

## **Community Relations Strategies and Conflict Mitigation in the Manufacturing Sector: Evidence from Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examines the role of community relations strategies in mitigating conflict between manufacturing firms and their host communities, using Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, as a case study. Using a mixed-method research design, data were obtained through a structured questionnaire from 400 respondents and an interview with the company's public relations officer. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Findings of the study indicate that while Champion Breweries recognises community relations and implements strategies such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), infrastructure development, cultural engagement, and open communication channels, conflicts still occur frequently due to gaps in stakeholder inclusion, transparency, and employment opportunities for local indigenes. The study further established that community relations strategies are moderately effective in mitigating conflict, with strengths observed in timely grievance handling and community engagement, but limitations evident in inconsistent implementation and weak participatory processes. Correlation results indicated a strong positive relationship between community relations strategies and conflict*

*mitigation ( $r = 0.749$ ). It was concluded that, although the company's community relations strategies have contributed to reducing tensions to a moderate extent, their effectiveness is constrained by inconsistencies in implementation. Major amongst the three recommendations is for Champion Breweries PLC to enhance transparency and communication, particularly in the planning and execution of CSR initiatives.*

**Keywords:** Community Relations, Conflict Mitigation, Corporate Social Responsibility, Host Community, Organisation

### **Introduction**

In the rapidly evolving landscape of global business, the establishment and maintenance of robust community relations have emerged as indispensable pillars for long-term organisational success and sustainability. This is particularly true in industries such as brewing, where operations often intersect intimately with local populations, influencing social, economic, and environmental dynamics (Kramer, 2016; Freeman, 2024). Organisations are entities created to drive people towards the achievement of corporate goals and, by extension, satisfy individual aspirations and visions. To achieve this, organisations rely on the elements of communication such as messages, networks, interrelationships and, above all, people. The success of any organisation depends on the effectiveness and efficiency of communication flow (Nsentip, Iwok & Akarika, 2023).

In organisations, the major objectives of communication are to inform and educate employees at all levels on the strategy and motivate them to support the strategy and organisational goals (Akarika, Iwok & Jessica, 2022). Communication has a vital role in any organisation's life. Every organisation is, however, concerned about its gains and profit and would usually avoid rivalry that would ignite conflict (Udomah, Akarika & Ikon, 2024). The ultimate concern of every organisation is the maintenance of peace and tranquillity (Udomah et al., 2024). Public relations strategies serve as a critical mechanism for organisations to manage stakeholder perception, particularly during crises.

Some conflict emanates from the failure of community relations strategies and conflict resolution; others stem from poor communication and poor relationships (Udomah et al., 2024). Community relations, as an arm of public relations, is a fascinating component of PR. It creates harmony between the organisation and the community in which it is located and serves as a tool for overseeing, managing, communicating and interacting with both the organisation and its community in order to achieve a mutually beneficial and long-lasting relationship (Udomah et al., 2024). Effective community relations strategies not only foster goodwill and trust but also serve

as proactive mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution, enabling companies to navigate the complex interplay between profit-orientated objectives and social expectations.

Champion Breweries PLC, a key player in Nigeria's brewing industry located in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, exemplifies conflict dynamics. Incorporated as a limited liability company on July 31, 1974, as Southeast Breweries Limited and later renamed Champion Breweries Limited in 1992, the company was commissioned in 1976, with an initial production capacity of 150,000 hectolitres per annum. Over the decades, it has evolved into a significant economic contributor in the South-South geopolitical zone, Nigeria, producing flagship products like Champion Lager Beer and non-alcoholic malt drinks. The 2011 acquisition by Heineken N.V. through Consolidated Breweries Plc. Heineken's involvement introduced global expertise, modernisation, and expanded market reach, enhancing operational efficiencies and product quality (Mkpanam, Daniel & Atakpa, 2023).

