

BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT IN ACTIVITIES FOR THE BENEFIT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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Purpose. The purpose of the article is to analyse if and how companies engage in activities for the benefit of local communities in Poland.

Design/methodology/approach. The article analyses the available literature on the subject, data and reports on this issue, and presents a case study of companies and their cooperation with local communities.

Findings. By implementing Corporate Social Responsibility assumptions and recognizing the importance of Sustainable Development Goals, companies are increasingly more and more consciously involved in activities for the benefit of local communities. Companies' environment and local communities are beginning to be perceived as one of the key stakeholders for companies.

Practical implications. As the data show, more and more companies are undertaking activities for the benefit of local communities, not only establishing a dialogue with them, but implementing specific projects and initiatives with their participation and for the common good. The growing involvement of business has a positive impact on the development of these communities.

Social implications. Business support for local communities is an opportunity for their development. Local activities and communities are key if we want to consider the further development of society. It is important to indicate what this collaboration can look like, and to highlight the benefits for each partner.

Originality/value. The article presents the business commitment of local communities, not only taking into account the perspective of a business partner, but also showing the benefits of this involvement for local communities and the entire society.

Keywords: local communities, business involvement, CSR, CCI, stakeholders.

1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is an approach that significantly affects the functioning of companies. Implemented strategically, it affects processes at all levels of management. However, pro-social activities undertaken by companies, as well as for the benefit of local communities, are still criticized for detachment from business strategy or implementation only to create a positive image.

When analyzing CSR at the definition level, it is said that it “represents nothing less than an attempt to define the future of our society. Corporate citizenship, as CSR is also called, matters because it influences all aspects of business. And businesses matter because they create much of the wealth and well-being in society. As such, CSR is increasingly crucial to both business and societal success” (Werther, and Chandler, 2006, xvii). It can be observed that the commitment to society or local communities, which are for many companies one of the most important stakeholders, becomes not only an addition to the implemented activities, but also a practice inscribed in the business strategy of an enterprise.

The expression of this is, for example, the inclusion of activities for the benefit of local communities as one of the indicators in the framework of international Global Reporting Initiative Standards. “The GRI Sustainability Reporting Standards (GRI Standards) are the first and most widely adopted global standards for sustainability reporting. Since GRI's inception in 1997, we have transformed it from a niche practice to one now adopted by a growing majority of organizations” (GRI, 2019). Standard GRI 413 addresses the topic of local communities. “In the GRI Standards, local communities are defined as persons or groups of persons living and/or working in any areas that are economically, socially, or environmentally impacted (positively or negatively) by an organization’s operations. The local community can range from persons living adjacent to an organization's operations, to those living at a distance who are still likely to be impacted by these operations. An organization’s activities and infrastructure can have significant economic, social, cultural, and/or environmental impacts on local communities (...). Establishing a timely and effective stakeholder identification and engagement process is important to help organizations understand the vulnerability of local communities and how these might be affected by the organization’s activities” (GRI 413: Local Communities, 2016).

Companies aware of their impact on local communities not only limit the possible negative effects of their activities, but also actively engage in activities for the benefit of local communities.

The article focuses on the issue of business involvement for local communities and examples of such activities. The study analysed available data relating to local communities and companies in Poland. The article is based on a literature review, available figures, and an analysis of examples.

2. Corporate Social Responsibility and business involvement for local communities – theoretical approach

The growing interest in establishing cooperation with the third sector and local communities was largely influenced by the concept of corporate social responsibility. CSR has a long and diverse history. However, a well-established approach to social responsibility is largely a product of the 20th century (Caroll, 1999, p. 268). The definition created by Caroll (in 1979) is considered one of the most complete and most accurate, showing the essence of CSR – "corporate social responsibility includes economic, lawful and ethical behavior and voluntary consideration of society's needs towards the company at a given time" (Caroll, 1999, p. 269).

The European Commission has defined CSR as "the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society" (European Commission, 2011). References to responsibility for the company's impact on society are among the most emphasized elements of the approach associated with defining CSR. It is also pointed out that CSR is defined in many different ways, e.g. "corporate responsibility", "corporate citizenship", "corporate community engagement", "community relations", "corporate stewardship", "social responsibility" (Werther, and Chandler, 2006, p. 6).

In international standard ISO 26000, CSR is defined as the "responsibility of the organization for the impact of its decisions and activities (products, service, processes) on society and the environment" (<https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#iso:std:iso:26000:ed-1:v1:en>), through transparent and ethical behaviour that contributes to sustainable development and the health and well-being of the society, takes into account the expectations of stakeholders, is consistent with applicable law and consistent with international standards of behaviour, and is consistent with the organization and practice in its relations. At the same time, ISO 26000 clearly distinguishes between the frequently used terms "sustainable development" and "social responsibility".

