

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT: INSIGHTS FROM CSR INITIATIVES OF A PUBLIC SECTOR COMPANY

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Abstract

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is emerging as a business-led solution for addressing development challenges, such as poverty, malnutrition, and inadequate infrastructure. However, there is limited research available on the process by which companies introduce innovative CSR practices to tackle these social problems. This study draws insights from a case study of CSR initiatives of a public sector company in India to examine the emergence and implementation of innovative CSR practices. The study reveals that CSR practices are influenced by the company's commitment and institutionalising a dynamic process of implementation and stakeholder engagement, and governance of partner relations. It is found that stakeholder engagement and partnerships not only attribute legitimacy but also ensure greater participation of the local community in problem-solving and the creation of shared value. Moreover, the formation of partnerships and collaborations contributes to the development of better solutions that serve the needs of the local community. These findings have implications for the design and implementation of innovative CSR practices, particularly in resource-constrained rural settings.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Rural Development, India, Legitimacy, Partnership, Collaboration, Innovative CSR .

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Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is increasingly recognised as a vital link between businesses and society (Carroll, 2021). Here, businesses voluntarily engage with local communities to solve pressing social problems (Arora, Kourula & Robert, 2020). CSR is grounded in the principles of business and societal relations (Barnett, Henriques & Husted, 2020; Porter & Kramer, 2006; Porter & Kramer, 2011; Elkington, 1997; Zhao et al., 2022). A shared understanding of CSR extends beyond shareholders, encompassing economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary responsibilities, emphasising social responsiveness (Carroll, 2021; Carroll & Shabana, 2010).

India has a rich tradition of CSR practices, shaped by philanthropic, legal, political, developmental, and cultural factors, each influenced by regional and local characteristics (Kumar, 2017). CSR has evolved into an integral component of business philosophy, transitioning from traditional charity and philanthropy towards business-led solutions to address development challenges (Gatti, Vishwanath et al., 2018).

CSR in India has been largely influenced by legislative mandates, stakeholder expectations, and changing business motivations (Majumdar & Saini, 2016). The Ministry of Corporate Affairs introduced the National Voluntary Guidelines on Social, Environmental, and Economic Responsibilities of Business (NVGs) in 2011, outlining a comprehensive framework for businesses. These guidelines underlined core principles like ethics, transparency, and stakeholder engagement. Section 135 of the Companies Act of 2013 mandated CSR provisions for qualifying companies, requiring them to form a CSR Committee and spend at least 2 per cent of the average net profits of the preceding three years on CSR activities (Kumar, 2017).

CSR policies now offer a robust framework for companies to leverage their managerial skills, technology, and innovation to find solutions to the country's development challenges. This paradigm

shift in CSR practices has given rise to concepts such as social innovation, ecological innovation, social and environmental entrepreneurship, and shared value creation, allowing companies to explore embedding CSR within their business practices (Porter & Kramer, 2011; Awaysheh, Heron, Perry & Wilson, 2020; Dionisio & de Vargas, 2020).

Research on Indian CSR has predominantly focused on understanding stakeholder perspectives, implementation of CSR initiatives, regulatory environments, and examining the link between CSR and corporate performance (Mishra & Modi, 2021; Bhatia & Bhatia, 2021; Kumar & Singh, 2017; Khanna & Sood, 2020; Srivastava, 2020; Gandhi & Bhal, 2015). CSR in the context of rural development has been a significant area of research, with studies exploring the role of CSR initiatives in promoting sustainable development, inclusive growth, education, and livelihood enhancement in rural communities (Bhattacharya, Korschun, & Sen, 2009; Khan & Khan, 2019; Sarkar & Sarkar, 2016; Sharma, N, Sharma, D., & Devi, 2017).

However, current research offers limited insight into the processes through which companies introduce innovative CSR practices to address social problems in specific sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture, and rural development. This study aims to fill this gap by posing the question, "What explains the emergence and implementation of innovative CSR initiatives by a public sector company, especially in resource-constrained rural settings?"