However, despite these advancements, Champion Breweries has encountered persistent challenges in harmonising its commercial ambitions with the expectations of its host community. Reports highlight ongoing disputes, including environmental concerns and land usage (Akpasak, 2023). These issues reflect broader tensions in Nigeria's industrial sectors, where corporate activities can exacerbate social discontent if not managed with cultural sensitivity and participatory approaches (Gunning et al., 2023; United Nations, 2023). Based on the above, this paper investigates the community relations strategies adopted by Champion Breweries PLC and evaluates their effectiveness in mitigating conflict with its host community.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In contemporary corporate practice, community relations have become a vital component of organisational sustainability, particularly for firms operating within host communities whose resources and environment directly support their operations. Effective community relations strategies such as stakeholder engagement and transparent communication are expected to foster mutual understanding, reduce tensions, and promote peaceful coexistence between organisations and their host communities (Freeman, 1984; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). However, despite the increasing adoption of these strategies, conflicts between companies and host communities remain prevalent in many parts of Nigeria.

In the case of Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, there is evidence of ongoing tensions between the company and its host community, despite the implementation of community relations initiatives such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes, infrastructure development, and community development activities. Reports and observations indicate that issues such as limited employment opportunities for local indigenes, perceived marginalisation in decision-making processes, land-related disputes, and dissatisfaction with the

execution of development projects continue to generate conflict. This suggests that while community relations strategies may exist, their effectiveness in mitigating conflict is questionable.

Given these concerns, there is a need to critically examine the extent to which community relations strategies adopted by Champion Breweries PLC effectively mitigate conflict and foster sustainable relationships with its host community. Therefore, the central problem of this study is: To what extent have community relations strategies adopted by Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, enhanced conflict mitigation between Champion Breweries PLC and its host community in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study were to:

- i. determine the extent to which Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, recognises community relations as a tool for conflict mitigation.
- ii. identify the community relations strategies adopted by Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, as a tool for conflict resolution with the host community.
- iii. examine the effectiveness of the community relations strategies adopted by Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, as a tool for conflict resolution with the host community.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. To what extent does Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, recognize community relations?
- ii. What community relations strategies are adopted by Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, as a tool for conflict mitigation with the host community?
- iii. How effective are the community relations strategies adopted by Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, as a tool for conflict mitigation with the host community?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The research hypothesis for this study is stated below:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant impact of community relations strategies adopted by Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, on conflict mitigation.

## **Literature Review**

### **Community Relations**

Gradually, businesses acknowledged the significance of incorporating community relations into their corporate strategy, especially as stakeholders, such as consumers, employees, and government entities, increasingly demand enhanced accountability and social responsibility from corporations. Community relations include many actions and techniques used by firms to establish and sustain connections with the communities in which they function (Piciocchi, Vollero & Palazzo, 2019). These programmes are components of extensive Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities aimed at fostering mutual understanding, trust, and collaboration between enterprises and local stakeholders (Frederick, 2018). To do this, corporations must understand the geo-political, geo-economic, and geo-social behaviours of the communities affected, participate in participatory procedures, and interact with local communities and agencies (Gill, Williams, Essex, Gilg, Yarwood, Smithers, & Wilson, 2015; Touitou & Brikins, 2024).

Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory emphasises that firms must reconcile the interests of many stakeholders, including the communities in which they function. This change in viewpoint signalled the beginning of a more strategic approach to community relations, where firms attempt to produce shared value that benefits both the company and the community. As firms embraced this strategic approach, they implemented more organised community involvement activities that tackle social challenges relevant to the company's expertise and goals, therefore improving both commercial and societal results (Waddock & Boyle, 2023). Carroll's (1991) CSR Pyramid model describes corporate responsibility as covering economic, legal, ethical, and charitable components. Community relations activities typically transcend several aspects, as firms attempt not just to satisfy legal requirements but also to interact morally and give philanthropically to local communities (Kindan, 2022). CSR initiatives that concentrate on community relations strive to enhance the quality of life, meet community-specific issues, and contribute to sustainable development (Kemp, 2020). Community connections are vital in creating social licence, since they allow corporations to address local problems, promote goodwill, and show responsiveness to stakeholder requirements. A good reputation throughout the community also adds to brand loyalty, employee happiness, and competitive advantage (Kindan, 2022).

