around the study's three research questions:

1. How does CCE contribute to social sustainability outcomes in Myanmar?
2. How effective is CCE in achieving sustainable social impact in the Myanmar context?
3. What institutional and contextual factors shape the implementation and outcomes of CCE initiatives in Myanmar?

Thematic analysis was performed to analyze data obtained from the interview. This approach involves identifying and making sense of patterns in qualitative data sets so as to gain insight into the ways participants construct meaning around their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2021). To ensure that the analysis was connected to actual organizational practice, codes were created inductively from the statements of the participants so that themes developed from the data rather than being assigned to the data. The codes were then reviewed and grouped into broader themes that summarized similar and dissimilar views on stakeholder engagement, practices of sustainability as if they were stable and community collaboration within MNC in Myanmar (Freeman et al. 2018).

A brief biography of all the participants opens the chapter, providing the context of their views. A thematic presentation of finding under each research question follows. Direct quotations are included as it helps in maintaining the authenticity of the voice of the participants alongside links to existing literature, with a focus on CSR regarding emerging markets, stakeholder engagement and social sustainability contributions to help establish the findings within broader academic and industry debates (Jimenez, Franco & Smith, 2021).

4.1. Participants' Backgrounds

Table 1. Summary of Participants' Backgrounds

Participant	Profession / Role	Job Responsibilities
P1	Sustainability & Communication Head	Responsible for overseeing sustainability programs and responsible for communications and coordinating partners.
P2	Project Manager	Plans and manages projects within the community and ensures that activities are done as planned.
P3	Communication Executive	Handles Communication tasks, prepares reports and supports stakeholders
P4	Project Executive	Supports on the ground project activities, community coordination and field reporting.
P5	Sustainability & Communication Executive	Helps with sustainability projects, data collection and communication-related tasks.

4.2. Themes

The themes of the study are used as the basis to understand the level of perception, implementation, and reflection of the Corporate Community Engagement (CCE) programs by the employees of an MNC in Myanmar. In keeping with qualitative

methodologies which emphasize lived experiences, the themes indicate how employees negotiate between external restrictions, community values and corporate demands while trying to achieve socially sustainable outcomes (Freeman et al., 2018; Rao-Nicholson, Thein & Zhong, 2024).

Thematic analysis was employed to form themes from the literature of stakeholder theory, institutional theory, and CSR implementation literature in developed markets (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Each theme corresponds to a recurrent "meaning unit" which was presented in more than one participant's narrative or was described in detail by an important informant. Table 2 provides on the main themes mapped against the research questions, with some brief explanation and concrete examples from program practice, illustrative quotes and the people in the program who mentioned or supported each theme.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis and Key Findings

RQ	Theme	What it means	What this looked like	Illustrative quote	Participants
RQ1	Theme 1: Increased Access to Water and Hygiene Results	Improved water access and hygiene behaviours eased daily routines for households.	Families saved time, adopted safer water practices and experienced more convenient daily tasks.	When we provide support to communities, the impact on families may be seen immediately in their everyday lives.	P1, P2, P3, P4,
RQ1	Theme 2: Increased Skills and Economic Confidence of Women	Women gained stronger business skills and greater confidence in decision-making.	Participants applied simple financial tools, managed stock better and improved small-business control.	The support of women, with training in business development, helps at strengthen household incomes and wellbeing in the community.	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5
RQ2	Theme 3: Positive Impacts on Increased Waste Awareness and Practice of the Community	Communities adopted better waste habits and took initiative in environmental upkeep.	Families sorted waste consistently and communities organized their own clean-up or recycling actions.	Waste-awareness activities have helped communities to adopt better habits of segregation of waste.	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5
RQ3	Theme 4: Monitoring Systems and Community-Owned Supporting Sustainability	Tracking tools and local leadership strengthened program continuity and impact.	Baseline surveys, partner reports and community-led maintenance supported sustained results.	We conduct our own monitoring and site visits, and partners report back to us on their endorsed reports	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5

4.2.1. Theme 1: Increased Access to Water and Hygiene Results

All five participants showed that improvements in water access had immediate and visible successful impacts in daily routines, household hygiene and overall wellbeing. Water infrastructure investments decreased reluctant physical and time demands, traditionally associated with water collection and encouraged for safer hygienic practices.

