Evaluating the Strategic Alignment of Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives with Sustainable Development Goals in Indian Corporations

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility has emerged as an integral element of modern business strategy, significantly reshaping how corporations in India approach their role within society, especially after the introduction of Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013. In recent years, Indian businesses have increasingly recognised the importance of aligning their corporate social responsibility initiatives with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, aiming for a broader social, economic, and environmental impact. This research paper evaluates how leading Indian corporations strategically integrate corporate social responsibility activities with the sustainable development goals framework, examining the effectiveness, challenges, and outcomes of such alignment. The research employs a qualitative case study method with five major Indian companies – Hindustan Unilever, Tata Group, ITC Limited, Reliance Industries and Infosys – as subjects for understanding the degree of alignment, strategic orientation, and measurable effect of CSR practices. The comparative analysis yields meaningful examples of best practices, constructive solutions, and areas of improvement. The research reinforces the importance of the multilateral collaboration between business, governmental organisations, and civil society, to enable more effective achievement of sustainable development goals. The research concludes with recommendations for practical improvement in strategic alignment, reporting transparency, and measurable impact, and offers contributions to academics, policymakers and business leaders invested in sustainable and inclusive growth in India.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Indian Corporations, Inclusive Growth, Sustainable Development Goals, Responsible Business Practices, Sustainability Frameworks

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of business in our society has changed enormously over the last decade. No longer are businesses judged simply on profits and market share; today business assessment includes the responsibilities associated with their immediate communities and environments. This shift has led to an increase in importance of the

concept of *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)* as an expectation that businesses today have moral responsibilities to contribute to the social, economic, and environmental development. CSR includes actions such as supporting education, providing health care, preventing pollution and championing women's empowerment, etc. (Carroll, 1999).

In India, CSR has also gained legal and strategic importance as evidenced by the introduction of *Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013* that obligates certain companies to contribute at least 2% of their average net profits on CSR activities. India is considered one of the few countries to have made CSR a statutory commitment as opposed an optional activity. In India, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs also published *Schedule VII,* which includes a list of CSR eligible activities and relevance to global sustainable development goals (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, 2020).

While in a separate development, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was launched when the *United Nations General Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* in 2015. The SDGs are a set of 17 interrelated global goals, which are intended to be a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all by 2030" (United Nations, 2015). The SDGs address issues such ending poverty and hunger; quality education; gender inequality; climate change; and building peaceful and inclusive societies.

For populous countries like India, with a multitude of regional disparities and hence their own specific developmental needs, the SDGs are critical and highly relevant. The Indian government have taken the SDGs into account in configuring its national priorities, with government bodies, such as *NITI Aayog* being provided with the responsibility of putting in place and tracking the delivery on the SDGs. It has been concluded that despite all the government efforts, it is doubtful that 2030 targets will be met without involvement by the private sector, particularly large public firms.

This brings up one central question: *Are Indian companies embedding their CSR initiatives and considering the implications of those ongoing CSR initiatives to achieve the SDGs in a strategic and meaningful constructive approach?* Though some corporations have increasingly taken affirmative steps in supporting education, clean energy, and rural development initiatives, there are many more that regard CSR as a compliance issue; and, accordingly the degree of realised impact, the transparency that impact is meaningful to the SDG targets, and ultimately the quality of reporting continues to vary greatly across the board.

This research paper seeks to explore the CSR and SDG dynamic in India; in particular it will assess how select Indian corporations are embedding SDGs in their CSR strategies and implementation. The study will include detailed case studies and comparative analyses to assess level of alignment, determine best practices, innovative practices, and to provide practical advice to improve CSR - SDG synergy in Indian business contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and its evolution have been the focus of a wealth of academic and policy-based dialog. In all the discussion that the evolution of CSR has provoked, the focus of CSR has evolved from philanthropy and community donations to a broader strategy for integrating social, environmental, and ethical considerations into the way a business operates and interacts with its stakeholders (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). In India, this process has not only been fueled by public expectations of businesses, but by the legal requirements contained in the Companies Act of 2013.