### **Conflict**

Ordinarily, conflict means a serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one. Conflicts exist whenever an action by one party is perceived as preventing or interfering with the goals, needs or actions of another party. Conflict can arise as a result of a number of factors, such as incompatible goals, differences in the interpretation of facts, negative feelings, differences in

values and philosophies, or disputes over a share of resources (Pondy, 1967). Conflict is seen as a controversy or divergence of opinion between two or more people in an organisation about something that was not done or to be done in a work environment in which opposing views are strongly held (Robbins & Judge, 2017). In a separate contribution, Thomas (1992) defined conflict as a friction which could occur between two or more people or groups with incompatible goals in an organisation. This implies that conflict connotes disagreement, controversy, opposition, dispute and resistance between persons, groups or organisations as it affects the interests or goals of each party. Conflict is inevitable, especially in organisations where members are expected to comply with the laid-down rules and regulations guiding the organisation.

Conflict can emerge from differences in personality, beliefs, and ideologies which, when clashing, result in disputes, insubordination, authoritarian behaviour by managers, and widespread lack of discipline among staff within an organisation (Robbins & Judge, 2017). Conflict tends to be associated with negative features and situations which give rise to inefficiency, ineffectiveness or dysfunctional consequences. But in some cases, it can stimulate creative problem-solving and lead to improved situations for the parties involved. Since conflict is seemingly unavoidable, it is necessary for managers to be able to recognise the source of the conflict and to view its constructive as well as destructive potential in a practical way (Shanka & Thuo, 2017).

### **Conflict Management**

Conflict management and resolution in organisational settings demand strategies that enhance amiable handling of misunderstandings. This should be done constructively and cooperatively in line with laid-down disciplinary processes. The means of reducing the negative impact of conflict while promoting the positive effect of conflict is referred to as conflict management (Shanka & Thuo, 2017). Best (2006) posited that the aim of conflict management is to reduce or mitigate the negative and destructive capacities of conflict.

According to Bercovitch (2011), ways of managing organisational conflict are as varied as its causes, origins and contexts. The purpose of conflict management, whether undertaken by the parties in conflict or involving the intervention of an outside party, is to manage the entire structure of a conflict situation so as to contain the destructive components in the conflict process. Conflict management is considered effective when it succeeds in minimising disruptions stemming from the existence of a conflict and provides a solution that is satisfactory and acceptable. Broadly speaking, there are five basic styles of managing conflicts (Rahim, 1983).

- i. **Integrating Style:** This style indicates high concern for self and others. This style is also known as the 'problem-solving style'. It involves collaboration between the parties.

According to Makaye and Ndofirepi (2012), this style has two distinctive elements: confrontation and problem-solving. Confrontation involves open communication, clearing up misunderstandings, and analysing the underlying causes of conflict. This is a prerequisite for problem-solving, which involves identification of and solutions to the real problem(s) to provide maximum satisfaction to contending parties.

- ii. **Obliging Style:** This style indicates low concern for self and high concern for others. This is also known as accommodating style. This style is associated with attempting to play down the differences and emphasising commonalities to satisfy the concern of the other party. It may take the form of selfless generosity, charity, or obedience to another party's order (Omisore & Abiodun, 2019).
- iii. **Dominating Style:** This style indicates high concern for self and low concern for others. This is also known as a competing style of conflict management. This style has been identified with a win-lose orientation or with forcing behaviour to win one's position.
- iv. **Avoiding Style:** This style indicates low concern for self and others. This is also known as the suppression method of conflict management. It has been associated with withdrawal, buck-passing, sidestepping, or "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" situations. It may take the form of postponing an issue until a better time or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation (Kilmann & Thomas, 2007).
- v. **Compromising Style:** This style indicates intermediate concern for self and others. It involves give and take or sharing whereby both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision. A compromising party gives up more than a dominating party but less than an obliging party. Likewise, such a party addresses an issue more directly than an avoiding party but does not explore it in as much depth as an integrating party (Rahim, 2002).

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study was anchored on two theories, namely stakeholder theory and relationship management theory.

