Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation
ISSN:3156-5743

Print ISSN:3156-5743 https://iauejournals.com **Volume 1; Issue 1; April 2026; Page No. 1-2.**

Public-Private Partnerships and Entrepreneurship Development in Nigeria: The Mediating Influence of Corporate Social Responsibility

***[1]Aliyu, U.M., & [2]Kabir, S.**
[1]Department of Business Education, Shehu Shagari University of Education, Sokoto, Nigeria
[2]Department of Entrepreneurship Education, Shehu Shagari University of Education, Sokoto, Nigeria

***Corresponding author email:** umarmuhammadaliyu@yahoo.com

Abstract
Entrepreneurship is described as a critical driver of sustainable economic growth and development. Despite Nigeria's abundant natural and human resources, the nation's entrepreneurial development remains modest. This study examines the interplay between Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) and entrepreneurship development in Nigeria, with a particular focus on the mediating influence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The paper adopts a conceptual and theoretical review based on secondary data drawn from journals, institutional reports, and policy documents. The findings reveal that PPPs, when strategically aligned with CSR principles, can significantly enhance entrepreneurial capacity, job creation, and community empowerment. The paper recommends that private organisations should dedicate a defined portion of their CSR investments to entrepreneurial initiatives within their host communities to foster innovation, reduce poverty, and stimulate long-term national development. The study proposes a research model linking PPPs and entrepreneurship development, with CSR serving as a mediating variable. The model underscores the potential of collaborative governance to promote inclusive and sustainable entrepreneurship development

Keywords: Public-Private-Partnerships, Entrepreneurship Development, Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainable Development, Nigeria

Introduction

Entrepreneurship continues to be a key element in the growth and sustainable development of any country. It promotes innovation, generates jobs, and enhances competitiveness, at the same time encouraging industrial progress. As Bosma and Harding (2007) point out, entrepreneurship acts as the main driver of economic change and personal prosperity and is a force that promotes inclusive growth as well as the diversification of economic structures, especially in developing countries. Worldwide, entrepreneurship via small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) accounts for more than 90% of all businesses and provides about 50% of employment opportunities (SMEDAN, 2021). In Nigeria, SMEs make up a large share of the country's total output and of its employment. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) (2021) state that Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) contribute approximately 46% to Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employ almost 88% of the workforce. This shows how important entrepreneurship is for achieving inclusive economic growth.

Despite these contributions, Nigeria's entrepreneurial ecosystem faces persistent structural challenges. The country's abundant human and natural resources have not translated into broad-based economic expansion. Government-led initiatives aimed at stimulating entrepreneurship through policies, development banks, and targeted programmes have often failed to achieve sustained impact. Many indigenous entrepreneurs remain limited to distribution or service-oriented ventures rather than manufacturing or technology-driven enterprises, largely due to inadequate access to finance, limited technical capacity, and infrastructural constraints (Thedrens, 2012).

Cite this article as:
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Since entrepreneurship can act as a catalyst for socioeconomic change, it has become necessary for there to be effective collaboration between the public and private sectors. Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) offer a feasible means of achieving this kind of cooperation by bringing together the government's goals for development with the private sector's efficiency and capacity for innovation. As a flexible approach, PPPs are being taken up more and more all over the world and they can help to alleviate funding gaps as well as enhance the effectiveness of public infrastructure projects (IFC, 2020). This approach can be used to bring in resources and expertise in order to strengthen entrepreneurial ecosystems, especially if it is combined with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Global organisations such as the United Nations and the World Bank promote CSR-based partnerships as ways of achieving sustainable development and social inclusion (Newell & Frynas, 2007). As part of their CSR efforts, companies can make contributions to community empowerment, to capacity building, and to the creation of conditions that enable business growth.