CSR has conceptual roots that are closely aligned with *Stakeholder Theory*. Stakeholder Theory stresses that businesses must be responsible for their impact on everyone that is impacted by their business (Freeman, 1984). This includes all stakeholders, employees, customers, communities, and most importantly the environment. A second line of thinking based on the concept of *Creating Shared Value* (Porter & Kramer, 2011) argues that businesses can capture competitive advantages, while providing economic and social advances to the communities they operate in. Both constructs are valuable in understanding how CSR can assist in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Sustainable Development Goals were adopted in 2015 by the United Nations as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure peace and prosperity for all people. The sustainable development goals are 17 goals containing 169 targets that are applicable to private enterprises and civil society, as well as to governments (United Nations, 2015). Across various sectors, it has been specifically called upon for businesses to align their operations and take action with respect to the SDGs and report on their contributions through frameworks such as the *SDG Compass,* developed by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), the UN Global Compact and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (GRI et al., 2015).

In India, the CSR–SDG relationship is particularly relevant. As a pioneer in requiring CSR spending, India's compulsory spending has provided an institutional avenue for businesses to mobilise funds towards development. A KPMG India report, for example, explored how companies have been increasingly aligning their CSR activities with SDG-related themes such as education (SDG 4), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), health and well-being (SDG 3), and poverty eradication (SDG 1) (KPMG, 2017). Even so, CSR development aligned to SDGs at the stakeholder level provides a different indication of effectiveness and varied approaches. While some firms have been well aligned on SDG frameworks in terms of impact and reporting, other firms have limited recognition or engagement.

There have been numerous attempts by a collection of scholars to measure CSR–SDG alignment efficacy. D'Souza and Jha (2022), for example, frame mapping existing CSR programmes to SDGs as a basic requirement and suggest that for just alignment as a business practice, intentionality through outcome-based planning; ongoing behavioural engagement; and a measurable impact are key pillars for establishing corporate

legitimacy. Chakraborty (2023) also noted in their study a lack of reporting practices, particularly among mid-sized companies who may still lack internal capability or awareness of SDG frameworks.

A comparison has shown discrepancies even on an international basis. While multinational companies are engaging these formative criteria of using SDG-aligned reporting tools, such as the GRI and the Standards and the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) frameworks, the greatest challenge remains connecting actual social impact measurement with a useful approach, as opposed to merely a symbolic compliance (Scheyvens et al., 2016). Our challenges further emerge within developed economies with respect to the connection of CSR for longer-term value and sustainable development.

This research suggests a growing awareness of CSR–SDG alignment as a strategic imperative. There are still gaps in measurement, transparency, and long-term commitment that remain. Each trajectory demonstrates an imperative for more empirical research, particularly at a national level, that can explore how companies in India are connecting CSR and SDG alignment in-practice; what approaches are working; the challenges that have prevented adoption by businesses; and models that present the most opportunity.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a *qualitative, case-based approach* to evaluate how Indian companies are aligning their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The focus is on understanding the *strategic intent, implementation mechanisms, and measurable outcomes* of CSR programmes mapped to SDGs.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

Given the nature of the research objective, evaluating strategy and practice across diverse corporate settings, a *multiple case study method* has been used. This allows for a contextual, in-depth analysis of selected corporations and their approaches to CSR–SDG integration. The method is exploratory and interpretive in nature, suitable for examining evolving practices rather than testing a fixed hypothesis.

3.2 SELECTION CRITERIA

Five Indian companies were selected based on the following parameters:
- Listed in the Top 100 companies on the National Stock Exchange (NSE) by market capitalisation.
- Recognised for CSR innovation and sustainability reporting (awards, rankings, or positive independent assessments).
- Publicly available CSR and sustainability reports from 2020 to 2023.
- Diversity in sectoral representation (FMCG, IT, manufacturing, energy, and conglomerates).

The five companies selected are:

1. Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL)
2. Tata Group (Tata Sustainability Group)
3. ITC Limited
4. Reliance Industries Limited
5. Infosys Limited

3.3 DATA SOURCES

The research relies on *secondary data*, collected from:

- CSR and sustainability reports available on company websites
- Official submissions to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (CSR disclosures)
- SDG alignment reports using frameworks like the GRI Standards, SDG Compass, and Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) guidelines issued by SEBI
- Independent databases such as CSRBOX, KPMG reports, NITI Aayog's SDG India Index, and relevant media coverage

Wherever available, company disclosures using GRI or SASB reporting frameworks were analysed for consistency and completeness of SDG alignment.

