

**International Conference – 2025: Developed India @ 2047****Charting Multidisciplinary and Multi-Institutional Pathways for Inclusive Growth and Global Leadership held on 4th & 5th April, 2025****Organised by: IQAC - Gossner College, Ranchi**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Nation-Building: Driving Inclusive Growth

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in nation-building and its impact on inclusive growth in India. It explores how businesses contribute to social and economic development through CSR initiatives in education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and rural development.

Methodology: The research is based on secondary data collected from government reports, corporate disclosures, journal articles, and industry case studies. A qualitative analysis is conducted to assess CSR policies, implementation patterns, and their socio-economic impact.

Findings: The study finds that CSR has significantly contributed to improving literacy rates, healthcare accessibility, environmental conservation, and employment generation. However, challenges such as lack of transparency, regional disparities in CSR funding, and ineffective impact assessment limit its full potential. Strengthening accountability and aligning CSR with national priorities can enhance its effectiveness.

Practical Implications: The research suggests that businesses should adopt a strategic approach by integrating CSR with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), fostering public-private partnerships, and leveraging technology for scalable impact. Policymakers should enforce stricter evaluation mechanisms to ensure long-term benefits.

Originality/Value: This study provides a comprehensive analysis of CSR's role in inclusive growth, offering insights into best practices and policy recommendations. By highlighting both achievements and challenges, it contributes to the ongoing discourse on CSR as a nation-building tool.

Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility, Nation-Building, Inclusive Growth, Sustainable Development, Public-Private Partnerships, Social Impact.*

1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a significant factor in shaping sustainable economic and social development. Businesses today are expected to go beyond profit-making and contribute to society through various initiatives. CSR encompasses activities that promote education,

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healthcare, environmental conservation, and community welfare. By integrating CSR into their core strategies, companies can create long-term value for society while enhancing their brand reputation and stakeholder trust.

1.1 Background on CSR and Its Role in Economic and Social Development

CSR is rooted in the idea that businesses have responsibilities beyond generating profits. Over the years, it has evolved from philanthropic donations to strategic investments in social welfare. When implemented effectively, CSR fosters economic growth by improving literacy rates, enhancing healthcare services, and generating employment opportunities. It also plays a crucial role in addressing environmental concerns by promoting sustainability initiatives. In many countries, including India, CSR has become a legal obligation, compelling businesses to contribute to national development.

1.2 Importance of CSR in India's Nation-Building Efforts

In India, CSR plays a vital role in addressing socio-economic challenges. With a vast population and diverse needs, government efforts alone are insufficient to drive inclusive growth. CSR helps bridge this gap by funding educational programs, healthcare initiatives, and rural development projects. Companies such as Tata, Infosys, and Reliance have actively contributed to nation-building through strategic CSR interventions. The introduction of Section 135 in the Companies Act, 2013, mandating CSR spending, has further strengthened corporate involvement in societal development.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to explore the role of CSR in India's nation-building process, focusing on its impact on key sectors such as education, healthcare, environment, and rural development. It also seeks to analyse the challenges faced in CSR implementation and suggest strategies for enhancing its effectiveness.

1.4 Research Methodology

This research is based entirely on secondary data collected from government reports, corporate disclosures, journal articles, and case studies. A qualitative analysis is conducted to assess CSR policies, implementation patterns, and their socio-economic impact. By reviewing existing literature, this study provides insights into best practices and policy recommendations for improving CSR's contribution to India's development.

2. Literature Review

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved as a crucial component of business ethics, influencing corporate policies and their role in society. It has transitioned from voluntary philanthropy to a structured approach, where businesses integrate social and environmental concerns

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into their operations. This section explores the definition and historical evolution of CSR, theoretical perspectives, policy frameworks in India, and existing studies on its impact on development.

2.1 Definition and Evolution of CSR

CSR refers to a company's commitment to ethical behaviour, sustainable business practices, and social contributions beyond legal obligations. It encompasses initiatives in education, healthcare, environmental protection, and community welfare. The concept of CSR has evolved over time. In the early 20th century, businesses engaged in philanthropy driven by personal ethics. The 1950s and 1960s saw the emergence of social expectations from businesses. By the 1990s, CSR became an essential aspect of corporate strategy, with organizations recognizing its impact on brand reputation and long-term sustainability. Today, CSR is seen as a strategic tool for achieving social and economic progress.

2.2 Theoretical Framework (Stakeholder Theory, Triple Bottom Line, etc.)

Several theories explain the significance of CSR in business operations.