The paper looks at the relationship between public-private partnerships (PPPs), corporate social responsibility (CSR), and the development of entrepreneurship in Nigeria. It points out that CSR activities, when incorporated into PPP structures, can act as strategic tools for encouraging innovation, creating employment opportunities, and promoting inclusive development. The following sections provide some conceptual explanations, discuss the development and implementation of PPPs, and give an overview of entrepreneurship and CSR. Section Three deals with the methodology. Section Four investigates the relationship between public-private partnerships, corporate social responsibility, and entrepreneurship development and proposes a model that links these areas within the Nigerian context. Section Five contains the conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual Clarifications

Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs): Concept and Development

Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) are structured ways in which public institutions and private companies work together with the aim of meeting common development objectives. They are cooperative arrangements employed in the management and development of public infrastructure, involving collaboration between government institutions and private sector organisations. As part of this approach, both sides enter into formal agreements so as to share the responsibilities involved in the planning, financing, construction and operation of infrastructure projects (Owotemu, Daniel, & Abubakar, 2022). By combining their financial, human and technical resources, these partnerships are able to carry out the delivery of public services or infrastructure projects more efficiently than the public sector could on its own. As Fiszbein and Lowden (1999) point out, PPPs consist of bringing together the complementary capabilities of both sectors in order to achieve mutually beneficial results. In practice, PPPs apportion the responsibilities, risks and benefits among the various stakeholders, thus enhancing efficiency, innovation and sustainability in the delivery of projects (Miraftab, 2004).

PPPs are founded on five fundamental criteria identified by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB, 2013):

1. Formal cooperation between public and private stakeholders to achieve common developmental goals;
2. Clearly defined objectives and obligations for each party;
3. A combination of public and private funding sources;
4. Explicit agreements regarding resource sharing and implementation responsibilities; and
5. Transparent mechanisms for distributing and managing risk.

If well designed, public-private partnerships allow governments to make use of the knowledge and skills of the private sector while at the same time ensuring accountability and safeguarding the public interest. They also provide private organisations with the opportunity to take part in national development by means of investment, the transfer of technology, and the creation of employment. Public-private partnerships function in a number of sectors, for example in transport, healthcare and education, showing that they are capable of meeting a wide variety of societal needs (EPEC, 2021).

Global and National Practices of PPPs

Worldwide, public-private partnerships have become important tools for dealing with gaps in infrastructure and service delivery. In the United Kingdom, for example, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) combines businesses, civil society, and government bodies in an effort to promote accountability in the management of revenues (UK Department of Trade and Industry, 2004). In a similar way, the Partners for Water and Sanitation (PAWS) programme has encouraged collaboration across sectors in a number of African countries, such as Nigeria,

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in order to improve access to clean water and sanitation services. In the United States, the Small Business Administration (SBA) shows what a PPP can look like by supporting small businesses through arrangements with state agencies and private organisations. Throughout Africa, a great many governments have introduced PPP frameworks in order to deal with infrastructure shortfalls and to promote enterprise development.

In the past Nigeria placed great reliance on traditional public funding for its infrastructure, a reliance which turned out to be inadequate and as a result led to a move towards Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). A significant step was the setting up of the Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission (ICRC) in 2005, which established the legal and regulatory framework necessary for monitoring PPP projects at the federal level (ICRC, 2021). PPPs are now being used in a wide range of areas of the Nigerian economy, including healthcare, housing, transportation, energy and agriculture. For example, the federal government's national policy on PPPs sets out the methods for attracting private investment in order to deal with infrastructure shortfalls and to enhance service delivery (Sulaiman & Oladimeji, 2015). Projects such as public housing schemes and collaborations in the field of renewable energy show how much greater the country's dependence has become on PPPs as tools for national development. The agreement between the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) and Bi-Courtney Aviation Services for the Build–Operate–Transfer (BOT) of the MMA2 Domestic Airport Terminal in Lagos is a clear example of a PPP in Nigeria (Davis et al., 2023). Yet the country's weak institutional frameworks, lack of transparency and bureaucratic inefficiencies have prevented the full realisation of the potential of PPPs.