Thus, the concept of corporate social responsibility emphasizes that business has an impact on the surrounding stakeholder groups, including the natural environment. This is related to supporting the development of society, e.g. through social involvement programmes. By pointing to company stakeholders, social groups are influenced and should be taken into account. Corporate Community Involvement "plays a prominent role in international guidelines, including ISO 26000, the CSR performance ladder, and the guidelines for the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). Community involvement is increasingly becoming a component of civic responsibilities for companies as well, as expressed in investments in the community" (Roza, Stubbe, Meijjs, 2014, p. 8).

It is the responsibility of society and building relationships with local communities, as well as including them as an important stakeholder from the company's point of view, which has influenced the development and quality of relationships. Over the years, we can see how the

approach of companies in this area is changing. There is a departure from the approach based only on the transfer of financial or material means, understood as philanthropy, towards the company's active involvement in the life of communities and being a member.

It is pointed out that one of the classic approaches to building business relationships with local communities was corporate philanthropy. As Porter and Kramer pointed out, “companies do not function in isolation from the society around them. In fact, their ability to compete depends heavily on the circumstances of the locations where they operate. (...) The more a social improvement relates to a company’s business, the more it leads to economic benefits as well” (Porter, and Kramer, 2002). With regard to corporate philanthropy, they emphasized that it “does not mean that every corporate expenditure will bring a social benefit or that every social benefit will improve competitiveness. Most corporate expenditures produce benefits only for the business, and charitable contributions unrelated to the business generate only social benefits. It is only where corporate expenditures produce simultaneous social and economic gains that corporate philanthropy and shareholder interests converge (...)” (Figure 1) (Porter, and Kramer, 2002).

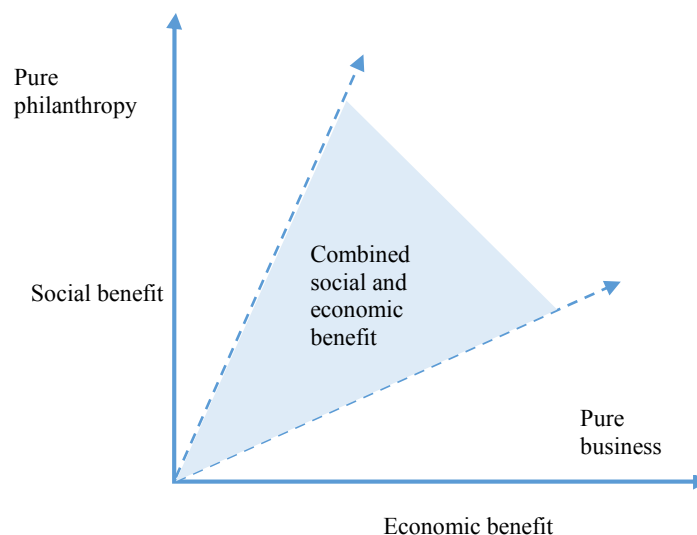


Figure 1. A Convergence of Interests. Adapted from: “The Competitive Advantage of Corporate Philanthropy” by M.E. Porter and M.R. Kramer. Copyright 2002 by Harvard Business Review.

Another strategic approach in the context of transferring funds and building relationships with local communities is the approach referred to as corporate social/community investment. “Corporate social investment is a form of corporate social responsibility, which is a company's overarching approach or strategy for improving the social, environmental, and economic well-being of their community or society at large. Through corporate social responsibility, a corporation may have multiple different tactics for achieving this strategy, including by making corporate social investments. Corporate social investment occurs when businesses use money or resources for projects that improve the world around them, without a direct financial benefit to the company. A company's investment in social causes may take the form of money, gifts in kind, employee time, or other resources” (Kuta, 2018).

However, it is emphasized that “despite efforts to transform corporate philanthropy and social investments, one of the limitations of both of these concepts is that they continue to be largely based on a business perspective of what is strategic” (Werna et al., 2009, p. 206).

Concerning business-community relations, the concept of corporate citizenship is also pointed out, which is based on the assumption that a company should be treated as one of the members of a given community. It is defined as a long-term and integrated approach to enterprise involvement in building an organization that creates conditions for employee activity, both individually and collectively, concerning activities undertaken inside and outside, while building relationships with the local community (Habisch et. al, 2007). However, this is not the only possible approach to defining corporate citizenship. There are two main approaches in the literature. The first narrow – “limited to emphasizing the charitable activities and volunteering of enterprises in a given community. Another approach is to treat it as a synonym of corporate social responsibility, especially when we talk about those activities of the company that are aimed at minimizing the negative effects of functioning and maximizing the positive effects of their activities on society” (Nakonieczna, 2008, p. 68).