- Stakeholder Theory emphasizes that companies must consider the interests of all stakeholders—employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and shareholders—rather than focusing solely on profits. This theory highlights the ethical responsibility of businesses in contributing to societal well-being.
- Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Approach advocates for a balance between three pillars: People (social responsibility), Planet (environmental sustainability), and Profit (economic performance). Businesses that follow this approach aim for sustainable growth while minimizing negative social and environmental impacts.
- Carroll's CSR Pyramid classifies CSR into four levels: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. According to this model, businesses must first be profitable, comply with laws, uphold ethical standards, and then contribute voluntarily to societal well-being.

These theories provide a framework for understanding how CSR initiatives align with corporate objectives and societal expectations.

2.3 CSR Policies and Regulations in India (Companies Act, 2013)

India is one of the few countries where CSR has been legally mandated. The Companies Act, 2013 (Section 135) requires companies meeting certain financial thresholds to allocate at least 2% of their average net profit over three years to CSR activities. The act specifies areas where CSR funds can be utilized, including education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and rural development. It also mandates the formation of a CSR committee within companies to plan and monitor CSR activities.

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Since the introduction of this policy, corporate participation in social development has increased significantly. Many companies have aligned their CSR programs with national initiatives such as Digital India, Skill India, and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, amplifying their impact on national development goals.

2.4 Review of Existing Studies on CSR's Impact on Development

Several studies highlight the positive impact of CSR on socio-economic development. Research has shown that CSR initiatives in education have improved literacy rates and employability skills among underprivileged communities. In healthcare, corporate-funded programs have enhanced medical infrastructure, increased vaccination coverage, and improved sanitation facilities. Environmental CSR efforts have led to increased investment in renewable energy, water conservation, and waste management.

However, studies also indicate challenges such as regional disparities in CSR funding, lack of transparency in CSR expenditure, and ineffective impact assessments. Researchers suggest that aligning CSR initiatives with national priorities and enforcing stricter evaluation mechanisms can enhance their effectiveness.

This literature review establishes that while CSR plays a crucial role in India's development, addressing implementation challenges is essential for maximizing its impact.

3. CSR and Key Development Sectors

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) plays a transformative role in various sectors that contribute to the socio-economic development of India. Companies are increasingly channeling their resources into projects that improve the quality of life, especially in marginalized communities. Key sectors such as education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and rural development have benefited significantly from CSR initiatives. This section highlights how businesses are contributing to these sectors and their impact on inclusive growth.

3.1 Education Initiatives

Education is one of the primary focus areas of CSR in India. Companies are actively supporting literacy programs, digital education, and scholarship schemes to promote inclusive education. Many corporate houses, such as Tata Group, Infosys Foundation, and Wipro, have launched initiatives to improve access to quality education in rural and underprivileged areas.

CSR projects like the Tata ClassEdge provide digital learning tools to schools, enhancing the quality of education through technology. Similarly, the Infosys Foundation Scholarship Program supports meritorious students from economically weaker sections, enabling them to pursue higher education. Several companies have partnered with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to organize adult literacy programs and vocational training. These initiatives not only improve literacy rates but also empower individuals with the skills needed for employability.

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However, challenges such as the digital divide, lack of infrastructure, and regional disparities remain significant barriers. Companies can enhance their impact by aligning education projects with national initiatives like Digital India and Skill India, ensuring widespread access to quality education.

3.2 Healthcare Contributions

Healthcare is another crucial area where CSR has made significant strides. Companies are investing in projects that improve medical infrastructure, provide free healthcare services, and promote hygiene practices. CSR funding has been instrumental in setting up hospitals, organizing vaccination drives, and enhancing sanitation facilities in underserved regions.

For instance, the Reliance Foundation's Health for All program provides affordable healthcare services in rural areas, while the Tata Trusts have funded cancer treatment centers across India. During the COVID-19 pandemic, companies played a pivotal role in supporting healthcare infrastructure by supplying medical equipment, personal protective equipment (PPE), and organizing vaccination drives.

Sanitation projects such as Hindustan Unilever's Suvidha Centers offer hygienic sanitation facilities and clean drinking water in urban slums. These initiatives not only improve public health but also raise awareness about hygiene and preventive care. Despite these efforts, healthcare CSR often faces challenges like limited outreach and inadequate monitoring. Strengthening partnerships with local health authorities and leveraging technology can enhance the long-term impact of CSR in healthcare.

3.3 Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability has become a key focus of CSR as businesses recognize the urgent need to combat climate change and preserve natural resources. Corporate efforts in waste management, renewable energy, and afforestation are contributing to environmental conservation.

Several companies have adopted waste recycling projects to minimize their carbon footprint. For example, ITC's "Well-being Out of Waste" (WOW) initiative promotes waste segregation and recycling in urban communities. Renewable energy projects, such as the Adani Group's solar power initiatives, contribute to reducing dependency on fossil fuels. Afforestation programs led by companies like Tata Steel and Infosys have helped restore green cover and mitigate the effects of deforestation.