3.4 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Each case study was analysed using the following steps:

- *Context:* Overview of the company and its CSR philosophy
- *SDG Linkage:* Identification of primary SDGs addressed through CSR
- *Programme Strategy:* Planning, execution model (direct/NGO/public-private), and delivery mechanisms
- *Measurement:* Qualitative and quantitative indicators of impact
- *Reporting and Transparency:* Nature and format of sustainability reporting

A cross-case synthesis was conducted to identify common patterns, best practices, and gaps.

3.5 LIMITATIONS

- The research is limited to secondary data, which may not be reflective of implementation issues on the ground.

- Smaller and mid-cap companies were excluded from the research.
- Only publicly disclosed data was used; some activities and initiatives might be missed due to potential under-reporting.

Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a solid basis for insight into how leading Indian companies are adopting a CSR–SDG agenda, in a considered, strategic, and structured manner.

4. OBJECTIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this study is to explore how leading Indian firms are aligning their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) work with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite CSR being part of Indian corporate culture for decades, CSR spending is formalized under the Companies Act, 2013 and the accepted SDGs goals in 2015 have allowed for further expectations and opportunities for firms to act as agents of sustainable change.

This research will explore the *strategic intent, delivery practices and impact reporting systems* adopted by large Indian firms in aligning their CSR efforts with specific SDG targets. Findings from this study include case studies of five large Indian companies, allowing the researchers to identify and analyze *patterns* the firms are experiencing in CSR-SDG alignment, including success stories, areas of *innovation* and identified *gaps.*

This study is important because of its contribution to existing literature on sustainable business practices in India, especially given the rapid developments after 2015 when the SDGs became globally accepted. It provides a helpful reference for pro-business managers, CSR professionals, and policy makers on how to design, implement, and improve CSR programmes that will make a meaningful contribution to either national or global development goals. In comparison to international practices to the extent possible, it helps put India's corporate sector engagement in the sustainability conversation.

By studying how Indian Government and NITI Aayog can track the ultimate goals set out in the SDGs through measuring, tracking and promoting successful mapping processes across various states and sectors, it can contribute to the broader national agenda. The identified findings can serve as helpful reference points for more responsible business activity platforms to strengthen *public-private partnerships,* support *impact measurement,* and establish frameworks for *inclusive development.*

5. RESEARCH IN DETAIL

This section includes five case studies of prominent Indian companies which are underway with their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities aimed at specific United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In each case study, we highlight the company's approach, implementation model, impact and integration with UN SDGs. We then present a comparative synthesis to draw out some common trends.

5.1 HINDUSTAN UNILEVER LIMITED (HUL)

SDG Focus: SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation, SDG 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production

HUL is one of the largest FMCG companies in India and has long been associated with health, hygiene and sustainability. The *"Swachh Aadat, Swachh Bharat"* initiative is its flagship initiative aimed at driving a behavioral change around hygiene and sanitation in rural and semi urban India. The focus of the programme includes handwashing with soap, using toilets, and safe drinking water practice, which directly contributes to *SDG 6* (Unilever, 2023).

Through its *"Project Prabhat",* HUL works closely with communities around its factories to promote livelihood enhancement, sustainable agriculture, and waste management, aligning with *SDG 12.* As part of its circular economic approach, the company has committed to making 100% of its plastic packaging recyclable, reusable, or compostable by 2025. In 2022 alone, HUL claimed to collect and process over 100,000 tonnes of post-consumer plastic waste (HUL, 2023).

HUL's approach stands out for its integration with business goals. For example, Hygiene behavioural change indirectly boosts demand for its own products, demonstrating a *"shared value"* strategy in line with Porter and Kramer's model (2011).

5.2 TATA GROUP (TATA SUSTAINABILITY GROUP)

SDG Focus: SDG 1 – No Poverty, SDG 4 – Quality Education

Tata Group, through its various entities (Tata Steel, Tata Motors, TCS, and Tata Trusts), has long been recognised for its commitment to inclusive development. *Tata STRIVE,* a skill development initiative targeting underprivileged youth, directly supports *SDG 1 and SDG 4* by enabling economic empowerment through vocational education and placement assistance.