Entrepreneurship and Its Development in Nigeria

Entrepreneurship has been given many different interpretations, a fact which shows how multifaceted it is. In general, it is seen as the process by which people spot opportunities, take on risks, and bring in the resources needed to set up and expand businesses that produce value. According to Shane and Venkataraman (2000), entrepreneurship involves the discovery and development of opportunities by means of introducing innovative products, services, or methods of organisation. Agbionu (2008) on the other hand views it as a mechanism for creating wealth with the aim of promoting economic development, generating jobs, and ensuring environmental sustainability. Entrepreneurship goes beyond simply starting a business; it includes innovation, creativity, and strategic decision-making, all of which help to improve productivity and competitiveness in an economy. It forms the basis of industrialisation by providing the drive necessary to turn ideas into practical enterprises that create employment and contribute to social welfare.

Since Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, various policies have been put into place by successive governments in an attempt to promote entrepreneurship as a means of tackling unemployment, poverty, and underdevelopment. Yet the results of these efforts have been mixed. Among the early initiatives was the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which was introduced in 1986 and aimed at liberalising the economy and encouraging growth in the private sector. Later on, the Small and Medium Industries Equity Investment Scheme (SMIEIS) (1999) required banks to devote 10% of their after-tax profits to financing small and medium enterprises. Although the scheme had ambitious goals, by 2009 implementation had been inconsistent and only 67% of the ₦42 billion that had been allocated had actually been invested, the majority of this amount being directed towards Lagos State (Central Bank of Nigeria [CBN], 2003).

Institutions such as the Bank of Industry (BOI) and the Nigerian Agricultural Cooperative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB) were set up in order to increase access to credit and to help strengthen rural enterprises. The Microfinance Policy (CBN, 2011) was similarly introduced with the aim of tackling financial exclusion by converting community banks into microfinance institutions. Nevertheless, a large number of small-scale entrepreneurs, especially those in rural areas, are still excluded from these services (Egwu, 2014). The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) were established in order to coordinate vocational training and SME support programmes. Although these organisations have helped to raise awareness and to develop policy, their overall effect has been hampered by funding constraints, bureaucratic duplication, and a lack of connection between training and industrial practice. The initiative to institutionalise entrepreneurship education via Entrepreneurship Development Centres (EDCs) based in universities has also encountered difficulties because of the limited cooperation between academia and industry. More recent efforts, such as the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWIN) programme, which was launched in 2011, aimed at promoting youth entrepreneurship by means of business plan competitions and grants. Even though the programme

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provided short-term employment opportunities, worries regarding political influence and sustainability have restricted its long-term impact (YouWIN, 2013).

Challenges and Prospects

The ongoing constraints affecting the development of entrepreneurship in Nigeria are inadequate infrastructure, limited access to finance, and poor policy coordination. Since many entrepreneurs do not possess the necessary technical knowledge, they find it difficult to run a business in a situation marked by inconsistent policies and a lack of institutional support. Yet the increasing focus on Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) offers new possibilities for improving entrepreneurial capacity. By working together, the government and the private sector can overcome these systemic obstacles through the provision of training, access to markets, and investment incentives. When such partnerships are properly implemented, they could help establish entrepreneurship as a major factor in Nigeria's sustainable economic transformation.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Its Development

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is defined as a company's voluntary effort to incorporate social, environmental, and ethical factors into its business operations and its relations with stakeholders. It reflects the belief that businesses, in addition to seeking profit, have both a moral and a strategic responsibility to promote societal well-being. CSR includes initiatives that go further than meeting legal requirements and thus takes account of stakeholders' wider expectations. Its purpose is to make sure that the company's activities produce shared value, thereby improving both the organisation's competitiveness and society's overall prosperity. If properly put into practice, CSR can enhance a firm's reputation, foster trust among stakeholders, and encourage innovation which aligns business goals with sustainable development (Hancock, 2015). Even though CSR is generally voluntary, there is evidence to show that it can lead to better long-term financial performance and greater public legitimacy. Companies that integrate CSR into their strategy tend to achieve higher levels of competitiveness and resilience, since socially responsible practices help to secure community stability and protect the environment (Babalola, 2012).