Some approaches indicate the weakness of traditionally understood CSR, emphasizing the weakness of this approach based on “the idea that business issues and social issues can be dealt with separately. This flaw promotes the potentially destructive idea that the underproposed a stakeholder approach that takes into consideration the intertwined nature of economic, political, social and ethical issues (...). The second flaw with Corporate Social Responsibility is its focus on corporations. We do not see why social responsibility only applies to corporations, rather than to all organizational forms” (Freeman, and Velamuri, 2006, p. 21). Based on these two main premises, the authors pointed to a new approach, which they called *Company Stakeholder Responsibility*. The authors outlined four levels of commitment to the stakeholder approach, which are:

- Level 1: basic value proposition.
- Level 2: sustained stakeholder cooperation.
- Level 3: an understanding of broader societal issues.
- Level 4: ethical leadership (Freeman, and Velamuri, 2006, p. 13-15).

Regardless of the form of involvement the company chooses, there is no doubt that business involvement and cooperation with local communities is key, especially in the context of Sustainable Development Goals. “In September 2015, all 193 Member States of the United Nations adopted a plan for achieving a better future for all — laying out a path over the next 15 years to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and protect our planet. At the heart of “Agenda 2030” is the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which clearly define the world we want — applying to all nations and leaving no one behind. The new Global Goals result from a process that has been more inclusive than ever, with Governments involving business, civil society, and citizens from the outset. We are all in agreement on where the world

needs to go. Fulfilling these ambitions will take an unprecedented effort by all sectors in society — and business has to play a very important role in the process” (UN Global Compact, 2019).

In this case, the scope of actions taken or their global dimension should also be considered from the perspective of a specific community, place, and the people who implement them. It is not possible to separate Sustainable Development Goals from their local dimension. Activities undertaken by companies that fall under the Sustainable Development Goals also have their local dimension.

3. Forms of business involvement for local communities and CCI

Forms of business involvement for local communities or in developing cooperation can be diverse. What activities the company implements in this area depends on several factors, including its size, financial and/or material resources allocated to these activities, and the strategic assumptions made – is the local community one of the key stakeholders?

When considering the possible forms of companies' involvement for local communities, their misidentification with NGOs should be separated at the outset. The cooperation of companies with local NGOs can be considered from the perspective of involvement for local communities. However, not every cooperation with an NGO will have a dimension of support for the local community. Moreover, if the local community is not represented by a non-governmental organization, the activities of companies may be hindered. This is most often associated with formal and legal considerations, such as the need to settle the financial or material support offered. It is much simpler if the local community has a representative such as a local NGO or public administration body, such as a school or library.

Commitment to local communities can be considered in two dimensions – positive and negative. On the one hand, it will take into account the voice and interest of local communities in plans and take specific actions for them, on the other, it may prove useful to refrain from taking actions that could be negative in their effects and harm the local community (Bernatt, 2009, p. 49).

The basis for planning and building engagement for the benefit of local communities should be well-conducted dialogue, which is one of the basic conditions for a proper approach to social activities and cooperation with stakeholders, which is emphasized by AA1000 standards.

It is indicated that the company's commitment to the local community may be related to solving specific social problems. This is related to activities that are to support the company's interest in the long run and improve its image in the immediate environment (Adameczyk, 2009, p. 146). Based on the example of companies from the fuel industry, Badura-Mojza pointed out that CSR activities for the benefit of the local community were undertaken to ensure safety, prevent exclusion, and promote sport and a healthy lifestyle (Badura-Mojza, 2017, p. 130).

Companies undertake various activities when it comes to cooperation with non-governmental organizations or projects implemented for the benefit of local communities. Possible forms of involvement include financial and material donations, sponsorship, equipment or premises lending, purchase of products from local organizations, barter cooperation, pay-roll provision, joint social programmes, grant programmes, employee volunteering, mentoring programmes, and innovative projects (Murawska, 2012, p. 97-104).

The involvement of companies for the benefit of local communities is an investment, but one that pays off in the long run. On the one hand, this is connected with financial outlays, but also resources of the company such as project time devoted to their implementation or dedication of the person (or team) who will coordinate these activities should be taken into account. What's more, every dialogue, the question about the needs or involvement in solving the indicated problems, may be associated with the risk that expectations will not be properly met, which may have negative consequences, such as loss of image.

Despite the necessary expenditures or possible risks, the benefits that both the company and the local community bring to such cooperation should be emphasized.