Participant 1 attributed these improvements directly to the design of the program:

"When we provide support to communities in terms of water tanks, safe water access, the impact on families may be seen immediately in their everyday lives." (P1)

Participant 2 similarly said hygiene behaviour improved:

"We do see families adopting some simple but important habits such as storing water in a better way, or encouraging their children to wash their hands regularly." (P2)

Participant 3 reinforced the following behavioural outcomes:

"Communities with improved water infrastructure have stated that time spent on collecting water had been reduced and improved hygiene practices. (P3)

Participant 4 emphasized the more wide-ranging change in wellbeing:

"Communities have access to water and better hygiene practices." (P4)

Participant 5 referred to the effects on routines in households:

"People tell us that they have no more long walks or no more time in long queues, and that in itself gives them more time for other work or for their children." (P5)

4.2.2. Theme 2: Increased Skills and Economic Confidence of Women

All participants noted that women who participated in empowerment initiatives acquired practical business skills, increased confidence and lifetime resiliency against livelihood shocks. These programs helped women better manage their income, assume the leadership role within their households and share skills with others.

Participant 1 noticed more global personal and social change:

"These initiatives about changing mindsets, gaining confidence and addressing money management skills." (P1)

Participant 2 linked these outcomes with strategic objectives:

"The support of women, with training in business development, helps at strengthen household incomes and wellbeing in the community." (P2)

Participant 3 stressed on strengthened financial capability:

"Women entrepreneurs who have been trained under our empowerment programs have demonstrated greater financial management skills and live more resilient lives." (P3)

Participant 4 declared the visible transformation in terms of participation:

"Women who participated in our capability-building activities are more confident and possess better business skills." (P4)

Participant 5 mentioned the confidence-building effect:

"Many of them tell us that they feel more confident after learning some basic business skills. It gives them a feeling of control." (P5)

4.2.3. Theme 3: Positive Impacts on Increased Waste Awareness and Practice of the Community

All participants described clear changes in behaviour in the areas of waste separation, environmental awareness and community-driven cleanup activities. Waste initiatives fostered new behaviours, especially for the children and youth, who often were behavioural influencers in their households.

Participant 1 mentioned the changes to environmental responsibility:

"We advocate for proper waste management and circular practices and communities respond well when they know why it is important." (P1)

Participant 2 highlighted the passion of younger members of the community:

"Children especially like to do these things, and remind their parents about the separation of plastic or keeping the surroundings clean." (P2)

Participant 3 also explained the proliferation of sustainable patterns of waste:

"Waste-awareness activities have helped communities to adopt better habits of segregation of waste." (P3)

Participant 4 mentioned a new community initiative:

“Some communities have started taking their own initiative. They form small committees or go on with some activities even after the end of the project." (P4)

Participant 5 mentioned how little changes do over time:

"Families begin taking small steps to start, organizing garbage or joining in on clean-up days and things, people can see that the surroundings slowly become clean." (P5)

4.2.4. Theme 4: Monitoring Systems and Community-Owned Supporting Sustainability

All participants emphasized how structured monitoring, follow-up and increasing ownership by communities were critical to the building of long-term sustainability for the program. With the use of systematic tracking, the company could measure progress, whereas community-led efforts were able to exhibit a lasting change in behavioural adoption.

Participant 1 highlighted the partner and the company monitoring role combined:

"We conduct our own monitoring and site visits, and partners report back to us on their endorsed reports." (P1)

Participant 2 had shared in her comment the usefulness of structured measurement systems:

"Baseline and endline assessments show us in terms of numbers what has changed." (P2)

Participant 3 shared how these systems are in line with global sustainability goals:

"We use KPIs that we are aligned with the MNC’s global framework like training outcomes or water replenishment metrics to validate results." (P3)

Participant 4 emphasized the importance of qualitative insights:

"Stories of change provide us with insights that simply cannot be represented by data." (P4)

Participant 5 associated monitoring with long-term behavioural sustainability:

"When we visit communities, we see if habits have really caught on and that gives us a good indication of how sustainable the changes are." (P5)

