



INFLUENCE OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH AS A CSR STRATEGY FOR ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE: A REVIEW OF SELECTED PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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REVIEW OF SELECTED PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA**

Kinyanjui, J. N.,^{1*} Juma, D.,² Njeru, A.,³ & Onyango, J.⁴

^{1*} Ph.D Candidate, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture & Technology [JKUAT], Kenya

^{2,3,4} Ph.D, Lecturer, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture & Technology [JKUAT], Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility has been regarded as one of the pillars of economic growth for any business. One of its major goals is to aid an organization's mission as well as serve as a guide to what the company represents for its consumers. Those who vouch for it have argued that it increases long-term profits by operating with a CSR perspective, while critics argue that CSR distracts from businesses' economic role. The public sector is largely a service provider yet it also participates in various CSR activities whose benefits may or may not be measured. This study set out to establish whether one of the CSR strategies, going out to engage with communities on gainful activities for both parties, reaps any kind of benefits for such organizations. The study hypothesized that community outreach programs did not significantly influence performance of Public Universities in Kenya. The results showed that indeed, it contributed to their performance. Therefore, the study noted that increasing community outreach programs would significantly increase the performance of public Universities. It therefore, recommended that the Public sector should aggressively invest in CSR programs and regularly assess the extent to which these can contribute to the attainment of their goals.

Key Words: *Corporate Social Responsibility, Community Outreach, Organization Performance*

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INTRODUCTION

CSR aims to ensure that companies conduct their business in a way that is ethical. This means taking account of their social, economic and environmental impact, and consideration of human rights. There have been increased demands from employees, customers and government bodies for businesses to be more open about their activities and to reach, and maintain, acceptable standards in their business practice. Typical CSR activities have included elements such as socially responsible investments (SRI), development of relationships with employees and customers, environmental protection and sustainability, working in partnership with local communities among other things. CSR has become a popular corporate practice, as well as being important for stakeholders when assessing corporate activities (Perrini & Minoja, 2008). Motivation for the growing academic interest is, at least partly, the result of recent global corporate problems arising from unethical corporate behavior. A KPMG (2003) study in Kenya noted that majority of companies not only engaged in social responsibility initiatives, but also devoted considerable resources to reporting CSR activities to a wide array of corporate stakeholders. Fontaine (2013) noted that increasingly, corporations are motivated to become more socially responsible because their most important stakeholders expect them to understand and address the social and community issues that are relevant to them. Heal and Garret (2004), maintain that corporate social responsibility is an important part of corporate strategy in sectors where inconsistencies arise between corporate profits and social goals, or discord can arise over fairness issues. Citing the African case, Hamil (2012) observes that CSR is mostly practiced by large, high profile national and multinational companies in Africa and feels more of philanthropy or charity than an economic venture. Ominde (2014) adds to this voice by asserting that the activities carried out as part of organizations' corporate social responsibility in Africa are those that are normally

considered to be the government's responsibilities such as investment in infrastructure, schools, hospitals, environmental clean-ups and housing.

In Kenya corporate social responsibility has been gaining a lot of momentum over the years and there has been a lot of excitement around it. Mwololo (2014) opines that the concept of CSR has gained prominence over the years through the increased adherence and practice by numerous local companies and the public as a way of doing business. Corporate social responsibility is believed to have been introduced by Non-Governmental Organizations such as the United Nations with the aim of aiding the government to combat poverty and promote sustainable development in the country. The growth of CSR among Kenyan companies and organizations has been attributed to the need to meet the expectations of their foreign trading partners. Kivuitu, Yambayamba and Fox (2015) showed that what most companies describe as CSR in Kenya is actually more of philanthropy. This adds to the earlier voices about what CSR actually means for some organizations operating within the boundaries of the continent.