### **Stakeholder Theory**

The stakeholder theory is a framework that highlights the importance of addressing the needs and interests of all parties affected by an organisation's actions. It emphasises balancing the objectives of the organisation with the expectations of its stakeholders, which is critical in fostering effective community relations. The theory assumes that organisations have a responsibility to identify, prioritise, and balance the competing interests of stakeholders, ensuring fairness and equity. Long-term success depends on understanding and meeting stakeholder expectations, including those of employees, customers, communities, governments, and shareholders. The theory was propounded by R. Edward Freeman in 1984 in his influential book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Freeman's work built on earlier management and ethics concepts to formalise the idea of stakeholders and their role in organisational success.

Despite its strength, stakeholder theory has been criticised for its lack of prioritisation among stakeholders and its idealistic assumptions (Jensen, 2002; Sundaram & Inkpen, 2004). The theory is relevant to this work because Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, operates within a complex network of stakeholders, including the host community in Uyo. Applying the stakeholder theory can guide its community relations strategies to foster sustainable and mutually beneficial relationships.

### **Relationship Management Theory**

Relationship Management Theory (RMT) emerged as a significant framework in public relations and corporate communication, focusing on the strategic cultivation and maintenance of long-term relationships between organisations and their publics. The theory was primarily developed and propounded by John A. Ledingham and Stephen D. Bruning (2000). Unlike earlier transactional views of communication that treated publics as passive recipients, RMT recognises publics as active participants in dialogues that build trust, commitment, and mutual understanding. The theory emphasises two-way symmetrical communication, where both parties (the organisation and the public) listen to each other and adapt accordingly. Communication is not top-down but involves genuine dialogue. This theory is highly relevant to the contemporary corporate environment, where organisations are increasingly expected to engage meaningfully with stakeholders, especially in complex contexts like community relations and conflict management.

However, RTM has been faulted for overemphasising harmony and mutuality while ignoring conflict and power imbalance (Heath, 2001; Pieczka, 2011). Motion & Weaver (2005)

criticised the theory for neglecting structural inequalities by focusing heavily on communication strategies. The theory provides a robust framework for understanding and improving community relations strategies at Champion Breweries PLC. By focusing on trust, commitment, and genuine two-way engagement, the brewery can enhance its relationship with the Uyo-Ibesikpo community, thereby reducing conflicts and fostering a more harmonious operational environment.

### **Review of Empirical Studies**

The study examined the relationship between conflict management strategies and organisational performance within selected breweries in Nigeria's South East region. The study objectives were to investigate how negotiation as a conflict management strategy influences the productivity levels within the breweries and examine the effectiveness of joint consultation between management and employees in mitigating conflicts and enhancing organisational performance.

The study employed a survey research design, utilising structured questionnaires to gather data from employees across five selected breweries in Southeast Nigeria. A total of 618 employees were randomly selected to participate in the study, ensuring a comprehensive representation of the workforce. Findings of the study showed a significant positive relationship between the use of negotiation strategies and increased productivity within the breweries. The study concluded that effective conflict management strategies are crucial for enhancing organisational performance in brewery companies. The study recommended that managers should adopt effective conflict management strategies to address organisational conflicts; engage in inclusive and collaborative strategies, involving union leadership or employee representatives in decisions affecting the workforce; and identify and mitigate major causes of conflict to prevent adverse effects on corporate performance. Apart from the two studies differing in their focus on internal versus external conflicts and stakeholders, they share common themes in the importance of effective conflict management and communication strategies to enhance relationships and performance.

The study investigates how oil companies employ community relations (CR) strategies to manage conflicts with their host communities in Delta State. The study aims to explore how participatory approaches to dispute resolution can support conflict management in oil-producing host communities in Delta State. The study employed a survey research design. A sample of 300 respondents was selected from six autonomous communities within the Ogulagha Kingdom in Delta State. Data were collected using questionnaires and analysed to determine the impact of participatory dispute resolution approaches on conflict management. Findings of the study established that involving community members in dispute resolution processes significantly influences conflict management positively in the host communities. The research found that when



N= total sample frame

(e)= error level of significance at (0.05)