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Effectiveness of CCE in Achieving Social Sustainability Outcomes

The results show that the CCE initiatives implemented by an MNC in Myanmar produced a number of visible social sustainability outcomes, especially in the areas of water access and hygiene improvements, improved women's skills and economic confidence, strengthened waste awareness and behaviour change, as well as greater monitoring and community ownership. These outcomes are a reflection of how program effectiveness emerged due to both the emphasis on engagement, participation and relationship-building in Stakeholder Theory (Freeman et al., 2018) and legitimacy and the influence of the normative, cognitive and regulative pillars for sustaining acceptance of new behaviours in Institutional Theory (Scott, 2014).

Improved access to water and improved hygiene outcomes were some of the greatest successes. Communities reported that they enjoyed reduced collection times, reliable access and hygienic practices. These changes reflect the expectation by Stakeholder Theory that organizations are responsive directly to the essential stakeholder needs to ensure that trust increases and value becomes evident. They also fall within the normative pillar of Institutional Theory since the provision of clean and reliable water supplies fulfill generally expected social norms and also strengthens organizational legitimacy (United Nations, 2023; Fatima & Elbanna, 2023).

The outcomes of women's empowerment were also significant. Participants described increased confidence, improved financial management skills and in some cases new income-generating activities. These outcomes are consistent with Stakeholder Theory's understanding that providing for marginalized communities can improve the welfare of the wider community, whilst

also being consistent with technical aspects of Institutional Theory's cognitive pillar, as building capabilities would overtime, lead to a gradual change in community expectations around women's economic roles (Porter & Kramer, 2019).

Waste awareness and behaviour change came through quite clearly across a number of locations. Children, youth and families took up improved practices of waste separation, and in some communities, clean-up activities did not end with the termination of the formal program. These results reflect the participatory logic of the Stakeholder Theory which means direct involvement is the source of a shared responsibility and the cognitive pillar of the Institutional Theory which also mean repeated involvement allows the internalization of new environmental norms (Scott 2014; Leal Filho et al., 2023).

Monitoring systems and community ownership were important and contributed to the sustainability of outcomes. Baseline and endline assessments, partner reports and field visits provided for verification and for adjustments of the program as reflected the regulative pillar of the Institutional Theory, which is a focus on structured procedures, evidence and accountability. Community leaders who persevered in keeping water systems in place or coordinating waste-related efforts demonstrated Stakeholder Theory's importance on shared ownership and relationship continuity which is the key in sustaining results beyond work project cycles (GRI, 2023; Hauser, Godinez, and Steckler, 2023).

Overall, the results identified that MNC's CCE programs contributed to the strengthening of water security, women's agency and environmental stewardship. Their effectiveness was contingent on institutional alignment such as responding to normative, cognitive and regulative expectations and strong stakeholder engagement as manifest in active participation and shared ownership. This highlights that the achievement of social sustainability outcomes in emerging markets is influenced by the interaction of institutional context, community norms and continuations relationships between organizations and stakeholders (Scott, 2014; Leal Filho et al., 2023).

5.2. Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study give important theoretical insights into understanding Corporate Community Engagement in terms of Stakeholder Theory and Institutional Theory in the complex sociopolitical and organizational context of Myanmar.

Stakeholder Theory is supported. Stakeholder relations were dynamic, negotiated, and context-specific, as reflected in participants' experiences with community actors. These practices are consistent with Hauser, Godinez, and Steckler (2023), who explained that meaningful engagement in emerging markets depends on aligning corporate actions with local expectations, cultural norms, and community rhythms.

The combination of both theories highlights how corporate engagement is shaped by structural and relational factors. The findings also contribute to debates on CSR localization by providing insights on how engagement is negotiated within institutional constraints. Contextual responsiveness, reflected in adaptations to local communication norms and operational realities, illustrates how engagement can be aligned with local contexts.

In conclusion, Stakeholder Theory and Institutional Theory together provide a comprehensive approach for understanding corporate engagement in Myanmar. Institutional Theory describes the frameworks within which corporate engagement operates, while Stakeholder Theory describes how organizations interact with communities. Combined, these theories elucidate how global commitments are translated into practical action in low-capacity institutional settings (Freeman et al., 2018; Scott, 2014).