Review of Literature

Corporate Social Responsibility: CSR has become a prominent topic in both business and development spheres (Arora, Kourula & Robert, 2020). Rooted in the ideals of business-societal relations, CSR is influenced by philanthropic considerations, the pursuit of improved business performance, strategies for competitive advantage, and the delivery of social goods to address social and economic challenges (Barnett, Henriques &

Husted, 2020; Elkington, 1997; Zhao et al., 2022). A widely accepted understanding of CSR involves a firm's concern for stakeholders beyond its shareholders, encompassing economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary responsibilities, aligning with the strategy of social responsiveness (Carroll, 2021). By focusing on stakeholders beyond shareholders, CSR can mitigate risks (Kim, Lee & Kang, 2021), foster goodwill (Kotler, Hessekiel & Lee, 2012), and enhance corporate reputation and legitimacy (Yadav, Dash, Chakraborty & Kumar, 2018).

Stakeholder theory emphasises that CSR is not just an act of corporate generosity; it forms an integral part of the identity and relationship that a company has with its stakeholders (Freeman, Harrison & Wicks, 2007). Stakeholders in this context include employees, customers, communities, and other groups with a vested interest in the company's activities (Sternberg, 1997). The success of a business is intricately linked to gaining the support of stakeholders, requiring a deep understanding of how they perceive the company (Barney, 1997). Therefore, CSR programme design and implementation must take into account the diverse perceptions, expectations, and local cultures of stakeholders for meaningful and sustainable impact. The stakeholder theory provides a comprehensive framework that integrates social and environmental considerations into corporate decision-making, fostering a more responsible and inclusive approach to business (Freeman, 1984).

Strategic CSR: The prevailing discourse on CSR advocates a 'middle path' approach, stressing collaboration and synergy in defining business roles (Carroll, 2021). Companies adopting a strategic approach integrate CSR initiatives with their business strategy (Porter & Kramer, 2006). They identify social and environmental issues that intersect with their operations and create initiatives that align with their business goals. This approach is often more sustainable and can lead to long-term positive impacts for both the company and society (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

The business-for-society view emphasises businesses contributing to the broader community for societal improvement, addressing criticisms of insufficient attention to social and environmental impacts (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). The companies are expected to acknowledge stakeholder claims, aligning strategic planning with both economic and social interests (Porter & Kramer, 2006). Moreover, the evident positive correlation between corporate social performance and financial performance put emphasis on the justification for prioritising "doing good," "strategic CSR," and "shared value creation" (Kotler, Hessekiel & Lee, 2012; Porter & Kramer, 2006). It is widely acknowledged that socially responsible actions lead to achieving sustainable competitive advantages (Hart & Dowell, 2011; Porter & Kramer, 2011).

CSR in India: CSR in India was historically characterised by philanthropic activities undertaken by businesses leading various social welfare initiatives in education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation (Jenkins & Yakovleva, 2006). Recent studies show that "Philanthropic" motivation remains the predominant CSR driver for both public and private sector firms in India (Acharyya & Agarwala, 2022; Bhatia & Dhavan, 2023). Chatterjee (2011) discusses the CSR practices of Indian companies, featuring topical and contemporary case studies of prominent companies. The author contends that CSR is not just philanthropy, and corporations have to move beyond the financial bottom line to the social and environmental bottom line. Majumdar and Saini (2016) view that CSR practices in India have been significantly shaped by stakeholder expectations and activism. Stakeholders, including employees, consumers, communities, and civil society organisations, now demand companies extend their purpose beyond profit-making, urging them to contribute to social and environmental well-being. This pressure has prompted companies to embrace CSR initiatives and adopt sustainable practices (Gupta & Kumar, 2022).