1= unity

Substituting into equation 3.2, the sample size is given as:

$$n = \frac{751854}{1 + 751854(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{751854}{1 + 751854(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{751354}{1879.6375}$$

$$n = 399.99$$

$$n = 400$$

A multistage sampling technique was adopted in selecting host community members for the study since it is a probability sampling technique that involves drawing a sample in multiple stages, where each stage uses smaller and smaller sampling units. In the first stage of the sampling, Uyo and Ibesikpo Local Government Areas were divided into clusters based on five major roads. The roads used as clusters were Oron Road, Aka-Nung Udoe Road, Abak Road, Ikot Ekpene Road, and Afaha-Offiong Road. Simple random sampling was then applied in the second stage to select participants for the study. Four hundred respondents within the host community of Champion Breweries PLC were sampled to participate in the study. The instruments that were used for data collection were a questionnaire and an interview guide.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

**Table 1: Mean statistics on extent of recognition of community relations by Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State**

Extent of recognition of community relations	Min	Mean	Max	SD
Champion Breweries actively acknowledges the importance of its host community.	1	3.21	4	.76
The company recognises community relations as a strategic priority.	1	3.40	4	.21
The company dedicates resources to community relations activities.	1	2.83	4	.73
Champion Breweries views the community as a key stakeholder.	1	2.74	4	.32
The company's community initiatives reflect recognition of local needs.	1	3.01	4	.61
Champion Breweries incorporates community feedback into decision-making.	1	2.31	4	.41
Champion Breweries engages proactively with community leaders.	1	3.11	4	.77
Champion Breweries publicly acknowledges community contributions.	1	3.17	4	.63
Champion Breweries maintains a dedicated team for community affairs.	1	2.13	4	.21
Champion Breweries integrates community relations into its corporate culture.	1	3.14	4	.55
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>2.91</b>		

The result in Table 1 shows a grand mean of 2.91. The grand mean is greater than 2.50, on which the decision is based. This implies that to a large extent, Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, recognises community relations in its dealings with the host community.

**Table 2: Mean statistics on community relations strategies adopted by Champion Breweries PLC as a tool for conflict management with the host community**

Conflict management tools	Min	Mean	Max	SD
Champion Breweries engages in regular dialogue with community leaders to prevent conflicts.	1	2.54	4	.54

The company uses Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to promote peaceful coexistence.	1	3.12	4	.88
Champion Breweries provides employment opportunities to community members as a conflict management tool.	1	2.09	4	.91
The company sponsors educational programs for the host community.	1	2.73	4	.52
Champion Breweries involves the community in decision-making processes.	1	1.92	4	.63
Community grievances are addressed promptly by the company.	1	2.23	4	.87
Champion Breweries implements community development projects to enhance relations.	1	2.60	4	.45
The company maintains an open-door policy for community concerns.	1	3.21	4	.89
Champion Breweries supports local cultural events to foster goodwill.	1	3.44	4	.21
The company provides infrastructure support to the host community.	1	3.28	4	.73
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>2.67</b>		

The result in Table 2 shows a grand mean of 2.67. The grand mean obtained is greater than 2.50, on which the rejection decision is based. This implies that Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, adopts diverse tools in managing conflicts with the host community.

**Table 3: Mean statistics on the effectiveness of community relations strategies adopted by Champion Breweries PLC as a tool for conflict resolution with the host community**

Effectiveness of community relations strategies	Min	Mean	Max	SD
Community relations strategies at Champion Breweries have reduced conflict occurrences.	1	3.19	4	.45
Champion Breweries' community engagement initiatives promote peaceful coexistence.	1	2.79	4	.34
Conflict resolution mechanisms employed by the company are effective.	1	3.18	4	.62
Community members feel adequately involved in decision-making processes.	1	2.41	4	.71
The company's CSR initiatives have lessened tensions with the host community.	1	2.97	4	.53

Community leaders are satisfied with Champion Breweries' engagement strategies.	1	2.13	4	.62
Champion Breweries addresses community grievances in a timely manner.	1	3.40	4	.28
The company's transparent communication helps prevent misunderstandings.	1	2.62	4	.67
Champion Breweries' support for local events enhances community trust.	1	3.11	4	.92
The company's employment of local residents helps to ease tensions.	1	3.15	4	.42
<b>Grand Mean</b>			<b>2.90</b>	

The result in Table 3 shows a grand mean of 2.90. The grand mean is greater than 2.50, on which the rejection decision is based. This implies that the community relations strategies adopted by Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, as a tool for conflict resolution with the host community are effective.