Despite these positive contributions, environmental CSR faces challenges like lack of community participation and inconsistent impact assessments. Businesses can improve outcomes by integrating sustainability into their core operations and collaborating with environmental NGOs for large-scale projects.

3.4 Rural Development and Employment Generation

CSR plays a vital role in rural development by supporting projects that enhance livelihoods and promote economic empowerment. Companies are investing in skill training, micro-financing, and rural entrepreneurship to uplift rural communities.

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For example, the Larsen & Toubro (L&T) Skill Development Training Program trains rural youth in technical skills, increasing their employability. Micro-financing initiatives by companies like HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank provide small loans to women entrepreneurs and self-help groups, enabling them to start small businesses. Additionally, companies are supporting rural entrepreneurship through initiatives like the Mahindra Pride Schools, which offer vocational training to marginalized youth.

However, rural development projects often face challenges such as low community participation and lack of infrastructure. Strengthening partnerships with local NGOs, providing market linkages, and involving community members in project planning can enhance the effectiveness of these initiatives.

CSR's contribution to key development sectors highlights its potential to drive inclusive growth. By addressing existing challenges and adopting strategic approaches, businesses can play a more significant role in nation-building and sustainable development.

4. Challenges in CSR Implementation

While Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has made a significant impact on various aspects of social and economic development, its implementation faces several challenges. Many CSR initiatives fail to reach their full potential due to issues related to transparency, unequal distribution of funds, inadequate impact assessment, and a lack of alignment with national development priorities. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring that CSR contributes meaningfully to India's long-term growth.

4.1 Transparency and Accountability Issues

One of the major concerns in CSR implementation is the lack of transparency and accountability in how funds are allocated and utilized. Many companies disclose their CSR spending in annual reports, but the details regarding the actual execution and impact of these initiatives are often unclear. In some cases, funds are allocated to projects that exist only on paper, with little real benefit to communities.

Additionally, there is no standardized mechanism for monitoring CSR expenditures, making it difficult to track whether companies are genuinely investing in social development or simply fulfilling regulatory requirements. Strengthening regulatory oversight, introducing independent audits, and ensuring greater stakeholder involvement can enhance transparency and ensure that CSR funds are utilized effectively.

4.2 Regional Disparities in CSR Funding

Another critical issue is the unequal distribution of CSR funding across different regions. Most CSR projects are concentrated in urban and industrialized areas, where corporate headquarters or production facilities are located, leaving rural and underdeveloped regions with limited resources.

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For example, states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Karnataka receive a significant share of CSR investments, while states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, and the north-eastern regions receive comparatively less.

This regional imbalance prevents CSR from reaching the most vulnerable populations who need it the most. To address this issue, policymakers and corporate leaders must work together to ensure that CSR funds are distributed more equitably. Government incentives for companies investing in backward regions and collaborative models involving multiple stakeholders can help bridge this gap.

4.3 Ineffective Impact Assessment and Evaluation

Many CSR initiatives lack proper impact assessment mechanisms, making it difficult to measure their long-term effectiveness. While companies often report the amount spent on CSR, few provide concrete data on how their initiatives have improved education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, or rural development.

The absence of standardized evaluation frameworks results in projects being continued without a clear understanding of their success or failure. Without proper assessment, companies may invest in initiatives that fail to create meaningful social change. To improve this, businesses should adopt internationally recognized impact assessment frameworks, conduct third-party evaluations, and involve community stakeholders in monitoring progress.

4.4 Limited Alignment with National Development Goals

Although CSR initiatives contribute to social welfare, they often operate in isolation from broader national development objectives. Many projects are selected based on corporate interests rather than being aligned with government policies such as Skill India, Digital India, and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. This lack of coordination reduces the overall impact of CSR and leads to fragmented development efforts.

If CSR initiatives are better integrated with national priorities, their effectiveness can be significantly enhanced. Collaboration between businesses, government agencies, and non-profit organizations can ensure that CSR projects complement existing public programs, leading to a more coordinated and large-scale impact.

Conclusion: Despite its potential, CSR in India faces challenges that limit its effectiveness. Improving transparency, ensuring regional equity in fund allocation, implementing robust impact assessment mechanisms, and aligning CSR with national development goals are essential steps toward making corporate social responsibility a more powerful tool for sustainable development. By addressing these challenges, businesses can create more meaningful and lasting social change.

5. Enhancing CSR Effectiveness

To maximize the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), businesses need to adopt a more strategic and structured approach. While CSR has contributed significantly to social development, its

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full potential remains untapped due to issues like poor alignment with global goals, lack of collaboration, and inadequate impact assessment. Enhancing CSR effectiveness requires a shift toward long-term, sustainable strategies that align with national and global development priorities.