5.3. Practical Implications

The findings suggest important practical implications for MNCs, local partners, and policymakers operating within Myanmar's evolving institutional landscape. The results highlight the overall effectiveness of corporate engagement in enhancing local outcomes and community relationships. These findings reinforce Institutional Theory's emphasis on adaptation to local governance capacity (Scott, 2014) and Stakeholder Theory's focus on interpreting community expectations and relational factors (Freeman et al., 2018).

At the organizational level, the results demonstrate that corporate engagement can strengthen local partners' capacity and improve accountability, fostering more effective collaboration (MCRB & Yever, 2024). Culturally responsive engagement also enhances participation and ownership within communities (Hauser, Godinez, & Steckler, 2023). At the policy level, enabling environments created by government agencies and development partners contribute to more effective corporate engagement,

aligning with SDG 17 on strengthening partnerships and institutional capacity, as well as SDGs 5, 6, and 12 (United Nations, 2023). In conclusion, the practical implications indicate that effective corporate engagement in Myanmar depends on coordination among actors. Strengthening partner capacity, aligning with community expectations, and fostering supportive institutional environments can enhance the overall impact of corporate initiatives, supporting sustainable social outcomes (Porter & Kramer, 2019).

5.4. Limitations of the Study

Although this research grants some meaningful insights into the MNC's Corporate Community Engagement (CCE) practices, there are a number of limitations that need to be acknowledged to put the findings into context. First, the study was only five interviews with PACS employee. This is a small sample because the PACS team itself is so small. While this is the majority of the unit and meant to have explored in depth operational practices, the small number of participants means the breadth of perspectives captured, as well as the generalizability of any findings to the wider organization, is limited (Hauser, Godinez, & Steckler, 2023).

A second limitation concerns the only tapped type of narrative, self-reported. Participants characterized their own roles, interpretations and experiences, which may have been biased due to selective recalling, subjective framing or a tendency to characterize the program outcomes in positive terms associated with organizational loyalty. This is a well-recognized challenge in CSR studies, where social desirability bias can influence the ways for self-commend achievements and problems (Rao-Nicholson, Thein & Zhong, 2024).

The contextual specificity of Myanmar's institutional environment, in turn, is an additional limitation. An MNC in Myanmar operates in an environment characterized by regulatory inconsistencies, informal norms of communication and poor rural infrastructure. These contextual factors had a major role to play in how programs were delivered and the challenges reported by the participants. According to Institutional Theory, organizational practices are deeply embedded within the institutional context (Scott, 2014), in other words, the dynamics that will be observed in this study may be very different in countries with stronger governance systems or formalized administrative processes (MCRB & Yever, 2024).

Finally, the study only focused on the views of corporate employees, without the involvement of the views of community beneficiaries, local partners or implementing NGOs. Inclusion of these voices would have provided a more complete understandings of effectiveness of the programs, long-term sustainability and ownership of communities. Grounded in Stakeholder Theory that puts emphasis on considering different stakeholder views (Freeman et al., 2018), future research should adopt a more inclusive and multi-perspective approach in triangulating program experiences and verifying impact claims.

5.5. Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results of the research and the acknowledgment of some research limitations, there are a couple of areas in which future researches can be starched to understand the concept of Corporate Community Engagement in Myanmar better.

5.5.1. Increase the Diversity of Stakeholders and the Context

Future studies should include people other than corporate employee, especially local partner organizations and local beneficiaries. Inclusion of these perspectives would provide greater insight on the experience of water stewardship, women's empowerment and waste management initiatives at the ground level. This is particularly relevant in rural areas with unique norms of communication and infrastructural barriers, this process of examining potential bottlenecks would also be useful in investigating whether or not the way stakeholder engagement is churned out here operates similarly across diverse areas of Myanmar (MCRB & Yever, 2022).

5.5.2. Increase the Diversity of Stakeholders and the Context

Longitudinal research is required to understand whether the positive behavioural changes mentioned by the participants endure past the program cycle. Following communities over the course of a number of years could help to account for whether there are improvements in water access, women's confidence and waste behaviours are maintained, adapted or diminished over time. Such research would serve in an attempt to establish which engagement strategies most contribute to long-lasting community ownership, in ways consistent with the relational claims of Stakeholder Theory (Freeman et al., 2018).