CSR Practices and Global Perspectives

There are great differences in the way corporate social responsibility is developed and put into practice from one country to another, this being due to variations in institutional arrangements and cultural expectations. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), which took place in Johannesburg in 2002, once again stressed the importance of business partnerships in fighting poverty and environmental degradation by means of sustainable practices. In Europe, the EU Green Paper (2001) offered guidance regarding major areas of corporate social responsibility such as human rights, occupational health and safety, and environmental accountability, and it urged companies to report transparently on their social performance. Likewise, the United Kingdom has for a long time supported the integration of corporate social responsibility through policy directives and public–private collaborations which promote community development and responsible investment (UK Department of Trade and Industry, 2004). In the United States, corporate social responsibility is often incorporated into corporate governance structures and stakeholder engagement models. Firms carry out philanthropic activities, environmental management, and community development in order to improve their brand image and social legitimacy. In the emerging economies too, corporate social responsibility is becoming seen as a way of tackling developmental problems that governments on their own cannot solve.

CSR in Nigerian Context

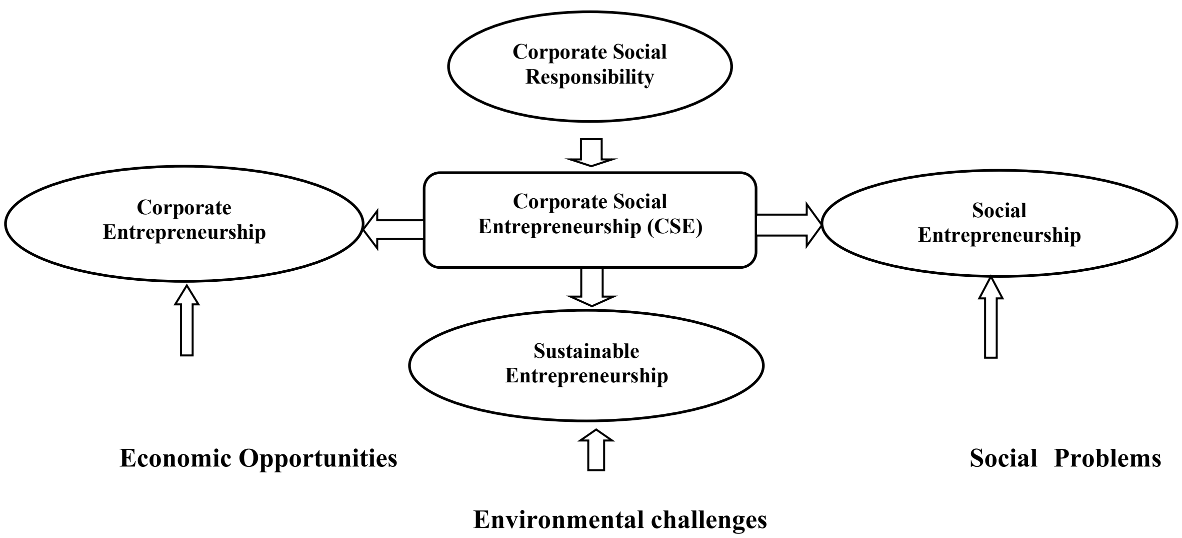
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Nigeria has evolved from occasional charitable acts to a more structured and ESG-focused strategy aimed at long-term sustainable development. Influenced by both community needs and regulatory requirements, CSR initiatives now prioritize skills development, employment generation, and infrastructure improvement, especially within the operations of multinational oil and gas companies. The evolution of CSR in Nigeria has been largely shaped by multinational corporations operating in the oil and gas sector. Early CSR practices were often philanthropic and reactive, focusing on community assistance rather than strategic integration (Amaeshi et al., 2006). However, as awareness grew, both local and international firms began adopting structured CSR policies linked to sustainable development and stakeholder engagement. Helg (2007) observes that CSR in Nigeria operates on two levels: formal and informal. Formal CSR is driven by multinational and large indigenous firms with documented sustainability policies, while informal CSR reflects community-based initiatives rooted in cultural traditions of mutual support. Despite this progress, CSR practice in Nigeria still faces challenges of inconsistency, poor regulatory enforcement, and limited alignment with national development priorities.