Research on CSR in India has largely focused on understanding stakeholder perspectives, implementation frameworks, assessing regulatory

environments governance issues, and establishing the connection between CSR and corporate performance (Mishra & Modi, 2021; Bhatia & Bhatia, 2021; Kumar & Singh, 2017; Khanna & Sood, 2020; Srivastava, 2020; Gandhi & Bhal, 2015). In recent years, there has been a growing trend of integrating CSR into the core business strategies of companies in India. CSR is increasingly recognised as a pivotal source of competitive advantage, contributing significantly to brand reputation and long-term sustainability (Narwal et al., 2021). A recent study by Kalagnanam and Rajeev (2023) sheds light on the emphasis on health, education, and environment in CSR initiatives. These firms adopt a long-term perspective on CSR, aligning strategies with their core business. Other studies reveal that the companies have established robust governance structures for policy development, planning, and monitoring of CSR initiatives and they are aligning them with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to address pressing social and environmental challenges (Sharma & Ramachandran, 2020).

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach and adopts a case study method, which is justified when the aim is to thoroughly explore a phenomenon (Yin, 2009). The case selection is based on the distinctive nature of CSR initiatives, with the chosen company demonstrating unique characteristics that highlight social innovation in its CSR processes. Operating as a public sector oil refinery in central India, a resource-constrained region with limited opportunities for local community development, the company is perceived as a catalyst for growth and a solution to social and economic challenges within the community.

The CSR initiatives of the company primarily target education and skill development, health and hygiene, sports and culture, agriculture and livelihoods. Notably, these initiatives showcase a stakeholder-centric focus and innovative approaches. Given the study's objective of gaining

an in-depth understanding of the emergence and implementation of innovative CSR initiatives, the selection of a case study method is appropriate. Case study research is particularly recommended for addressing "how, why, when, and what type" of research questions that centre on contemporary events in real-life situations (Yin, 2009).

This research utilises diverse methods—focus group discussions, interviews, and observation—for a case study analysis of the company's CSR initiatives. Six focus group discussions were carried out with participants of various CSR initiatives. Apart from that, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the CSR programme manager of the company, project managers of the NGOs and community-based organisations and staff. Smaller focus groups (involving 15-20 members) explored individual experiences deeply, while interviews (15 interviews involving CSR manager of the company, project managers of NGOs and community-based organisations and field staff), each lasting 45 to 60 minutes, aimed to uncover details about CSR processes, programme design, and implementation, highlighting aspects such as stakeholder engagement, participation, and partnerships within the initiatives.

The analytical process is involved in two stages. Firstly, a detailed case study is crafted by synthesising insights from interviews, focus group discussions, and diverse sources, including newspaper reports, company annual reports, and partnership agreements. Subsequently, a qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) is applied to the case study, field notes, and relevant documents. This method systematically uncovers the meaning of qualitative data, scrutinising material in relation to research questions and describing it through coding. Balancing inductive and deductive methods (Schreier, 2012), the resulting categories—commitment, strategic approaches, setting up of system and processes, stakeholder engagement and partnership, and governance of partner relations—form the foundation for explaining the processes and emergence of the company's innovative CSR initiatives.

Results

Case Study of CSR Initiatives of the Company:

The “Company,” is a public sector refinery operating in central India since 2011. Its CSR vision emphasises inclusive and sustainable development through partnerships with internal and external stakeholders, leveraging CSR for business value creation, and aspiring to be a CSR role model. Towards this, the Company is committed to engaging with local communities, collaborating with non-profit organisations, and continuously improving the processes to align with the principles of sustainability. The CSR initiatives are designed to focus on key areas aligned with its values and stakeholder expectations. The broad approach is “Think Global and Act Local”.

The Company adopts a strategic approach for the design and implementation of CSR by identifying social and environmental issues that intersect with its operations and creating initiatives that align with its business goals. In an interview, the CSR manager of the company expressed that, “our company has evolved its CSR initiatives through a learning process, transitioning from one-time short-term activities to planned, systematic projects for long-term impact. The CSR policy aligns with sustainability principles and is approved by the Board, with a dedicated committee overseeing policy formulation and implementation. We firmly believe that the stakeholder engagement process is vital for CSR implementation and our stakeholder engagement process is rooted in understanding the communities’ key concerns and expectations through systematic community engagements and need assessment.”