Organizational performance is the accumulated end results of all the organizations' work processes and activities. Although performance has been traditionally conceptualized in terms of financial measures, some scholars have proposed a broader performance construct that incorporates non-financial measures including among others issues of standards, response to stakeholders interest and company image (Huynh & Tran, 2013). Hull and Tang (2012) on consistency in CSR performance found that a consistent social performance is a condition under which firms start realizing synergies and improve their financial performance. Wang and Choi (2013) asserts that for firms to enjoy the CSR returns, they must be consistent with the CSR activities and further concluded that firms that are knowledge-intensive pay more attention to their CSR performance, as such actions have a stronger positive impact on their overall financial performance through

maintaining their know-how secrecy and thus keeping one of their core competencies. Developing an understanding of how different stakeholders vary in their importance is a salient issue (Gomes & Liddle, 2009). In this context stakeholder can effectively represent opportunities or threats to any organization depending on whether they are identified and actively managed or not, to the extent where not understanding them may be considered an example of 'dumb practice' (Bryson 2004). Corporate social responsibility has been seen as an activity that should be carried out by all organizations. Public universities are often seen as organizations that are not established for business purpose and thus they tend not to embrace corporate social responsibility.

Statement of the problem

Islam (2012) sees CSR not just as an activity that deals with charitable events but also deals with tools for boosting positive image of the company, employee and customer satisfaction and organizational profitability. The notion that the main forces that drove companies to adopt corporate social responsibility activities originally were linked to financial benefits but this has shifted drastically in recent years (Rapti & Medda, 2012). There has been growing attention on CSR issues in research. Aguinis and Glavas, (2012) studied the effects of government policy in corporate social responsibility projects on the performance of mobile phone service providers. Hossein, *et al.* (2012) examined the link between CSR and economic performance. Similarly Emilson (2012) assessed the relation between CSR and profitability. Skare and Golja (2012) investigated the relationship between CSR and financial performance. Swapna, (2011) investigated the role of CSR in community development. Okeudo (2012) examined the effect of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on the society. Locally, Kubai and Waiganjo (2014) studied the relationship between strategic corporate social responsibility and competitive advantage of commercial banks in Kenya. Mulwa (2001), Kiarie

(1997) and Kweyu (1993) studied managers' attitudes towards corporate social responsibility in selected Kenyan companies. Nyoro (2015) studied CSR as a competitive strategy and its effect on performance of mobile telephone service industry. Kamau (2001) investigated the awareness of the social responsibility concept among managers in Kenyan firms. Muriuki (2008) studied CSR link to strategy among mobile telephone service providers while Mbogoh (2014) studied challenges of implementing corporate social responsibility strategies by commercial banks in Kenya. These streams of studies seem to suggest that specific CSR strategies such as community outreach activities have not been given close attention. The aim of this study was to establish whether such programs have an impact on the performance of public sector organizations.

Research Objective

The aim of this study was to establish the influence of community outreach strategy on organizational performance of Public Universities in Kenya.

Research hypothesis

Community outreach strategy does not significantly influence organizational performance of Public Universities in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical framework

Stakeholder Theory

This theory asserts that managers must satisfy a variety of constituents (workers, customers, suppliers, local community organizations) who can influence firm outcomes. The theory was originally detailed by Freeman in 1984. It attempts to identify different factions within a society to whom an organization may have some responsibility. Developments on stakeholder theory that exemplify research and theorizing in this area include Donaldson and Preston (1995), Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997) and Phillips (2003).

Stakeholder theory is a theory of organizational management and business ethics that addresses morals and values in managing an organization (Freeman, 1984). A stakeholder in an organization is defined as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives. Freeman (1984) further stated that managers should tailor their policies to satisfy numerous theory constituents, not just shareholders. These stakeholders include workers, customers, suppliers, and community organizations. The stakeholder theory poses two questions to administrators: The first question is on the purpose of the organization. This question encourages stakeholders to articulate the shared sense of the value they create, and what brings its core stakeholders together. This propels the organization forward and allows it to generate outstanding performance. The second question that stakeholder theory asks is on the responsibility of management to stakeholders. This encourages managers to articulate how they want to run their organizations, establish the kinds of relationships they want and need to create with their stakeholders in order to deliver on their purpose (Freeman, 1984).