Analysis

Nexus Between Public–Private Partnerships (PPPS), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) And Entrepreneurship Development

Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as a strategic mechanism for addressing complex social and economic challenges that neither the public nor private sector can manage alone. When linked with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), PPPs extend beyond infrastructure delivery to foster sustainable entrepreneurship, poverty reduction, and inclusive development. CSR provides the ethical and operational foundation for these partnerships, ensuring that business participation contributes not only to profit but also to social advancement and environmental stewardship (Jamali & Mirshak, 2006). Through CSR-aligned PPPs, private firms can direct resources towards entrepreneurial initiatives that address unemployment and promote local economic participation. For instance, partnerships that fund skill acquisition, youth training, and microenterprise development can help bridge the capacity gap among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). CSR-driven PPPs can therefore serve as catalysts for sustainable development. They facilitate inclusive growth by ensuring that business operations contribute to long-term societal goals such as education, health, and environmental protection.

This aligns with the broader objectives of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasise collaboration between sectors to achieve shared prosperity. The significant use of CSR in the growth and sustainable development of corporate entities has led into the formulation and practice of Corporate Social Entrepreneurship (CSE) with the aim to accelerate the CSR journey. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework connecting CSR, Corporate Social Entrepreneurship (CSE) for entrepreneurship development.



Source: Authors (2026).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Connecting Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Social Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Innovation

Figure 1 demonstrated that the concept of Corporate Social Entrepreneurship (CSE) strengthens the relationship between CSR and entrepreneurship. CSE is the process through which firms innovate to create joint economic and social value. It integrates three dimensions of enterprise: Corporate Entrepreneurship (focused on economic opportunity), Social Entrepreneurship (addressing social issues), and Sustainable Entrepreneurship (emphasising environmental stewardship). According to Gherghina and Simionescu (2015), CSR can be divided into two strategic components: CSE, which drives socially oriented initiatives, and Corporate Entrepreneurship, which enhances competitiveness and market relevance. Both are essential for firms seeking to balance profitability with responsibility. Dees (1998) further explains that social entrepreneurship operates across private and nonprofit sectors to deliver

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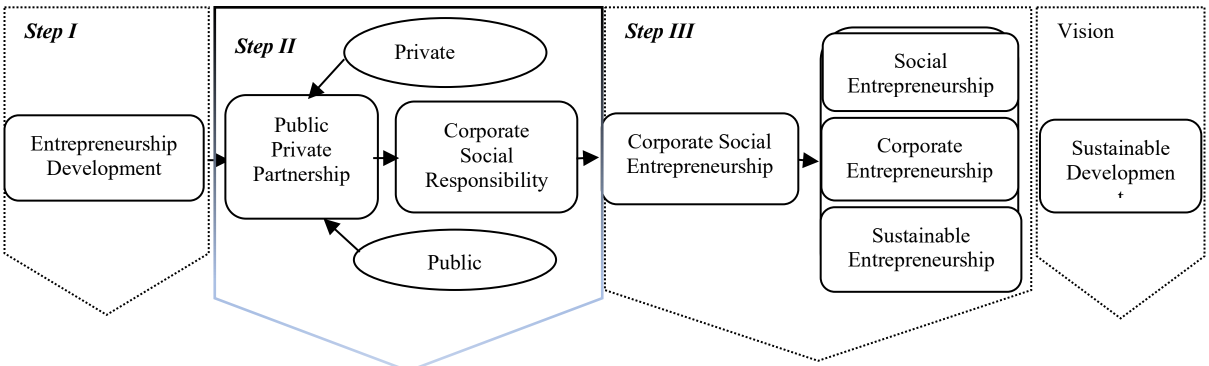
solutions that address social needs such as education, healthcare, and employment. Similarly, Weber (2007) defines sustainable entrepreneurship as the creation and commercialisation of environmentally friendly innovations that generate both economic and ecological value.

These complementary approaches position CSR as a dynamic framework that supports entrepreneurship through innovation and community engagement. Firms adopting CSE strategies can design business models that respond to environmental and social challenges while strengthening their competitive advantage. Within PPP arrangements, this approach ensures that corporate investments contribute directly to national development objectives. In view of the above, this study develops a conceptual model for CSR-Driven Entrepreneurship Development in Figure 2.