Tailored to the context of a region marked by widespread poverty, the Company’s CSR programme focuses on education, sports, skill development, health and hygiene, agriculture and rural livelihood. The programmes meticulously consider the micro-details of targeted community needs and are implemented through a participatory process involving the company officials, local communities and the NGOs as implementing partners. The partners are identified by considering

their expertise in specific areas, local knowledge, professional approaches and experiences. The company adopts several innovative approaches in the design and implementation of CSR activities, showcasing its commitment to sustainable development and social responsibility. A brief description of the CSR initiatives of the company is provided below.

Education: The Company is implementing a rural education programme titled ‘Shiksha Aapke Dwar’ across 22 villages in collaboration with Samanwaya Manadapam, an NGO that works in the region. The primary objectives of the project encompass enhancing school attendance, academic performance, involvement in extracurricular activities, and fostering an interest in science education. A significant innovation in the project is the formation of a dedicated group of village-level volunteers who provide coaching to students during after-school hours. Beyond academic support, volunteers play a pivotal role in identifying students’ talents in sports and games. The students also receive training in activities such as wrestling, kabaddi, chess, and swimming; the volunteers also encourage students to participate in competitions, fostering a holistic development approach.

The programme has covered over 8000 students in the past four years. During focus group discussions, the students revealed that attendance at coaching sessions holds substantial value for them. Those who actively participate not only enjoy the classes themselves but also play a motivational role in encouraging others to join. Many students cited diverse reasons for attending, including a thirst for general knowledge and engagement in extracurricular activities, such as sports and games.

As evident, several young individuals, particularly girls, have emerged as coaches and trainers for a variety of sports, including wrestling, volleyball, hockey, and chess. FGDs concur that the sports programmes have achieved remarkable success in fostering positive social change among children, especially girls, and their parents. It has cultivated unity and a sense of camaraderie among

children, transcending caste and class considerations. In an interview, a volunteer emphasised the transformative impact of the Sports project, stating that the participation of girls in sports and games was not well appreciated by parents earlier. "The sports project has brought about changes in this mindset to a large extent. We see a significant increase in the participation of girls in various sports events."

Science Education: The project focuses on advancing science education in schools through the utilisation of a mobile science lab. Agastya International, an organisation dedicated to popularising science education through experiments and science fairs, spearheads the implementation of this programme. The mobile science lab has an array of resources, including over 150 science models spanning chemistry, biology, physics, and mathematics. Additionally, it is equipped with computers, an LCD projector, and a display screen. The overarching goal of the project is to enhance the quality of science education in schools while concurrently training teachers in employing science experiments as a pedagogical method for teaching science subjects.

During the interview, the project manager of the NGO said that the key innovation is the mobile van for facilitating science experiments in schools through the organisation of science fairs, and teacher training. "An integral component is the 'Young Instructor Leaders Programme,' which has successfully trained nearly 3000 young individuals in conducting science experiments. Over the last three years, the programme has reached more than 13,000 students and 950 teachers across 250 schools. It has conducted 12 teacher training programmes and initiated community visits to engage students".

During the fieldwork, conversations with the students reveal their interest and preference for science education. Students are not only encouraged but also empowered to conduct science experiments within their classrooms, igniting a genuine interest in learning science subjects. During focus group discussions, several participants exhibited a remarkable ability to recall

the science experiments conducted in lab sessions, establishing a tangible connection between scientific concepts and their everyday lives. Those engaged in the science lab sessions demonstrated the capacity to formulate science questions driven by curiosity and conduct experiments using improvised materials.