There are two perspectives on stakeholder theory: a descriptive and normative view. The descriptive stakeholder approach identifies and classifies the different constituents of a project without assigning any value statements regarding the legitimacy of their

claims or their power (Lozano, 2005). Normative stakeholder theory goes further and grants stakeholder claims intrinsic value due to the moral rights of any individual affected by corporate conduct (Ulrich, 2008). From a normative point of view stakeholders need to be included in corporate governance in order to respect their moral rights.

Stakeholder theory is closely related to CSR as stakeholder theorists often define appropriate and inappropriate corporate behavior with respect to their stakeholders (Driver & Thompson, 2002). Though the stakeholder approach is only one of several different perspectives on CSR and notwithstanding the fact that basic stakeholder research has had little to do with CSR, this area has developed to become one of the most important and popular perspectives on CSR. The stakeholder approach to CSR is explained through three points where number one is to recognize that the firm has multiple relationships with different stakeholders and that the firm is part of a network of stakeholders. Second, the firm also has societal responsibilities toward all these stakeholders as can be seen below in the "stakeholder model". A stakeholder approach to CSR includes a high level of interaction between the firm and the different stakeholders, where all players participate and gain advantages out of a good relationship, which can also be seen in the "stakeholder model" with arrows going in both directions (Gjerdrum, 2011).

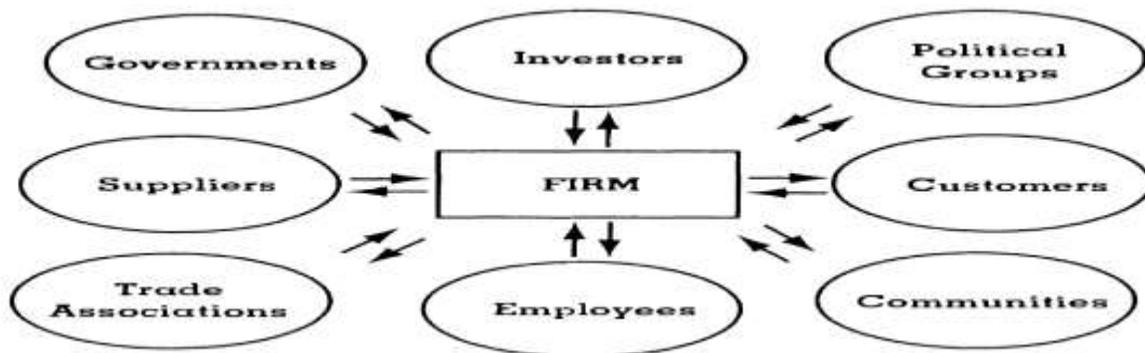


Figure 1: Stakeholder’s Model: (Donaldson & Preston, 1995)

During the last three decades stakeholder management has developed to become one of the largest areas within CSR (Wood, 2015). In addition to making a profit and obeying the law, accompany should attempt to alleviate or solve social problems. This view is commonly advocated through stakeholder theory. This theory maintains that corporations should consider the effects of their actions upon the customers, suppliers, general public, employees, and others who have a stake or interest in the corporation (Jensen, 2002; Smith, 2003; Freeman, Wicks, & Parmar, 2004; Lee, 2008; Schaefer, 2008). Supporters reason that by providing for the needs of stakeholders, corporations ensure their continued success.