### Test of Hypothesis

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant impact of community relations strategies adopted by Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, on conflict mitigation.

**Table 4: Result of Pearson Product Moment Correlation for the impact of community relations strategies on conflict mitigation**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	Calculated r-value	Critical r-value	Decision
Adopted strategies	448	2.97	.48	446	.749	.195	Significant
Conflict mitigation	448	3.01	.58				

The results on Table 4 show a calculated r-value of (.749), which is greater than the critical r-value of (.195) at the .05 level of significance for 395 degrees of freedom. With this result, the

null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was upheld. This implies that there is a significant impact of community relations strategies adopted by Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, on the host community.

### **Summary of Interview**

The findings from the interview reveal that Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, recognises community relations as an important aspect of its operations and long-term sustainability. The public relations officer emphasised that the company views its host community as a key stakeholder and acknowledges the need to maintain a peaceful and mutually beneficial relationship. However, it was also implied that while this recognition exists, there may be limitations in the consistency and depth of its implementation.

In terms of community relations strategies, the interview findings indicate that Champion Breweries adopts several approaches to engage with its host community. These include the implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives such as community development projects, youth empowerment and skill development programmes. The company also maintains regular interaction with community leaders, supports local cultural events, and operates an open-door policy that allows community members to express their concerns. These strategies are aimed at fostering goodwill, strengthening relationships, and preventing conflicts.

Regarding the effectiveness of these strategies, the interview findings suggest that community relations efforts have contributed to reducing tensions and promoting a level of peaceful coexistence between the company and the host community. The prompt handling of grievances and continuous engagement with stakeholders were identified as key strengths. However, the interview also highlighted certain challenges, particularly in the areas of stakeholder inclusion, transparency, and meeting community expectations. While the strategies are generally effective, their impact is somewhat constrained by gaps in implementation, especially in ensuring that community members are adequately involved in decision-making processes. Overall, the findings indicate that although Champion Breweries' community relations strategies play a significant role in conflict mitigation, there is a need for improvement to achieve more sustainable and harmonious relationships.

## **Discussion of Findings**

### **What is the extent to which Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, recognises community relations?**

Table 1 presents a range of measures assessing Champion Breweries' recognition of community relations, with various community-related activities rated across a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Champion Breweries scores relatively high (mean = 3.21, SD = 0.76) on recognising the importance of its host community. This suggests that the company actively acknowledges the vital role that the community plays in its operations. With a mean of 3.40 (SD = 0.21), findings from the study show that the company places community relations as a strategic priority. This is an important indicator of the company's commitment to maintaining a positive relationship with the community, considering its long-term operational benefits.

Table 1 revealed that Champion Breweries PLC recognises the importance of community relations to a considerable extent. The company demonstrates awareness of the role of its host community and integrates community relations into its strategic priorities and corporate culture. However, despite this recognition, there are observable gaps in the consistent allocation of resources, the existence of a fully functional community relations structure, and the effective integration of community feedback into decision-making processes. This suggests that recognition is present but not fully translated into comprehensive practice. Freeman, Harrison & Wicks (2007) argue that organisations must move beyond mere recognition of stakeholders to actively managing relationships through stakeholder engagement, value creation, and trust-building.

This finding aligns with the tenets of stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), which posit that firms must manage the interests of all key stakeholders, including host communities, for long-term success. The finding suggests that the company's leadership understands the value of a social licence to operate. However, the disparity resonates with the criticisms of relationship management theory (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000), which emphasises that genuine relationships are built on mutual influence and organisational adaptation, not just one-way communication. The data implied that while Champion Breweries is adept at informing the community, it falls short of the two-way symmetrical communication required for true partnership, leading to a perception of tokenism.