It has been reported that teacher training programmes have played a pivotal role in enhancing the skills of educators. The science teacher of a school said that they learn to conduct science experiments effectively, utilising them as a pedagogical method to elevate the quality of science education and improve teaching and learning outcomes in schools. During interviews with the instructors, they concur that the positive impact of these initiatives is evident in the students' proficiency in conducting science experiments and comprehending science subjects.

Skill Development: The Company supports three key programmes: i) 'Learn and Earn' initiative ii) Quality Improvement of an Industrial Training Institute, and iii) the Swavalamban project. The first two programmes were launched in 2014 and are executed by the Nettur Technical Foundation (NTTF), while the Swavalamban project is implemented by the Pratham Educational Initiative, another partner NGO.

Under the 'Learn and Earn' programme, NTTF has successfully trained 380 students in various trades, including fitter, electrician, mechanic, electronics, turner, and welder. The training duration for this programme is six months. In the Quality Improvement initiative, NTTF focuses on training and capacity building for teachers, curriculum revision, development of training materials, and provision of training kits to enhance the skill levels of trainees. The Swavalamban project specifically concentrates on skill training in hospitality and automobiles.

The skill development initiatives have emerged as a transformative force, providing valuable opportunities for young individuals in rural areas, particularly those from low-income households, to undergo skill training and enhance their proficiency

in various trades. Examining the placement data, it is revealed that 50 per cent of the trainees from the 'Learn and Earn' programme have secured placements, while approximately 25 per cent have opted for higher studies, notably, a segment chose not to accept placements due to job offers in distant locations.

While stressing the importance of placement in the skill development programmes, the project manager of NTTF expressed that the placement of trainees is a critical component of their skill training programme. "We follow a process that begins during the training programme itself. We work closely with our industry partners and local employers to understand their needs. Simultaneously, we provide our trainees with career counselling, resume building, and interview preparation. Once the training is complete, we actively connect our trainees with job opportunities, facilitating interviews and providing ongoing support during the placement process."

During interviews, the project manager said that the Swavalamban project has witnessed remarkable success, achieving nearly 100 per cent job offers for trainees consistently across all years. One of the instructors associated with the training institute said that skill training has broadened the employment opportunities for trainees. However, an overarching concern raised by trainees is the relatively low salary in their first positions, coupled with the challenges of working in remote locations. This aspect poses a common dilemma for many trainees, impacting their decision to accept job offers.

Health and Hygiene: The Company has established a 30-bed multi-speciality hospital within the township, aimed at providing healthcare services to the employees and residents of the peripheral villages. This facility extends medical treatment and subsidised medications to eligible patients, including those from Below Poverty Line (BPL) households. The hospital organises medical camps, operates a mobile medical van, and conducts informative sessions on yoga and meditation. Besides, the Company supports health and hygiene initiatives in the villages by offering

financial aid to NGOs for the cleaning of public spaces, sewage management, sanitation of toilets, maintenance of playgrounds in government schools and fogging activities to prevent the spread of vector-borne diseases, such as dengue and malaria.

Two noteworthy projects, the Kishori Balika Vikas Yojana and Project Sanjeevani, are implemented to address malnourishment among children and pregnant women. These initiatives focus on creating awareness about nutrition, anaemia, and menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls and young women. Through these concerted efforts, the organisation contributes significantly to the overall well-being and health improvement of the communities it serves.

Focus group discussion involving the villagers expressed that the hospital serves as the sole healthcare facility for the peripheral villages of the township, with the nearest Primary Health Centre (PHC) situated 30 km away. The people in the villages heavily rely on this hospital for primary care, disease treatment, and management of critical illnesses. Since its establishment in 2012, the hospital has been instrumental in providing medical services to nearly 3.4 lakh patients. A significant proportion of these patients are from BPL families (85,000). In addition to these services, Project Sanjeevani, designed to combat malnutrition among children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers, has reached approximately 2697 people. During FGDs, the community acknowledged the vital role played by the hospital in providing accessible health facilities, with many residents having availed themselves of treatment over the past three years.