Fair and ethical as it may be, adopting a stakeholder approach is by no means an easy and simple step to make, and rather constitutes a daily challenge for managers. Indeed, Wood (1991) clearly suggests that stakeholders are likely to develop a different understanding of what CSR means, what they expect from the organization in relation to CSR. To create a balanced outcome acceptable to the majority, if not all, of the stakeholders, notwithstanding the possible differences in the value systems and ideological positions of stakeholders, is a harsh but necessary task for managers (Wood, 1991; Szwajkowski, 2000). It becomes an even more necessary skill, or a 'core competence' to possess as today's corporations are viewed as 'extended enterprises' that operate at the centre of "a network of interrelated stakeholders that create, sustain and enhance [their] value-creating capacity" (Post *et al.*, 2002,). The whole environment in which this extended enterprise operates has changed, and the firm's relationships to its stakeholders have shifted from essentially transactional to truly relational, with these relationships affecting, either positively or negatively, the creation of organizational wealth (Post *et al.*, 2002; Simmons, 2004).

In line with the evolution of CSR, Stakeholder Theory has emerged as the dominant paradigm in CSR discussion. According to Stakeholder Theory, Freeman (1984) asserts that firms have relationships with many constituent groups which have an interest in the activities and outcomes of a firm (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Margolis & Walsh, 2003). These stakeholders both affect and are affected by the actions of the firm and balancing the needs of the multiple stakeholders in the activities and outcomes of a firm is crucial. Among others, these groups include employees, customers, suppliers, environmentalists, the community as whole, and owners/shareholders. Adding on, Stakeholder Theory perspective on the morality of CSR implies that managers should recognize and serve the interests of a broader set of constituent groups (Jones *et al.*, 2007; Aguinis, 2011). Hence, Stakeholder Theory marks as an important theory that should not be omitted in the CSR and employees' discussion.

Conceptual framework



Independent Variable

Dependent Variable

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

Source: Author (2018)

Empirical Literature Review

Many scholars acknowledge the fact that community outreach programs play an important role in strengthening the relationship between institutions of higher education and the local communities. Bhayat and Mahrous (2014) conducted a study to

investigate the impact of outreach activities by a university, with specific focus being on the College of Dentistry, Taibah University. They report that in teaching and training medical and dental students, outreach activities play an integral role. In their findings, they indicate that the community outreach program that the university organized had a positive impact on the students and enhanced their personal growth and social responsibility. They also report that the activities helped make aware the needs of the marginalized communities. Erickson (2015) postulates that higher education has been encouraged to become more engaged with its constituent communities in recent years. He states that through community outreach programs, universities and colleges have been able to increase their participation in helping solve community problems. The study aimed at finding out the community impacts of the Iowa State University College of Design outreach program on the local communities. Erickson (2015) indicates in his findings that the communities derived a number of benefits from the university's outreach program, the key ones being physical improvements to the community, expanded community capacity, increased project legitimacy, and stimulation of local dialogue, activities, and creative capacity. Davidson, Kerrigan and Agre-Kippenhan (2013) argue that outreach is less about reaching out than it is about blurring the boundaries between the university and the community. They state that the blurring of these boundaries takes place through engaging the university and the community in defining mutual concerns and together exploring ways to address them, with the main aim being to strengthen student learning as well as communities within which the said institutions are located. Baum (2013) in his investigation of university-community partnerships indicates that University-community partnerships can be a realistic means of increasing resources for addressing community problems. He further states that expectations of partnerships are often so grand and available resources so limited, that those who

create partnerships may substitute fantasy about how partnerships will magically create abundant problem-solving resources for realistic analysis, organizing, planning, and funding. In his conclusion, Baum (2013) opines that it is important to start partnerships with definiteness about outcomes and resources but maintaining adaptability in process for the desired outcomes to be achieved.

The earth summit in 1992 and the subsequent focus on climate change have increased awareness about environmental issues globally. International standards like ISO 14000, EMAS, and OHSAS 18000 along with environmental legislations in different countries have been formulated. Research has highlighted the importance of environmentally sensitive operations and productions by firms (Gupta, 1994; Inman, 1999). Emphasis on issues such as responsible waste disposal and emission standards, conservation of green resources, environmental training, and the like gives positive signal about their CSR towards environment.