The literature mainly focuses on the general benefits for companies related to the implementation of CSR activities. A few studies referring to the local dimension of these activities indicate image-related benefits (Szwajca, 2017; Leoński, 2018, p. 270; Murawska, 2012, p. 105-106).

Another benefit of the company's commitment to the local community is the ability to reduce costs and eliminate potential risks and difficulties associated with the undesirable impact of the company (Skrzypek, Saadi, 2014, p. 16).

From the generally understood benefits of CSR for external stakeholders, including local authorities or local communities, are mentioned, for example, the feeling that the existence of a company is beneficial for its environment; improving communication; stimulation of development; job creation; cooperation (Sznajder, 2013, p. 202).

Looking at the mutual benefits for each party, it can be said that it is a win-win relationship. In the dimension of joint social projects implemented by companies and local communities (including their representatives), an important element is thus to legitimize the company's activities as well as the initiatives it undertakes. The very involvement of a company can translate into giving more publicity to a given case or project (Murawska, 2012, p. 106). What's more, in terms of project cooperation, we can talk about the mutual benefit of each party implementing the project and the possibility of increasing its success, thanks to the synergy effect, which can be an added value for the whole society, and above all the local community (Ćwik, Januszewska, 2010, p. 11).

In the social dimension, the involvement of companies also translates into the possibility of achieving many charitable and social goals that could not be achieved without the support of companies (Kulawczuk et al., 2007, p. 65).

4. Business involvement for local communities in Poland – a research review

The approach of companies to engage local communities in recent years has changed in Poland. This can be referred to in the model of ages and stages of CSR (Visser, 2010), which shows the initial commitment associated with the charitable stage of CSR and relying on action and project cooperation, usually in the form of charitable programmes. A good example of this type of involvement involves projects submitted to the "Benefactor of the Year" competition in the first years of the competition, which has been organized for 20 years. Over the years, local communities began to be seen as one of the key stakeholders with whom valuable relationships should be built, and there has been a transition to the stage of strategic CSR and systemic CSR.

In studies from 2011, 22% of companies indicated that they were engaged in some activities for the benefit of the local community, of which the largest commitment was declared by large companies (over 250 employees), as much as 61% declared in this group. The most frequently chosen form of cooperation was the financial support of social and charity organizations 41%, sponsorship of sporting and/or cultural events 93%, and promotion of culture 29% (Ocena stanu wdrażania..., 2011) (Figure 2). It can be seen that this was a time when understanding and perspective, looking at relations with stakeholders, was not widespread among companies.