Sustainable Livelihoods: Agriculture and livestock rearing constitute the primary livelihoods for residents in the peripheral villages associated with the organisation. In these regions, agriculture primarily relies on rainfall and is oriented towards foodgrain production, with limited emphasis on cultivating vegetables and other crops. The local cattle are desi breeds with lower milk production. Recognising the significance of agriculture and livestock development in enhancing the livelihoods

of the villagers, the organisation has launched a Sustainable Livelihood Development Programme across 22 villages. This initiative, commenced in the year 2014-15, is implemented in partnership with BAIF Development Research Foundation.

The programme encompasses three key components: i) Livestock development, ii) Agriculture (with a focus on vegetable cultivation), and iii) Training and Capacity Building. Employing an innovative and bottom-up approach for the doorstep delivery of veterinary and agriculture services, BAIF has established an Integrated Livestock Development Centre to facilitate effective coordination of these activities. The programme targets farmers currently engaged in agriculture and cattle rearing, with a particular emphasis on small and marginal farmers. Beneficiaries are identified based on criteria such as owning at least one or two cattle and reliance on agriculture as their primary source of livelihood.

A pivotal aspect of the project is the enhancement of livestock productivity through measures such as breed improvement, vaccination, and de-worming. The programme also emphasises capacity building of farmers, encouraging them to diversify their livelihoods. By addressing these key components, the organisation aims to create a sustainable impact on the overall well-being and economic prosperity of the local communities.

The programme has reached 2738 farmer households, fostering increased awareness about animal healthcare, specifically emphasising the importance of deworming, vaccination, and the adoption of scientific feeding practices. During focus group discussions, many farmers concur that they had availed veterinary services, encompassing artificial insemination, de-worming, and vaccination and also embraced scientific feeding practices by incorporating minerals and mixtures, resulting in noteworthy enhancements in cattle health and a substantial reduction in disease incidence.

During the interview, the field coordinator of the project said that the program has been instrumental in motivating several young farmers to adopt

improved agricultural and livestock practices. Several farmers had implemented initiatives such as green fodder cultivation, use of cattle mangers, and the establishment of vermicomposting units. Ten vermicomposting units have been established by the farmers. Additionally, farmers have experimented with the preparation of bio-pesticides and manures, yielding improved crop yields and effective pest control. This achievement is attributed to the comprehensive awareness campaigns conducted through village-level farmer meetings, training sessions, and exposure visits.

Analysis and Discussion

This study analysed the CSR initiatives by a public sector company, spanning education and skill development, sports, health and hygiene, agriculture and livelihood. It is found that CSR is deeply woven into the fabric of the company through management practices, adherence to CSR standards and rules, and stakeholder engagement process. These initiatives are strategically aligned with the company's commitment to fulfilling its social responsibilities and addressing the pressing needs of the communities it serves. The emergence of these initiatives unfolds through the interplay of four pivotal elements: commitment and strategic approaches, setting up of processes and systems, stakeholder engagement, partnerships and governance of partner relationships.

The company embraces a strategic approach for designing and implementing CSR initiatives. This is evident in their methodology of identifying social and environmental issues that intersect with their operations and creating initiatives that align with their business goals. This commitment permeates the design of innovative CSR initiatives and is ingrained in the organisational implementation framework. The company views CSR as a vital tool for engaging with local communities and cultivating an image as a responsible business entity, fortifying relationships with both the local community and partner organisations. This collaborative effort leads to the co-creation of innovative solutions for prevalent

social issues. The focus of CSR is transitioning from traditional charitable activities and employee engagement to proactive and innovative strategies for problem-solving and value creation.

In an era where corporations grapple with mounting pressure from diverse stakeholders, encompassing governmental bodies and local communities, CSR emerges as a strategic imperative for securing legitimacy (Freeman et al., 2007). This study sheds light on the nuanced process of gaining legitimacy through strategic CSR initiatives. It underscores the pivotal role of these initiatives not only in addressing critical social and environmental challenges but also in fortifying the company's standing and legitimacy within the broader societal context. This legitimacy, in turn, heightens the company's preparedness to meet stakeholder expectations through socially innovative practices (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). Previous research has shown that societal values and expectations confer legitimacy on a firm, ensuring sustained support from stakeholders (Epstein & Roy, 2001, Du & Vieira, 2012).