Environment awareness programs are equally important to institutions of higher learning as they are to profit generating organizations. Yazici and Babalik (2016) investigate the extent to which university students promote environmental awareness. They report that to improve the students' knowledge about environmental problems, universities now offer environmental courses. However, the apparent lack of awareness about the environment and the current environmental problems among university students brings to question the effectiveness of the courses offered. On the other hand, Aloniet *al* (2015) investigated the significance of involving stakeholders of any given organization in environmental impact assessment. They argue that addressing the environmental problems caused by human activities requires the collective effort by all concerned parties. They opine that the level of involvement may vary, but it is important that all affected by resource exploitation, projects, and any activity on the environment be

given opportunity to think the way forward. Shoukryet *al* (2012) acknowledge the fact that Environmental problems and environmental issues have become some of the most important problems and issues in the late modernization age. They are of the view that Environmental issues include the relationship between environment and society, effects of economic growth and technology on the environment, environmental degradation, air and water pollution, greenhouse effect, global warming, and numerous other environmental problems. They report that the extent to which institutions handle has over the past few years been an important determinant of how the public and other stakeholders perceive the organization.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The targeted population constituted of the 31 Chartered Public Universities in Kenya. Out of these, five Universities were selected. A sample size of 202

participated in the study representing a 80.52 per cent response rate. The study sampled teaching and non teaching staff of the selected Universities. Purposive sampling uses only those members of the population with the desired information that is relevant for the study. Questionnaire was the main data collection instrument. The instrument was developed from existing literature, was piloted and tested for validity and reliability. The community outreach variable gave Cronbach results of 0.809 indicating that the instrument was reliable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 3 below illustrated the distribution of results for the community outreach variable. The data was evenly distributed and so was used to draw inferential statistics and conclusions. As seen from the Q-Q plot, the data was evenly distributed along the line of best fit therefore establishing a normal distribution.

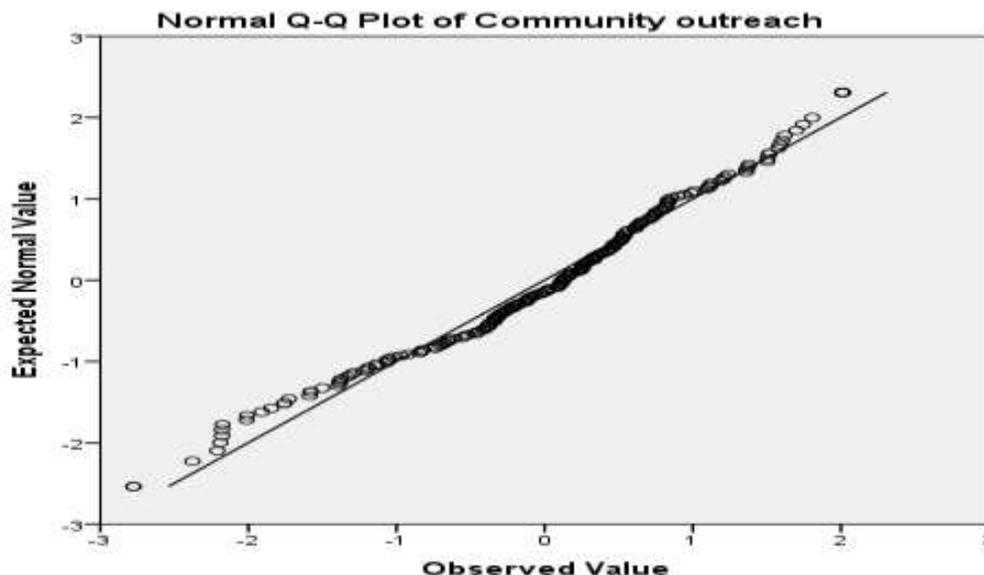


Figure 3: Q-Q Plot for community outreach programs

Reliability and variables correlations results

A reliability analysis was carried out on the community outreach strategies scale comprising 7

items. Cronbach's alpha showed the questionnaire to reach acceptable reliability, $\alpha = 0.791$. Most items appeared to be worthy of retention, resulting in a decrease in the alpha if deleted. The one exception to

this was item 3 which read the university hired low skilled people, which would increase the alpha to $\alpha = 0.805$ if deleted. Since the difference was insignificant, the variable was maintained instead of being removed. While reliability results showed this objective was reliable the correlation results validated this by showing that all constructs measuring same variable were well correlated. The strategies with low correlations were excluded during hypothesis testing.