5.5.3. Make Comparative Studies across Organizations or Countries

Comparative research with other multinational corporations or CCE programs in neighboring countries in Southeast Asia could reveal similarities in problems and differentiating success factors. Hauser, Godinez, and Steckler (2023) point out that the effectiveness of CSR in emerging markets is influenced by the nature of the local institutional setting, and thus comparisons across contexts open up the possibility to recognize the transferability of practices and the context specificity of constraints.

5.5.4. Explore Institutional and Policy Interactions More Deeply

Future studies should focus on the influence that national policies, regulatory frameworks and capacity-building initiatives have over the design and outcome of corporate programs. Institutional Theory emphasizes the importance of environmental constraints (Scott, 2014) and future research could analyze the role that government support, digital connectivity in rural areas and licensing processes or capacity building efforts from NGOs have had in supporting or impeding CCE operations. This perspective would reinforce the knowledge of the contribution that institutional strengthening can have to the achievement of SDGs 5, 6, 12 and 17 corporate.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to examine how a multinational corporation (MNC) implements Corporate Community Engagement (CCE) in a context characterized by a complex institutional environment. Guided by Stakeholder Theory and Institutional Theory, the findings indicate that CCE is an ongoing and collaborative process mediated by global corporate expectations and local community realities. Program teams engaged with stakeholders in ways that fostered trust, cultural fit, and responsiveness, reflecting Freeman et al.'s (2018) emphasis on relational dynamics and Scott's (2014) insights on adapting to institutional pressures.

The study found that CCE activities contributed meaningfully to social sustainability outcomes in the communities involved. Positive effects included improvements in community knowledge, skills, and participation, demonstrating how global sustainability commitments can be translated into practical gains when programs are aligned with local needs and context. These results highlight the potential of CCE to create tangible social impact and reinforce the value of participatory engagement in fostering long-term community benefits.

Overall, the study concludes that Corporate Community Engagement in Myanmar has the potential to generate significant social outcomes, with success dependent on aligning organizational practices with local culture, capacity, and institutional conditions. The findings underscore that effective CCE is shaped not only by corporate design but by meaningful engagement and collaboration with local stakeholders, enabling sustainable contributions to social development.

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Ethics Statement

University Research Ethics Committee in accordance with the committee's guidelines and applicable institutional research ethics requirements. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards and guidelines of the INTI International University Research Ethics Committee.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study consist of qualitative interview transcripts and thematic analysis outputs. Due to the sensitive nature of the data and to protect participant confidentiality and privacy, the data are not publicly available. The data may be made available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical approval and participant consent.

Appendix A: Initial Coding

Table A1. Coding the Interview Data into Themes Aligned with Research Questions

Research Questions (RQs)	Interview Questions (IQs)	Initial Codes (P1–P5)	Final Themes
RQ1: How does CCE contribute to social sustainability outcomes in Myanmar?	IQ1: What outcomes or changes have you observed in communities where water and hygiene programmes have been implemented?	P1: Providing water tanks and safe water access creates immediate visible changes in families' everyday lives. P2: Families adopt simple habits like proper water storage and encouraging children to wash hands regularly. P3: Communities report reduced time spent on water collection and improved hygiene practices. P4: Access to water and better hygiene practices improve overall community well-being. P5: Elimination of long walks and queues for water gives families more time for other activities.	**Theme 1: Increased Access to Water and Hygiene Results** Supported by: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5
	IQ2: How have women's empowerment initiatives contributed to skills development and economic confidence?	P1: Initiatives change mindsets, build confidence and improve money management skills. P2: Business development training strengthens household incomes and community wellbeing. P3: Women trained under empowerment programmes demonstrate greater financial management skills and live more resilient lives. P4: Women who participated in capability-building activities are more confident and possess better business skills. P5: Women feel more in control after learning basic business skills.	**Theme 2: Increased Skills and Economic Confidence of Women** Supported by: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5
	IQ3: In what ways have these CCE initiatives produced measurable social sustainability outcomes?	P1: Programmes link directly to corporate sustainability goals and community health indicators. P2: Improvements in water access and women's capabilities align with SDG targets. P3: KPIs such as training outcomes and water replenishment metrics validate programme results. P4: Visible change in participation and household economic practices confirm social impact. P5: Community members themselves report feeling more capable and comfortable in daily life.	**Consequences of Themes 1 & 2** Supported by: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5
RQ2: How effective is CCE	IQ1: What changes in waste awareness and	P1: Communities respond well to waste management education when they understand its importance.	**Theme 3: Positive**