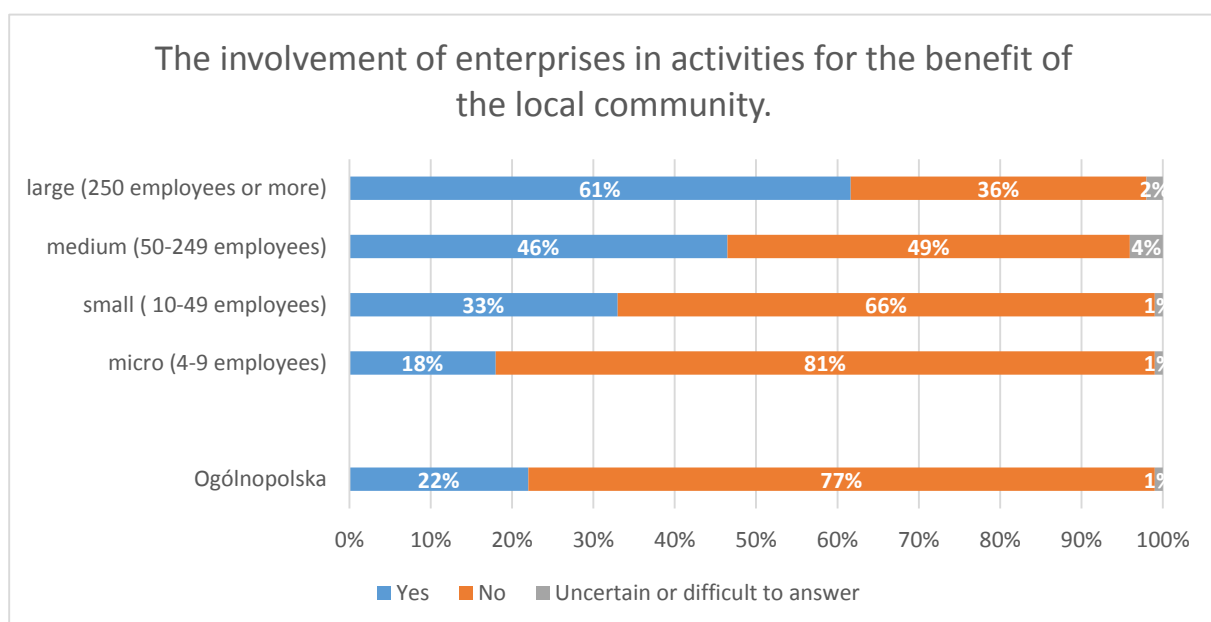


Figure 2. The involvement of enterprises in activities for the benefit of the local community. A nationwide sample divided into categories – the size of the enterprise. Adapted from: “Ocena stanu wdrażania standardów społecznej odpowiedzialności biznesu. Zestaw wskaźników społecznej odpowiedzialności w mikro, małych, średnich oraz dużych przedsiębiorstwach. Raport.” Copyright 2011 by MillwardBrown SMG/KRC, PwC dla PARP.

A slightly different view of the local community is already evident in the study of the management of companies from the MSME sector. When asked about the meaning of the concept of "corporate social responsibility", the largest percentage of respondents gave the answer – "care for the local environment and its development – activities for the benefit of local communities" 16.37%, followed by "responsibility to the local community" 11.31% (Research of the management staff ..., 2013, p. 14). It is apparent that from the perspective of defining social responsibility by the management staff of the MSME, the local community played a key role.

When it comes to the perception of CSR by large and medium-sized companies in Poland, as many as 92% of respondents in the 2014 survey, concerning the most important challenges in which companies should be involved in solving, indicated the development of local communities (Badania kadry zarządzającej..., 2014, p. 20). In the same study, 36% of the surveyed companies indicated an increase in acceptance by the environment among the benefits of acting following the CSR concept (Badania kadry zarządzającej..., 2014, p. 21).

An interesting set of company declarations regarding commitment to local communities was presented in the 4th edition of the study "CSR in practice. Barometer of the French-Polish Chamber of Commerce "(2019). As many as 79% of the surveyed companies indicated that their company currently implements CSR activities for local communities (Figure 3), and 86% declared that they planned to continue or implement new CSR activities targeted at local communities (Figure 4).

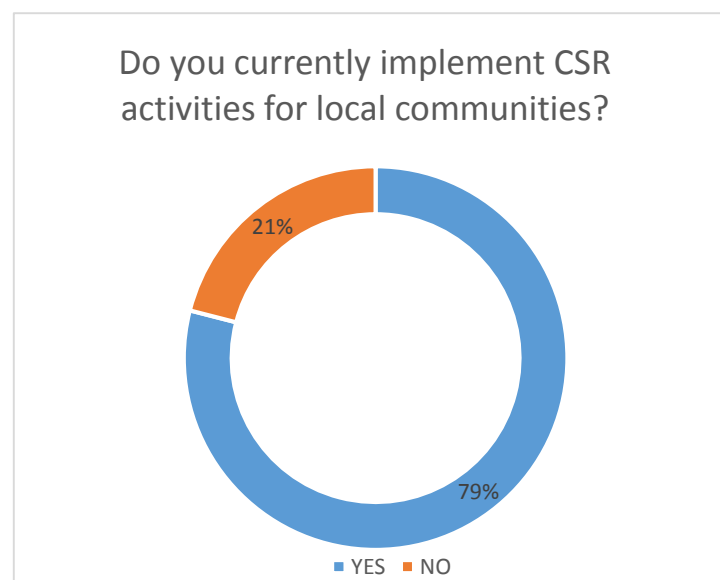


Figure 3. Declarations regarding the implementation of CSR activities by companies for local communities. Adapted from: "CSR w praktyce. 4. edycja badania. Barometr Francusko-Polskiej Izby Gospodarczej.". Copyright 2019 by Francusko-Polska Izba Gospodarcza.

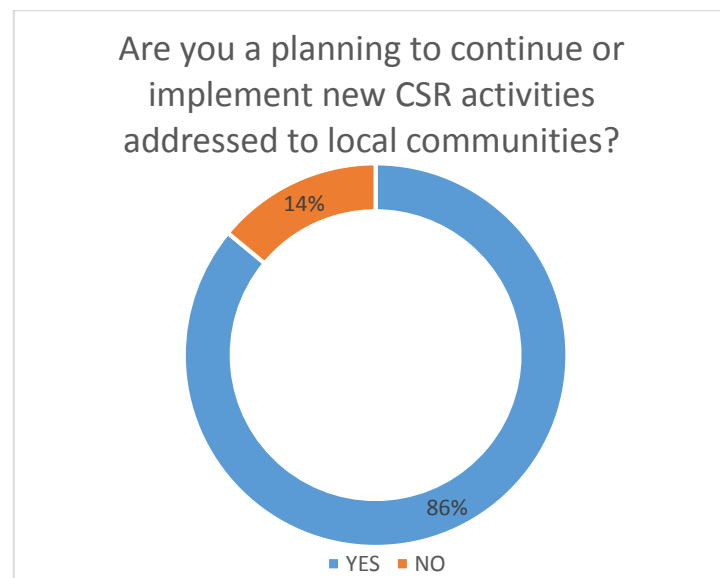


Figure 4. Company declarations regarding the planning of continuation or implementation of new CSR activities targeted at local communities. Adapted from: "CSR w praktyce. 4. edycja badania. Barometr Francusko-Polskiej Izby Gospodarczej." Copyright 2019 by Francusko-Polska Izba Gospodarcza.