Descriptive Results

The study wanted to establish community outreach strategy of the universities in Kenya. Strongly agreed and agreed was combined to form agreement with the hypothesis, while strongly disagreed and disagreed were combined to form disagree. The study found 35.6% of the respondents disagreed, 33.2% were neutral and 31.2% agreed university addresses unresolved societal problem as part of community outreach. Fourty two percent of respondents agreed universities hire low skilled people in their outreach

even though 37.1% disagreed with this statement and 20.8% were not sure of it. Almost half of the respondents (47.5%) agreed universities offers products and services to the vulnerable people and 28.7% disagreed on this.

Almost half of the respondents (48%) agreed universities informs the local community by organizing presentations and company visits while 31.2% disagreed on this and 20.8% were not sure of it. The study also found 57.4% of the respondents agreed the universities supports collaborations with local businesses and schools while 22.8% disagreed and 19.8% were not sure of it. Also, 58.4% of the respondents agreed universities engages in activities that encourage and nurture effective university community partnerships and 63.9% agreed universities pursues partnerships with government, for profit organizations, social economy organizations, labour agencies and other community organizations.

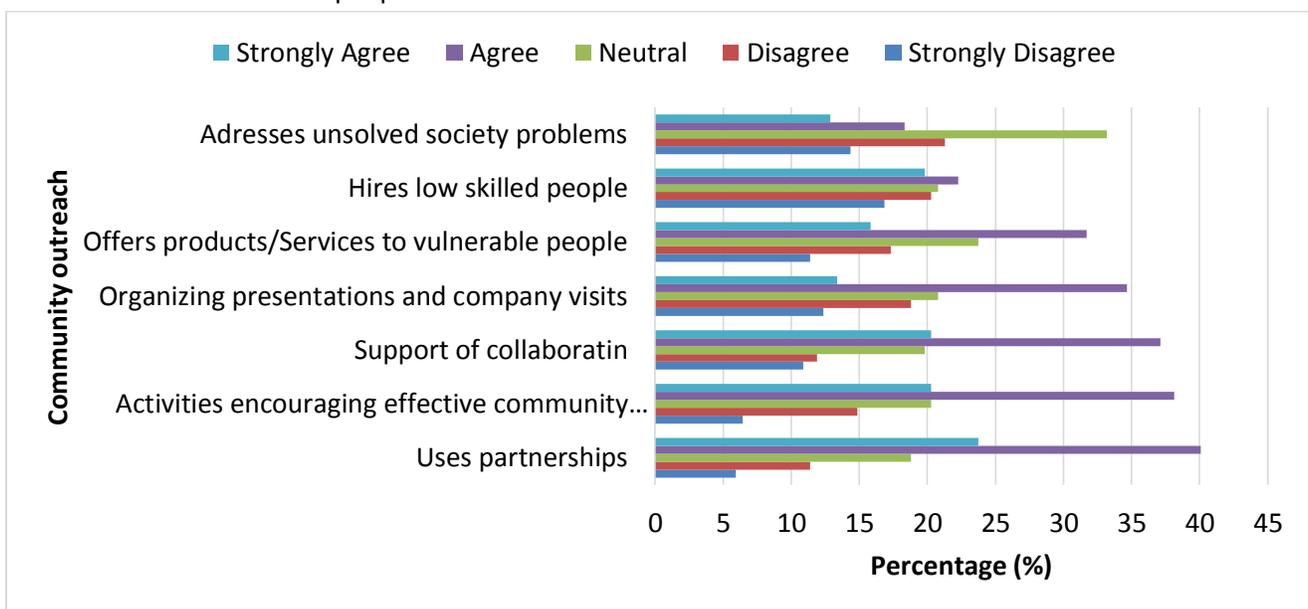


Figure 4: Community outreach strategies

The study also established that only 26.7% of respondents had been engaged in outreach programs organized by the university.