Another major initiative is *Tata ClassEdge,* an ed-tech programme delivering digital learning content to more than 1,20,000 classrooms across India. Tata Trusts also supports foundational literacy through programmes like *Parag* and *Room to Read India* collaborations (Tata Trusts, 2022).

What sets Tata apart is the scale and institutionalisation of its CSR architecture. Unlike companies that delegate CSR to a department, Tata's *Sustainability Group* works across group companies to ensure alignment with SDG targets and tracks progress using structured impact indicators, a model few Indian conglomerates have adopted to such depth.

5.3 ITC LIMITED

SDG Focus: SDG 13 – Climate Action, SDG 15 – Life on Land

ITC is widely recognised for its commitment to environmental sustainability. Its *social forestry programme,* which covers over 9,00,000 acres and has generated over 150 million person-days of employment, directly supports *SDG 15* by combating land degradation and encouraging biodiversity (ITC, 2023).

The company is also carbon positive for 18 consecutive years, water positive for 21 years, and solid waste recycling positive for 16 years, positioning it as a global sustainability leader in the FMCG and agri-business space. These achievements link strongly to *SDG 13* (climate action), particularly given the company's large supply chain footprint across rural India.

ITC uses an integrated CSR model: from climate-resilient agriculture (e-Choupal) to energy-efficient operations and paper recycling units. The *Mission Sunehra Kal* umbrella programme brings together water, sanitation, livelihoods, and biodiversity under one cohesive CSR–SDG strategy (Singh & Ramesh, 2021).

5.4 RELIANCE INDUSTRIES LIMITED (RIL)

SDG Focus: SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy, SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Reliance Industries, India's largest private sector company, has been pivoting toward clean energy through massive investments in solar, green hydrogen, and battery storage, aligning with *SDG 7.* The *Reliance New Energy Solar Ltd.* arm aims to build 100 GW of solar energy capacity by 2030, part of a broader ₹75,000 crore clean energy commitment (RIL Annual Report, 2022).

Through its *Reliance Foundation,* the company has implemented thousands of rural infrastructure projects, from roads and irrigation systems to digital health centres, contributing to SDG 9. During the COVID-19

pandemic, Reliance set up India's first COVID hospital and distributed over 100 million meals to the underprivileged showcasing rapid infrastructure mobilisation and cross-sector collaboration.

Though RIL's traditional core business in oil and petrochemicals raised questions in earlier sustainability reviews, the shift toward green energy and rural digital infrastructure signals a reimagining of its long-term CSR–SDG strategy.

5.5 INFOSYS LIMITED

SDG Focus: SDG 4 – Quality Education, SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth

Infosys has a long-standing record of investing in education and digital empowerment. Through its *Infosys Foundation,* it supports school infrastructure, girl child education, and rural library development. The company also runs *Infosys Springboard,* an online learning platform that offers digital and soft skills training to more than 2 million learners, aligning with *SDG 4* (Infosys, 2023).

Infosys is also one of the few Indian IT companies that actively promote *decent work practices (SDG 8)* with measurable ESG goals: zero gender pay gap, equal opportunity hiring, and robust employee wellbeing programmes. The company is consistently ranked among India's best employers by the Great Place to Work Institute.

Unlike many firms that report CSR and ESG separately, Infosys integrates both in its annual sustainability disclosures. It follows the GRI framework and aligns with SASB for investor transparency, a practice still evolving among Indian peers.

5.6 CASE SUMMARY AND EMERGING INSIGHTS

The five case studies collectively reveal that Indian corporates are increasingly aligning their CSR initiatives with the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the *approaches, tools, and strategic depth differ across companies.* While some firms view CSR as an integral part of business strategy, others focus more on programme delivery without robust impact frameworks. Below are the key patterns observed:

- *Hindustan Unilever Limited* takes a behavioural-change approach through initiatives like *Swachh Aadat, Swachh Bharat,* and supports circular economy principles via plastic waste management. Its SDG alignment primarily targets *SDG 6* (Clean Water and Sanitation) and *SDG 12* (Responsible Consumption and Production). The company uses *GRI Standards and SDG Compass* to guide sustainability reporting.