**What community relations strategies are adopted by Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, as a tool for conflict mitigation with the host community?**

Table 2 presents an analysis of the strategies employed by Champion Breweries PLC to manage conflicts with its host community. The data shows that Champion Breweries adopts a range of community relations strategies to manage conflict with its host community. Prominent among these are corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, infrastructure development, support for cultural events, and the use of open communication channels such as an open-door policy. While these strategies contribute to fostering goodwill and reducing tensions, others, such as regular dialogue with community leaders, employment of local indigenes, and inclusive decision-making, are less effectively implemented. This is consistent with Fisher, Ury, and Patton (2011), who emphasise collaborative conflict resolution through stakeholder involvement and addressing underlying interests. The absence of interest-based engagement not only limits the effectiveness of the strategies but suggests a gap in applying principled negotiation. This therefore results in moderate success in conflict mitigation and indicates that although multiple strategies are in place, their application is uneven.

These initiatives align with interest-based relational theory (Fisher and Ury, 1981) by focusing on shared interests like community well-being and cultural preservation, which helps to build goodwill and foster a positive working relationship. Conversely, the least effective strategies are those that require deeper, more collaborative engagement. This finding is consistent with the study by Igben and Ikiyowere (2022) in Delta State, which found that top-down approaches without genuine consultation are ineffective. These indicate that the company's strategies are often reactive and palliative, rather than proactive and empowering, failing to address the root causes of conflict as identified by the community. The results suggest that Champion Breweries should consider reinforcing its engagement with the community through more active dialogue, greater involvement in decision-making, and more prompt responses to grievances. By strengthening these strategies, the company can enhance its relationship with the host community, reduce tensions, and foster a more cooperative and harmonious environment.

**How effective are the community relations strategies adopted by Champion Breweries PLC, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, as a tool for conflict resolution with the host community?**

Table 3 provides insights into the effectiveness of various community relations strategies employed by Champion Breweries PLC to manage and resolve conflicts with the host community. The mean score of 3.19 (SD = 0.45) indicates that Champion Breweries' community relations strategies have been successful in reducing conflict occurrences. This suggests that the company's efforts in building relationships with the community, including engaging with local leaders and

addressing community concerns, have had a significant positive impact on lowering the frequency of conflicts. This implies that when disputes do arise, the company has systems in place to manage them effectively.

The grand mean of 2.90 indicates that, overall, the community relations strategies employed by Champion Breweries PLC are effective in conflict resolution. While some strategies, such as addressing grievances promptly, employing local residents, and supporting local events, are particularly effective, others, like involving the community in decision-making and engaging community leaders, need improvement. A mean score of 2.62 (SD = 0.67) for transparent communication suggests that while the company's communication helps prevent misunderstandings, it may not be entirely sufficient. Deutsch (1973) emphasises the role of trust and communication in determining whether conflict is constructive or destructive.

Best (2006) argues that conflict persists when root causes like injustice and exclusion are not addressed; with a mean score of 2.41 (SD = 0.71), the data shows that community members do not feel fully involved in decision-making processes. This is one of the lowest scores, indicating that while the company may involve the community in some decisions, this involvement may not be sufficiently inclusive or transparent. The persistence of these root causes limits CRS effectiveness, indicating that sustainable conflict mitigation requires addressing the fundamental sources of dissatisfaction.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, while Champion Breweries PLC recognises the importance of community relations and has implemented various strategies such as CSR initiatives, infrastructure support, and stakeholder engagement, conflicts with the host community still persist. These conflicts are largely driven by gaps in stakeholder inclusion, limited employment opportunities for local indigenes, and inadequate transparency in communication and decision-making processes. Although the company's community relations strategies have contributed to reducing tensions to a moderate extent, their effectiveness is constrained by inconsistencies in implementation. Therefore, for community relations to serve as a more effective tool for conflict mitigation, they must be more inclusive, transparent, and responsive to the needs and expectations of the host community.

### **Recommendations**

Following the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Champion Breweries PLC should increase the involvement of host community members and leaders in decision-making processes to promote inclusiveness and trust.

- ii. The company should enhance transparency and communication, particularly in the planning and execution of CSR initiatives, to reduce misunderstandings and suspicion.
- iii. There is a need to expand employment opportunities for local indigenes, as these are a major source of conflict and dissatisfaction.

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