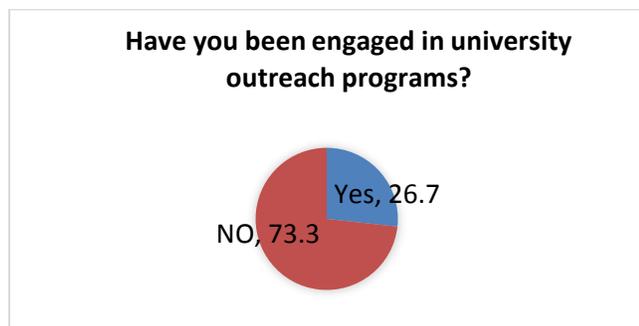


Figure 5: Staffs engagement to university outreach programs

Correlation analysis between community outreach strategies and organizational performance

The correlation between community outreach strategies and organization performance found that all the variables were moderately correlated with organization performance, except the variable that read the university hired low skilled people. This variable was not included in the final regression. These results were presented in the table below.

Table 1: Correlation between community outreach and organizational performance

	Organization performance
The university supports collaboration with local business & schools	.360**
The university engages in activities that encourage and nurture effective community partnership	.419**
The university hires low skilled people	.006
The university informs the local community by organizing presentations and company visits	.435**
The university offers products and/ or Services to vulnerable people	.377**
The university addresses unsolved society problems	.300**
The university pursues partnership with: government, for profit organizations, social economy organizations, labour agencies and other community organizations	.384**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Univariate regression of community outreach strategies and organizational performance

The study found community outreach strategies' value of 0.561 with a p-value of 0.000 which was less than critical a p-value of 0.05 hence the study reject

the null hypothesis. This means improvement of community outreach strategies' is likely to improve organizational performance of public universities in Kenya factor 0.488. The results summary is presented below.

Table 2: Regression of community outreach strategies and organizational performance

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.624	.229		7.081	.000
Community outreach	.488	.067	.456	7.253	.000

Dependent Variable: Organizational performance
 The results above corroborated to those of Okwemba *et al* (2014) which showed that an increase in philanthropic activities in the society like donations to charities, building of social amenities among others.

Other studies such as Mali *et al* (2015) also found a relationship between awareness of corporate social responsibility activities and organizational performance. Dawkins (2004) stated that when an

organization contributes towards social welfare, it enhance commitment level of existing customers and attracts the motivated potential employees. Brammer, Millington and Rayton (2007) stated when a company has CSR initiatives; employees are more proud of and committed to the organization. According to Stawiski *et al.* (2010) organization should involve their employees in decision making regarding which actions should be undertaken relating to community, environment and employees themselves so that organization can get maximum benefits of CSR.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Community involvement – either individually or through associations seeking to enhance the public good – helps to strengthen civil society. Organizations that engage in a respectful manner with the

community and its institutions reflect and reinforce democratic and civic values. Community involvement goes beyond identifying and engaging stakeholders in relation to the impacts of an organization's operations; it also encompasses support of and identification with the community. Above all, it entails acknowledging the value of the community. Universities were seen to solve the problems affecting the communities around them. Notably, the responses indicated that they offered employment to various levels of staff and that they have lately been very sensitive to the needs of the vulnerable members of society. They have also up-scaled their collaborations with society in areas of industry and academic institutions such as schools. The regression results indicated that improvements in community outreach programs improved organizational performance by 48.8%.

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