- *Tata Group,* through Tata Trusts and its corporate entities, integrates CSR with *SDG 1* (No Poverty) and SDG 4 (Quality Education). It operates with a centralised sustainability vision across companies, uses internal SDG mapping tools, and publishes structured data through *BRSR (Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting)* disclosures.

- *ITC Limited* aligns its initiatives with *SDG 13* (Climate Action) and *SDG 15* (Life on Land) through social forestry, water stewardship, and sustainable livelihoods. The company stands out for being water, carbon, and solid waste positive for multiple years, and reports through *GRI-based frameworks.*

- *Reliance Industries* is repositioning itself as a clean energy leader with heavy investments under *SDG 7* (Affordable and Clean Energy) and *SDG 9* (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure). Its CSR arm, Reliance Foundation, also contributes to rural infrastructure and digital healthcare. The company uses integrated sustainability reports, though detailed SDG mappings are evolving.

- *Infosys* focuses on *SDG 4* (Quality Education) and *SDG 8* (Decent Work and Economic Growth), especially through digital skilling and inclusive workplace policies. It reports using *GRI Standards, SASB,* and aligns with *UN Global Compact (UNGC)* principles, showcasing one of the most integrated CSR–SDG reporting approaches in India's IT sector.

Across these cases, firms that demonstrate stronger CSR–SDG alignment tend to have *centralised strategies, clear impact indicators, and multi-stakeholder partnerships.* Nonetheless, challenges remain in standardising impact metrics and ensuring consistent third-party evaluation. These insights serve as a foundation for this research paper analysis.

6. CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how major Indian companies are aligning their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a global framework aimed at addressing some of the most pressing challenges of our time. Through in-depth case studies of five Indian corporations namely, Hindustan Unilever, Tata Group, ITC Limited, Reliance Industries, and Infosys, the research examined whether CSR practices in India are evolving from compliance-driven models to more strategic and outcome-oriented approaches. The findings suggest that while many companies have indeed started integrating the SDGs into their CSR frameworks, the depth of alignment and the sophistication of impact measurement vary significantly across the corporate landscape.

Several encouraging trends have emerged. Leading companies are increasingly adopting sustainability reporting tools such as the GRI Standards, SDG Compass, and Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) frameworks to disclose their efforts more transparently. Initiatives such as Tata's skill development programmes, ITC's carbon and water positive milestones, and Infosys's digital education platforms show a conscious alignment with both national development priorities and global sustainability benchmarks (KPMG, 2017; GRI et al., 2015). These examples reflect a shift towards long-term thinking and stakeholder inclusion, echoing earlier theoretical frameworks such as stakeholder theory and shared value creation (Freeman, 1984; Porter & Kramer, 2011).

At the same time, challenges remain. The study observed that many companies continue to focus on inputs and outputs such as the number of beneficiaries or rupees spent, rather than outcomes and impact. While larger firms with mature sustainability teams are setting clear SDG targets, smaller or mid-sized enterprises often lack the capacity or expertise to measure change in a meaningful way (Chakraborty, 2023). Furthermore, third-party impact validation, multi-stakeholder engagement, and long-term programme continuity are areas that require further attention.

By addressing these questions, the study fulfils its core research objectives and contributes to the broader literature on sustainable business in India. It offers practical insights for corporate leaders seeking to align CSR with strategic business goals while supporting national and global development agendas. For scholars and policymakers, the paper provides evidence of emerging best practices and persistent gaps in the CSR–SDG alignment process.

These insights pave the way for targeted recommendations that can help Indian companies move beyond symbolic compliance and truly embed sustainability into their core decision-making processes. As India continues its journey towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, the role of businesses will be central, not just as donors or enablers, but as active co-creators of a more inclusive and sustainable future.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study highlight several opportunities for Indian corporations to strengthen the alignment between their Corporate Social Responsibility activities and the Sustainable Development Goals. While progress is visible among large companies, there is still scope to make CSR more outcome-driven, inclusive, and strategically aligned with national and global development goals. The following recommendations are based on insights from the case studies, supported by academic literature and global best practices.