The Company has institutionalised CSR within the organisation by establishing systems and processes, such as CSR standards and rules, stakeholder involvement, and reporting on social and environmental performance. Adopting a mission-centric approach to CSR, the company has implemented a systematic stakeholder engagement process for spearheading innovative CSR initiatives. Stakeholder engagement is considered an organisational capability that allows firms to build strategic relations with stakeholders (Freeman, 1984).

Stakeholder theory suggests that firms benefit from these relations as they provide a source of competitive advantage in the form of trust, reputation, and innovation (Rodriguez et al., 2002). It is found that stakeholder engagement helps the company develop mutually beneficial relationships with communities, fostering greater loyalty and support. Previous studies have established that firms can integrate insights from stakeholder engagement into their organisational innovation processes, enabling them to understand the critical

needs of communities and design appropriate solutions (Ayuso et al., 2006).

As observed, the CSR initiatives of the company are characterised by stakeholder engagement, fostering collaboration and partnership with local NGOs, and community-based organisations. These partnerships play a pivotal role in introducing innovative solutions to social problems (Lashitew et al., 2020). By engaging with these external organisations, the company gains access to fresh perspectives and novel ideas, resulting in the development of more effective and impactful solutions. A key aspect of these collaborative efforts is the establishment of improved relations with diverse stakeholder groups, including local communities. This enhanced understanding of stakeholder desires and expectations becomes a catalyst for innovative CSR initiatives.

It is found that the company's commitment to forging meaningful partnerships goes beyond conventional corporate philanthropy, aligning with a more proactive approach aimed at co-creating sustainable solutions. This collaborative ethos is evident in the fruitful partnerships with organisations such as Agastya International, which brings innovation to science education, or Samnyaya Mandapam, facilitating innovative methods for sports education. Such alliances not only leverage the expertise of partner organisations but also contribute to the creation of novel and impactful CSR interventions. This approach ensures that the CSR initiatives are not just isolated efforts but part of a broader strategy that integrates local knowledge, contacts, and legitimacy to achieve meaningful social impact. Partnerships play a pivotal role in co-creating innovation opportunities, offering synergistic inputs for achieving social impact (Babu et al., 2020).

This is evident in educational, skill development, and agricultural initiatives outlined in the case study. The involvement of partners, ranging from NGOs like Agastya International to social enterprises like Samnyaya Mandapam and BAIF Foundation, brings a diversity of perspectives and competencies. The resulting shared value

creation is exemplified in the case study's portrayal of initiatives that tackle issues such as access to quality education, skill development, and sustainable agricultural practices. In essence, effective governance of partner relations emerges as a cornerstone, fostering trust, knowledge-sharing, and expertise, ultimately catalysing the creation of social innovations (Babu et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This research study underscores the critical role of stakeholder engagement in the success of CSR initiatives. To enhance the effectiveness of CSR projects, organisations should consider stakeholder engagement as a core practice, enabling them to gain valuable insights into community needs and expectations. By fostering a continuous learning experience through engagement, companies can

align social strategies with the legitimate expectations of local communities, ensuring the relevance and impact of their CSR interventions. The findings also underscore the importance of partnerships and collaborations with local NGOs and community-based organisations in CSR initiatives. By leveraging these partnerships, organisations can co-create more effective solutions to address social challenges in resource-constrained settings. Finally, the study suggests that successful CSR interventions in resource-constrained settings involve a deep understanding of local needs and aligning social strategies with the legitimate expectations of communities. By tailoring interventions to the unique needs of the community, organisations can ensure that their CSR programmes are not only relevant but also contribute to the sustainable development of the local population.

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