5.1 Strategic Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive framework for addressing global challenges such as poverty, education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and economic growth. Many companies currently invest in CSR activities without a clear link to these broader objectives, leading to scattered efforts and limited impact.

By aligning CSR initiatives with SDGs, businesses can ensure their contributions are part of a larger, measurable development framework. For example, CSR programs focused on education can directly support SDG 4 (Quality Education), while healthcare initiatives can contribute to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being). A structured alignment with SDGs allows companies to measure progress against global benchmarks and enhance their credibility as socially responsible organizations.

5.2 Strengthening Public-Private Partnerships

Collaboration between businesses, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can significantly enhance the reach and effectiveness of CSR initiatives. The private sector brings financial resources, innovation, and efficiency, while the public sector offers policy support, infrastructure, and grassroots reach.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have proven successful in areas such as education, healthcare, and rural development. For example, the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) has partnered with several corporate organizations to provide vocational training programs that align with Skill India. Similarly, collaborations between companies and municipal bodies in sanitation projects under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan have yielded positive results.

Encouraging more such partnerships can lead to better resource utilization, increased impact, and long-term sustainability of CSR projects. Companies should actively seek government and NGO partnerships to enhance the effectiveness of their CSR investments.

5.3 Leveraging Technology for Scalability and Impact Assessment

Technology has the potential to transform CSR by making initiatives more scalable, efficient, and measurable. Digital platforms, data analytics, and artificial intelligence (AI) can help companies assess the impact of their projects, ensuring funds are utilized effectively.

For instance, real-time data tracking systems can provide insights into the progress of CSR initiatives, while AI-driven tools can analyse social impact trends and recommend improvements. Companies like Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys have successfully used technology to improve digital education and healthcare accessibility in remote areas.

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Moreover, blockchain technology can be used to enhance transparency in CSR funding by enabling real-time tracking of fund allocation and utilization. Mobile apps and cloud-based solutions can further help businesses engage with stakeholders and gather feedback, ensuring better accountability.

5.4 Policy Recommendations for Better CSR Governance

To improve CSR effectiveness, policymakers and businesses must focus on strengthening governance mechanisms. Some key recommendations include:

- **Standardized Impact Assessment Frameworks:** Companies should be required to conduct independent audits and social impact assessments to measure the effectiveness of their CSR programs.
- **Mandatory Disclosure of CSR Outcomes:** Beyond financial spending, businesses should report tangible social outcomes in their annual CSR reports.
- **Incentives for CSR in Underdeveloped Regions:** The government can encourage companies to invest in backward areas by offering tax benefits and recognition programs.
- **Creation of CSR Innovation Funds:** Establishing funds dedicated to innovative social projects can encourage businesses to develop scalable, high-impact solutions.

Conclusion: Enhancing CSR effectiveness requires a multi-dimensional approach that includes strategic alignment with SDGs, stronger public-private partnerships, greater use of technology, and improved governance policies. By adopting these measures, businesses can ensure their CSR contributions create long-term, meaningful change and contribute more effectively to national development goals.

6. Conclusion and Future Research

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a vital tool for driving inclusive growth and nation-building in India. Companies are investing in key areas such as education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and rural development, contributing to social and economic progress. However, challenges such as lack of transparency, regional disparities, and ineffective impact assessment continue to limit the full potential of CSR initiatives.

6.1 Summary of Findings

This study highlights that CSR has significantly improved access to education through digital learning programs and scholarships, strengthened healthcare infrastructure by supporting hospitals and vaccination drives, and contributed to environmental sustainability through renewable energy projects and afforestation efforts. Additionally, CSR initiatives in rural development have promoted skill training and entrepreneurship. However, issues like uneven fund distribution, weak monitoring mechanisms, and misalignment with national development goals hinder its effectiveness. Addressing these challenges requires a more strategic, well-coordinated approach.



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6.2 Implications for Businesses and Policymakers

1. For businesses, this study emphasizes the need for long-term, impact-driven CSR strategies rather than one-time philanthropic donations. Companies should integrate CSR with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and leverage technology for better impact assessment. Strengthening partnerships with government agencies and NGOs can further enhance CSR's reach and efficiency.
2. For policymakers, stronger governance mechanisms are needed to ensure CSR funds are utilized effectively. Policies should encourage more investments in underdeveloped regions, mandate transparent reporting of social impact, and incentivize businesses to engage in sustainable, high-impact CSR projects.

6.3 Scope for Future Research in CSR Effectiveness

Future research can focus on developing standardized impact measurement frameworks to assess the long-term success of CSR projects. Studies can also explore how digital innovations, such as blockchain and AI, can enhance transparency in CSR funding. Additionally, research on industry-specific CSR models can help businesses tailor their initiatives for maximum social impact. By addressing these areas, CSR can become a more powerful instrument for sustainable development and nation-building in India.

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