in achieving sustainable social impact in the Myanmar context?	environmental behaviour have occurred within communities following CCE waste management initiatives?	P2: Children particularly enjoy waste activities and encourage parents to separate plastic and keep surroundings clean. P3: Waste-awareness activities help communities adopt better habits of waste segregation. P4: Some communities have begun self-organising committees for waste management activities after programme closure. P5: Families start small—organising waste or joining clean-up days—and surroundings gradually improve.	**Impacts on Increased Waste Awareness and Practice of the Community** Supported by: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5
	IQ2: How do monitoring systems and evaluation mechanisms contribute to the long-term effectiveness of CCE programmes?	P1: Combined company and partner monitoring through site visits and endorsed reports ensures accountability. P2: Baseline and endline assessments show in numbers what has changed over time. P3: KPIs aligned with the MNC's global framework such as training outcomes and water metrics validate results. P4: Stories of change provide qualitative insights that data alone cannot represent. P5: Community visits reveal whether habits have really caught on, indicating true sustainability of changes.	**Theme 4: Monitoring Systems and Community-Owned Supporting Sustainability** Supported by: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5
	IQ3: Overall, how effective do you consider the CCE initiatives in achieving lasting social impact?	P1: Structured programme design and clear stakeholder roles contribute significantly to programme effectiveness. P2: Seeing communities continue activities independently after projects end is a key indicator of lasting social impact. P3: Alignment with global sustainability frameworks validates programme effectiveness and demonstrates accountability. P4: Effective CCE depends on cultural responsiveness and ongoing relationship-building with communities. P5: Sustained behavioural change—not just activities—is the true measure of a programme's long-term effectiveness.	**Consequences of Themes 3 & 4** Supported by: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5
RQ3: What institutional and contextual factors shape the implementation and outcomes of CCE initiatives in Myanmar?	IQ1: What institutional or regulatory factors in Myanmar's operating environment have affected the delivery of CCE initiatives?	P1: Licensing requirements limit the pool of qualified partners and reduce programme flexibility. P2: Frequent regulatory changes require continual realignment of plans and administrative procedures. P3: Political instability and regulatory shifts restrict or delay programme execution and scope. P4: Variability in administrative procedures across regions causes inconsistent implementation timelines.	**Theme 4 (Institutional Dimension): Administrative & Compliance Requirements** Supported by: P1, P2, P3, P4
	IQ2: How did local partner capacity and community	P1: Local partners lack skills in preparing proposals, reports and required documentation.	**Theme 4 (Contextual Dimension):**

	communication norms influence CCE programme coordination?	P2: Communities accustomed to verbal practices distrust structured tracking tools; reliance on one focal person with phone access. P3: Communication gaps in local areas and geographic remoteness complicate stakeholder management. P4: Language and dialect differences between corporate staff and community members complicate documentation. P5: Lack of written reporting culture increases the burden of field visits.	**Partner & Community Capacity and Informal Communication Norms** Supported by: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5
	IQ3: In what ways did the broader Myanmar operating environment shape programme delivery and social outcomes?	P1: Staff required to make additional unplanned field visits to collect timely and accurate programme data. P2: Unpredictable community attendance and incomplete monitoring data required repeated reinforcement cycles. P3: Coordination challenges in remote communities delay activities when key communication persons are unavailable. P4: Documentation complications hinder programme progress and make accurate record-keeping difficult. P5: One planned monitoring visit regularly converted into two or three due to contextual barriers.	**Consequences of Institutional & Contextual Factors** Supported by: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5

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