Settings Goal	Policy Formulation, Planning & Development	Implementation	Goal Achieve
Governments and private sector partners establish shared objectives such as job creation, innovation, and technology transfer.	CSR principles are embedded into partnership agreements, encouraging firms to invest in capacity-building and community development.	CSR programmes are executed through social, corporate, and sustainable entrepreneurship initiatives, generating economic and social value.	More employment opportunities, poverty alleviation and wealth creation

Source: Authors (2026)

Figure 2: Conceptual Model for CSR-Driven Entrepreneurship Development

Integrating CSR into PPP structures can yield long-term socio-economic benefits. The conceptual model developed in this study shows how PPPs enable entrepreneurship development through CSR initiatives. The model identifies three key stages:

1. Entrepreneurship Development (Goals Setting): Governments and private partners establish shared objectives such as job creation, innovation, and technology transfer.
2. Policy Formulation (Collaboration through CSR): CSR principles are embedded into partnership agreements, encouraging firms to invest in capacity-building and community development.
3. Implementation (Sustainable Impact):CSR programmes are executed through social, corporate, and sustainable entrepreneurship initiatives, generating economic and social value.

This model underscores that CSR-oriented PPPs can create an ecosystem where public policy, private investment, and community participation intersect to foster sustainable entrepreneurship. For practical implementation, governments could mandate that corporations allocate a defined proportion of their CSR budgets to entrepreneurship programmes, particularly in their host communities. Collaborative training projects, microfinance partnerships, and sector-based innovation hubs can serve as viable channels for translating CSR commitments into measurable developmental outcomes.

Discussion

Proposed Research Model

Following the preceding discussion on the theoretical connections among the study's variables, this section introduces a proposed research model that connects how Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) affect Entrepreneurship Development (ED), with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) serving as a mediating factor. The structure of this conceptual model is presented in Figure 3