Among activities undertaken for the benefit of local communities, the largest number of companies, as much as 84%, declared financial and material support for local associations, schools, foundations, and organizations. In second place was running information and educational campaigns, 73% of responses, and the third involvement in the economic development of the region. 59% of companies indicated these activities.

It is only surprising that these declarations are poorly represented in dialogue with the local community – only 41% of companies declared this form of cooperation. This is still a better result than a year ago, but considering the key role of dialogue in properly identifying the needs of the local community and how helpful it is in building relationships with the local community, it may be puzzling that so few companies have decided to implement this form of cooperation (Figure 5).

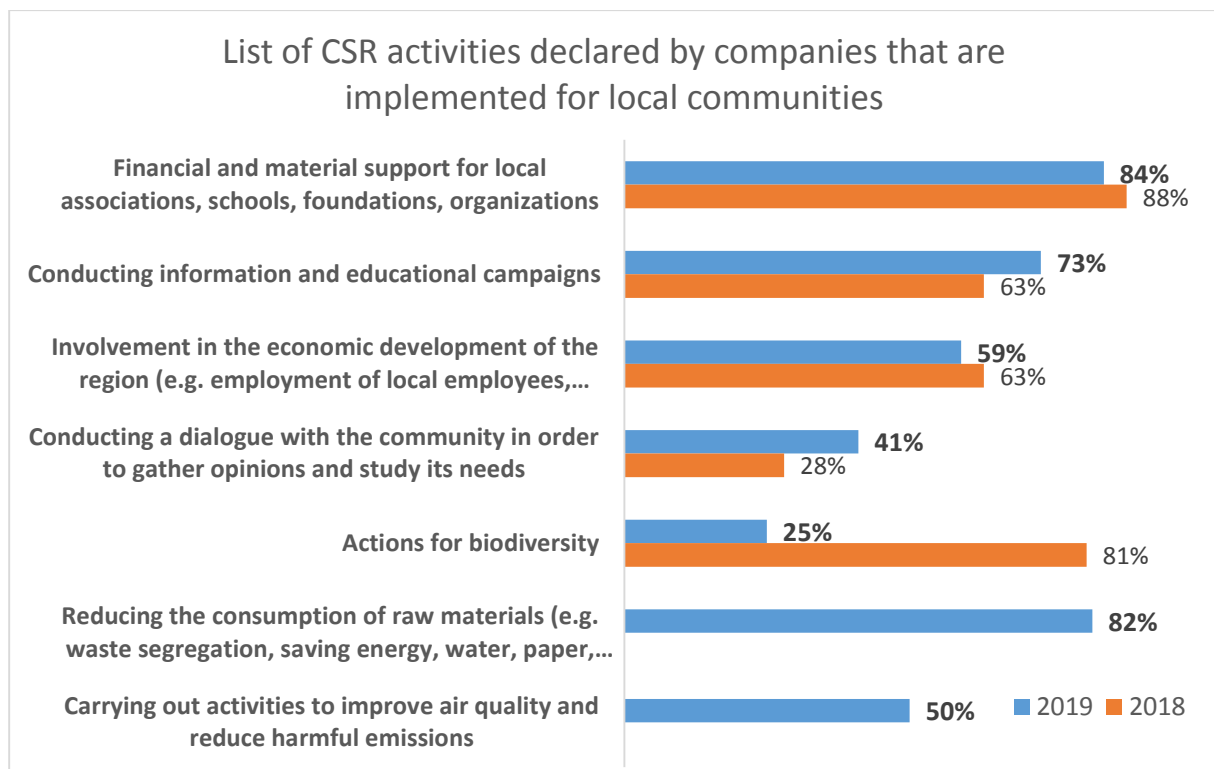


Figure 5. List of CSR activities declared by companies that are implemented for local communities. Adapted from: “CSR w praktyce. 4. edycja badania. Barometr Francusko-Polskiej Izby Gospodarczej.”. Copyright 2019 by Francusko-Polska Izba Gospodarcza.