- *Starting with Clear Mapping of CSR Projects to the Sustainable Development Goals:* Many companies tend to align their CSR programmes with the Sustainable Development Goals only at the reporting stage. To make real impact, the mapping must begin at the planning stage itself. Organisations should refer to tools like the Sustainable Development Goal Compass, developed by the Global Reporting Initiative, the United Nations Global Compact, and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, which guides companies in integrating the goals into their strategy and operations (Global Reporting Initiative et al., 2015). Companies can create internal mapping frameworks that link each CSR project to specific Sustainable Development Goal targets and indicators, ensuring clarity from day one.

- *Focusing on Measuring Outcomes and Long-Term Impact:* Large number of CSR reports still highlight inputs such as the amount spent or number of people reached. While this information is useful, it does not reveal the real differences made in people's lives or the environment. Companies should use "Theory of Change" or similar models to establish a logical link between activities and the expected results. For example, instead of only reporting the number of children enrolled in a digital education programme, companies could also track improvements in learning levels or transition to higher education. Third-party evaluations, community feedback, and follow-up assessments after project completion can help measure outcomes and guide course corrections (D'Souza & Jha, 2022).

- *Strengthening Collaboration with Government and Civil Society:* Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives become more impactful when implemented in partnership with local governments, non-governmental organisations, and academic institutions. Public-private partnerships can help scale up successful interventions and ensure alignment with local development priorities. State governments and district administrations in India are already working on area-specific Sustainable Development Goal plans, and companies can plug into these efforts for better results (KPMG, 2017). Tata Group's multi-partner education programmes and Reliance's rural infrastructure initiatives offer useful templates for other companies to follow.

- *Improving Sustainable Development Goal Reporting and Transparency:* Most companies now disclose their Corporate Social Responsibility activities in their annual reports or standalone sustainability reports. However, very few present clear and structured reports based on Sustainable Development Goal targets. Companies can improve this by using established sustainability frameworks like the Global Reporting Initiative Standards, the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) format by the Securities and Exchange Board of India, or the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board indicators, depending on their size and sector. Simplifying language and segmenting reports according to the Sustainable Development Goals can also help make them more accessible to a wider audience, including investors, community stakeholders, and policymakers (Scheyvens et al., 2016).

- *Building Internal Capacity for Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility:* Strategic alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals requires more than just intent. It needs skilled people within the organisation. Companies should invest in training their Corporate Social Responsibility teams, sustainability officers, and even business unit leaders in areas like social impact assessment, sustainability reporting, and participatory development. Collaborations with development think tanks, universities, and non-governmental organisations can support this effort. Some companies may also consider setting up internal knowledge centres or cross-functional teams dedicated to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals through business operations and Corporate Social Responsibility programmes.

- *Promoting Innovation through Thematic and Community-Led Approaches:* While compliance with the Companies Act remains important, companies should also create space for experimentation and innovation. Setting aside a portion of the Corporate Social Responsibility budget for pilot projects, community innovation challenges, or partnerships with social enterprises can bring in new solutions to development problems. For instance, supporting early-stage startups working on clean drinking water, sustainable agriculture, or inclusive education can help companies fulfil multiple Sustainable Development Goals at once. Encouraging employee participation through volunteering, mentoring, or ideation challenges can also deepen engagement with communities and strengthen impact.

- Aligning Corporate Social Responsibility More Closely with Core Business Strengths: One of the most effective ways to sustain long-term development impact is by aligning Corporate Social Responsibility with the company's core competencies. For example, technology companies can contribute to digital education and skill development (as Infosys has done), consumer goods companies can work on sanitation and hygiene (like Hindustan Unilever), and energy companies can focus on clean and renewable solutions (as seen with Reliance Industries). This alignment not only builds brand credibility but also ensures that CSR is not a standalone activity but part of the company's value system and operations (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

In summary, Indian companies have a real opportunity to lead the way in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by embedding sustainability into the heart of their Corporate Social Responsibility practices. By being intentional, collaborative, and transparent, they can contribute meaningfully to India's development agenda and set global benchmarks for responsible business.

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