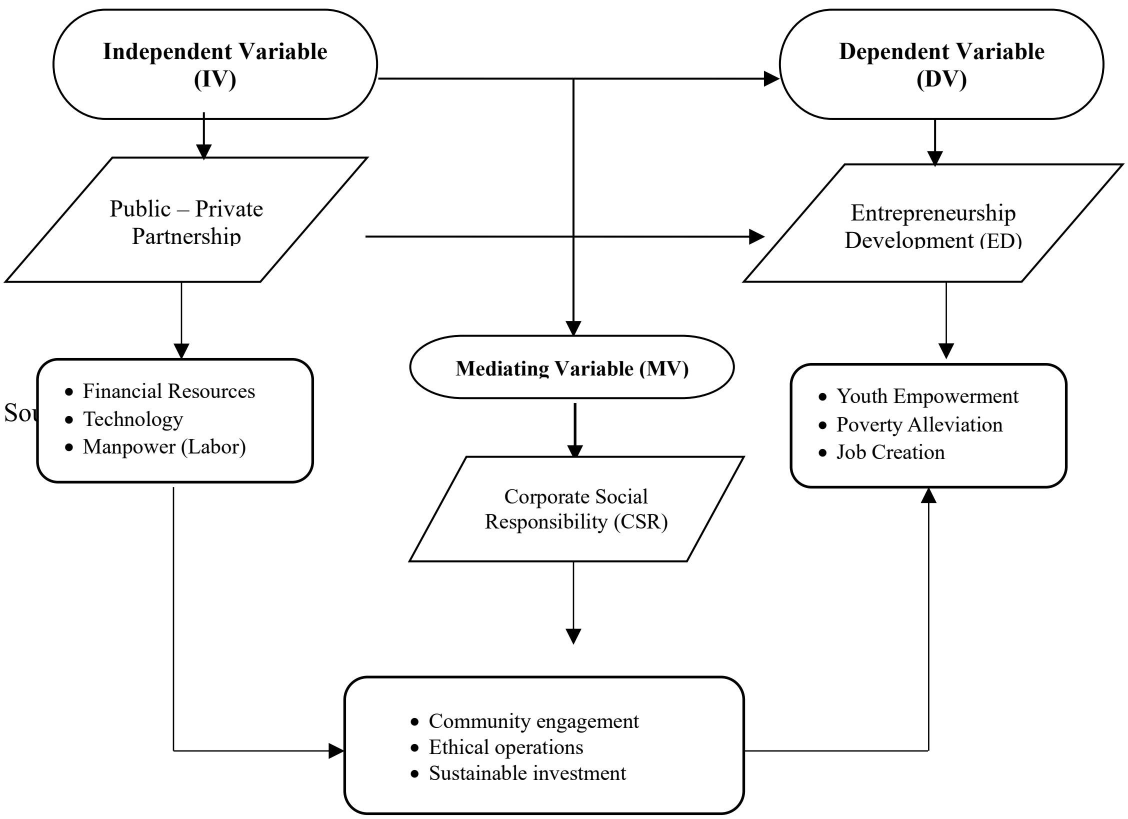


Figure 3: Proposed Research Model

The proposed framework positions PPPs as the independent variable (IV), representing cooperative arrangements between the public and private sectors designed to support socio-economic initiatives. Entrepreneurship Development (ED) serves as the dependent variable (DV), reflecting the extent to which PPP initiatives stimulate entrepreneurial behaviour, innovation, and enterprise creation. To deepen the analysis beyond a simple direct connection between PPPs and ED, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is incorporated as a mediating variable (MV). Including CSR allows the model to assess whether socially responsible practices such as community engagement, ethical operations, and sustainable investment enhance or moderate the impact of PPPs on entrepreneurial outcomes. The model assumes that strategic collaboration between public and private actors encourages skill development, youth empowerment, and the growth of local enterprises. When CSR principles are embedded in such partnerships, the combined effect is expected to produce broader benefits for individuals, communities, and the wider economy. If future empirical testing validates this conceptual model, the results would contribute meaningful insights into how PPP frameworks, strengthened by CSR practices, can drive entrepreneurship and inclusive economic progress.

Conclusion

Entrepreneurship is still a major factor in national advancement and serves as an important means of tackling unemployment, poverty, and industrial underdevelopment. In Nigeria, continuous entrepreneurial growth can only be achieved through coordinated actions that go beyond isolated government measures. The evidence given in this paper shows how important Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) are in creating the right conditions for enterprise development. PPPs provide structured arrangements by means of which public organisations and private companies can work together to generate social and economic value. If CSR is incorporated into these partnerships, it increases their development potential by linking business aims with societal needs. This kind of integration not only leads to greater transparency and accountability but also encourages innovation, builds capacity, and fosters inclusive growth. The study finds that CSR-based PPPs can have a transformative effect on Nigeria's entrepreneurial environment by promoting community empowerment, improving access to resources, and helping with skill development. Yet their success is dependent on the presence of strong governance systems, transparent regulation, and continued commitment from both the public and private sectors. In the end, the combination of PPPs and CSR offers a route to inclusive and sustainable entrepreneurship in Nigeria. This kind of cooperation can promote industrialisation, increase job opportunities, and help the country to achieve its long-term development objectives.

Suggestions

The study offered the following recommendations.

1. The Nigerian government should include CSR-driven entrepreneurship schemes in its national development policies by setting up an official framework which requires a certain amount of the CSR budget to be used for supporting entrepreneurs. This way, steady funding could be provided for capacity building and innovation.
2. Organisations responsible for promoting entrepreneurship, such as SMEDAN and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), should enter into public-private partnership agreements with private organisations and make sure that these agreements place a priority on acquiring skills and on business incubation.
3. The PPPs should concentrate on offering digital tools, infrastructure, and training which will increase the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); investing in technology hubs and innovation centres can also lead to higher productivity and greater integration into global markets.
4. A national framework for monitoring CSR and PPP performance should be set up in order to evaluate the socio-economic impact of the private sector's involvement in entrepreneurship. Mechanisms for transparent reporting will help to enhance public trust and accountability.
5. Corporations ought to create their CSR programmes in such a way as to directly empower local communities by giving them access to finance, offering mentorship, and providing entrepreneurial education. This will assist in bringing about a new generation of innovative business leaders.

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