Business commitment to local communities or to cooperate with non-governmental organizations can be seen in the data and practices presented in the annual report of “Responsible Business in Poland. Good practices”, published since 2001. The number of good practices reported, both new and those implemented in the long term, is steadily increasing (Figure 6).

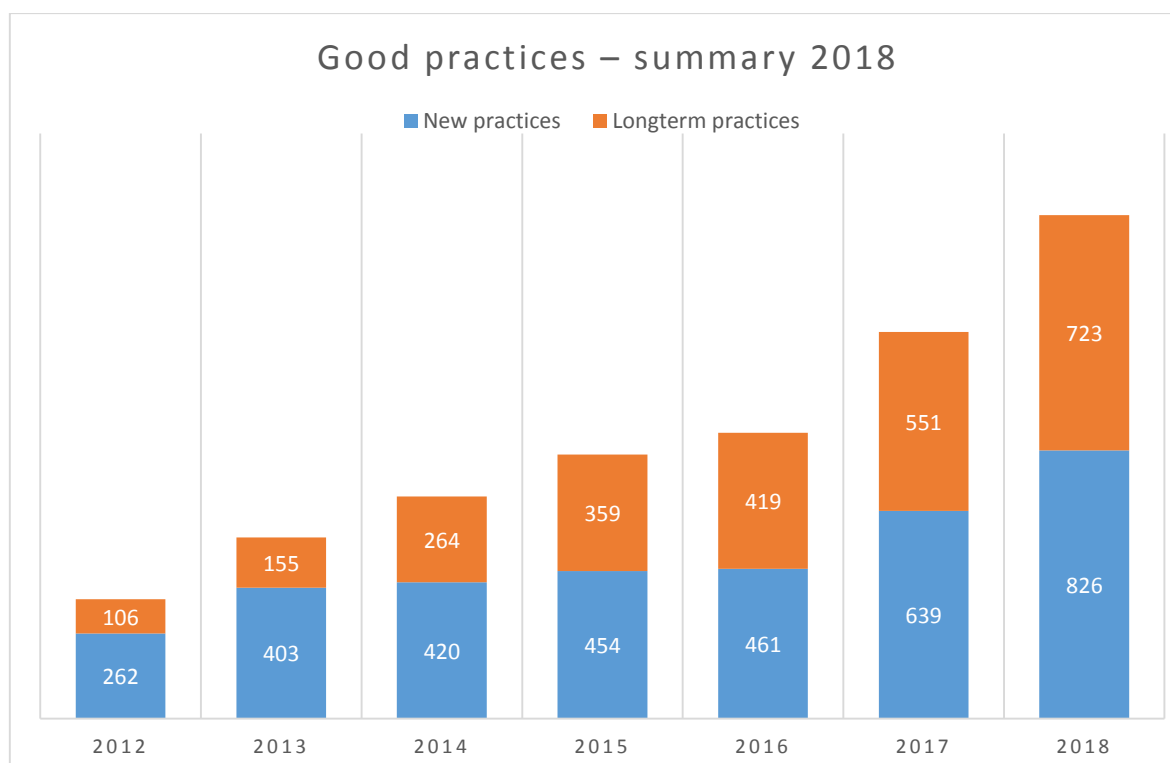


Figure 6. Responsible business in Poland. Good practices – summary 2018. Adapted from: “Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu”. Copyright 2019 by Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu.

One of the chapters of FOB’s report presents a case study in the area of local community involvement and development. This refers to practices related to activities undertaken for the benefit of local communities and cooperation with non-governmental organizations. This is the department to which companies submit the most project descriptions. This area includes “activities grouped into 16 categories: physical activity, road safety, good neighbour, charitable and philanthropic activities, adult education, child and youth education, social innovations, social campaigns, culture and the arts, socially-engaged marketing, preventive health care, entrepreneurial development, job creation and competency development, non-governmental organizations support, cooperation with universities, and sustainable cities” (FOB, 2019). Also here is an increase in the number of good practices reported, as well as the companies that implement them (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Practices in the area *Local community involvement and development* in report the “Responsible business in Poland. Good practices 2018”. Adapted from: “Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu”. Copyright 2019 by Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu.

Based on the presented data, we can see a significant change in the approach of companies to local communities and understanding the importance of engaging in activities for their benefit. Companies not only declare their commitment, but every year they undertake more and more initiatives in this area. This is a significant change that indicates that companies are increasingly familiar with their surroundings and are addressing local communities as one of the key stakeholders.

5. Examples of business involvement for local communities

An example of building relationships with the local community is arranging meetings or inviting people to a stakeholder panel to provide direct feedback and receive feedback on the company's activities. These types of activities were initiated by the International Airport Jana Pawła II Kraków – Balice Sp. z o.o., which, as part of an information campaign related to the plan to build a new runway, organized information meetings with representatives of the local community. A total of 20 such meetings were held in 2017, during which detailed information related to the planned investment and compensation programme addressed to the local community was presented. An interesting element of the meetings was the company's plan of obtaining feedback through a survey available to participants, in which they could assess the actions taken by the airport, as well as express their expectations. Additionally, to ensure the

flow of information with stakeholders, an investment website was created, as well as a dedicated e-mail address for direct contact. Kraków Airport also publishes an information bulletin that is sent by traditional mail to all residents of the villages closest to the airport (Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu, 2019). This practice has been included as an activity supporting the implementation of the 11th SGD's – "Sustainable Cities and Communities".

The SDG's practice is part of the practice presented by Raben Group, which in 2015 held dialogue sessions as part of the "Common Way" project, in which stakeholders from three key locations for the company were invited to participate. Among the invited stakeholder groups were service providers, employees, representatives of the local community, and administration. The purpose of the meetings was to learn about the needs and expectations of these stakeholder groups and to present to them the development goals and directions for the company, build an information exchange system, as well as offer an invitation to join the decision-making process in the scope specified by the company. The key issue was to listen to the postulates, needs, ideas, and opinions regarding the functioning of the form and its participation in the local community, and possible areas of cooperation. The meeting resulted in the company collecting 183 postulates (Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu, 2019).

However, most activities for the benefit of local communities are based on cooperation with local NGOs, because this form of cooperation is easier for legal and formal reasons. Organizations have a legal personality, which allows them to participate in grant competitions organized by companies. An example of this type of activity is the "Good Neighbour" grant program of TAURON Polska Energia, which was implemented in the municipality of Krzeszowice, where the Wapienia Czekkowice mine belonging to the company is located. Entities operating in an organized legal form, in particular associations, foundations, sports clubs, and other entities conducting their activity in the municipality could participate in the competition. They submitted their ideas for the development of publicly available and non-commercial educational, tourist, recreational or cultural infrastructure, educational programmes improving the quality of teaching and equalizing educational opportunities, promoting the talents and outstanding talents of children and youth, educational, sporting, recreational, tourist or cultural events, physical education, the sport of children and youth, sport for everyone, and sport for the disabled. The ideas were evaluated, and grants of up to PLN 5,000 were given to the winners for their implementation" (Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu, 2019). Also, these projects were assigned as activities that are part of the implementation of the 11th Sustainable Development Goal.

An interesting example of a project implemented for the integration of the local community is the "Nowa Huta Gardens" project organized by ArcelorMittal Poland in cooperation with the Cultural Centre of Norwid in Krakow, which has been implemented since 2011. On the one hand, the goal of the project is education and the promotion of knowledge about gardening and ecological activities, and on the other, integration of the local community around the greenery in one of the districts of Krakow – Nowa Huta. Under the project, neglected green areas are being renewed, and new, generally accessible green enclaves are created with the active

participation of local communities. The activities provide an opportunity for meetings and joint activities, including youth, families with children, and seniors. The project is based on competition rules – the inhabitants submit areas for revitalization, and twice a year the jury selects places that will receive funding for the necessary works. So far, 14 gardens have been created as part of the project (Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu, 2019).

The above examples indicate that the solutions used by companies are quite diverse. They are influenced by strategic projects implemented by companies, the scale of their activities, offered products or services, but also the needs of the local communities in which they operate.

6. Summary

Contemporary societies are facing challenges not only locally but also globally, which has been emphasized by establishing Sustainable Development Goals. In 1970, Milton Friedman published the essay *The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits* in The New York Times Magazine, in which he referred to the conclusion contained in his book *Capitalism and Freedom* – “there is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud” (Milton, 1970). It is now clear how far companies are involved in building their strategies on the foundations of corporate social responsibility, implementing more and more community initiatives at both local and global levels.

The involvement of companies for the benefit of local communities has a broader dimension than just benefits for a given enterprise. Aware of its role in the immediate environment, the company is a full member of a given community and should take into account the impact that its activities have on the local community. It is not necessary to invest large funds. The key is to notice the local community and establish a dialogue with it. As a result, the company will be able to run its operations more efficiently and take care of these relationships in the long term.

Business commitment to the local community is also important from the perspective of implementing SDGs. Each global change must be initiated locally. Businesses must first take care of the local community in which it operates.

From the perspective of Polish society, the role that business can play in activating citizens and supporting them in activities for the benefit of the local community is extremely important. Without this, it is not possible to build social capital. Relationships and trust are not created. It seems that it is not possible to build active networks or grassroots citizens' involvement without the support of a partner who becomes a company.

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