CSR TIMES

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INDIA'S NO. 1 CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY MAGAZINE

GAIL INDIA LTD.
CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF FLAGSHIP
CSR PROJECT - 'GAIL UTKARSH'

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HARISH CHANDRA

THIS YEAR, THE GOVERNMENT'S VISIONARY POLICIES, INCLUDING THE NATIONAL CSR FRAMEWORK, HAVE ELEVATED CSR FROM A REGULATORY REQUIREMENT TO A STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE. WITH INCENTIVES FOR IMPACTFUL PROJECTS AND A FOCUS ON TRANSPARENCY, THESE INITIATIVES ARE PAVING THE WAY FOR COMPANIES TO INTEGRATE SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS INTO THEIR CORE STRATEGIES.

Forging Pathways for Impactful CSR in 2025

Dear Readers,

As we step into 2025, the transformative potential of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has never been more evident. The initiatives highlighted in this issue of CSR TIMES remind us of the powerful role businesses play in addressing critical social and environmental challenges.

From supporting quality education through programs like "GAIL Utkarsh" to advancing sustainable practices in waste management and renewable energy, Indian corporates are leading by example. These efforts are not just bridging gaps but are actively creating opportunities for a brighter, more equitable future.

This year, the government's visionary policies, including the National CSR Framework, have elevated CSR from a regulatory requirement to a strategic imperative. With incentives for impactful projects and a focus on transparency, these initiatives are paving the way for companies to integrate social and environmental goals into their core strategies.

In this issue, we delve into stories that showcase how CSR is being harnessed to empower communities, promote education, and address pressing global challenges like climate change. We also explore the intersection of innovation and social responsibility, where technology-driven solutions are revolutionizing traditional CSR models.

The year ahead holds immense promise, but it also calls for collective action. Let us commit to leveraging CSR as a catalyst for sustainable development, fostering collaborations, and ensuring that every initiative leaves a lasting impact on society and the planet.

Happy reading, and here's to a transformative 2025!

Warm regards,

Harish Chandra
Editor, CSR TIMES

PERSPECTIVE
CSR and Sustainability in India: From Jugaad to Impact

India, a land of vibrant festivals, spicy curries, and unparalleled jugaad (the art of frugal innovation), has embraced Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability with the enthusiasm of a cricket fan during an India-Pakistan match. While generosity has always been part of our DNA, embedding it into corporate strategies has been both an enlightening and amusing journey.

Imagine this: a corporate head honcho touts his company's green initiatives while sipping tea from a biodegradable cup. Behind him, employees shuffle between meetings, occasionally stopping by the "plant a tree" booth in the cafeteria. Welcome to CSR with a dash of Indian flair!

India's CSR journey officially kicked off in 2014, courtesy of the Companies Act mandating 2% of profits for social good. Initially, many corporations thought this meant putting up a few water coolers in villages. Fast forward to today, and CSR has become a playground for tackling everything from clean energy to digital literacy, all while giving compliance officers a reason to smile.

Take renewable energy, for example. While the world talks about solar panels and electric cars, Indian firms are lighting up remote villages with solar-powered lamps and low-cost cookstoves. Tata Power's microgrid initiatives and Reliance's green energy push are brightening lives—and occasionally confusing cows wandering into these solar-powered utopias.

Waste management, too, is getting its moment in the sun. Programs like ITC's "Well-being Out of Waste" are teaching urban Indians to separate "wet" and "dry" waste—although some still confuse these with tea varieties. Meanwhile, startups are turning plastic waste into roads tough enough to endure pothole-loving drivers. Education is another CSR darling. Initiatives like "GAIL Utkarsh" are turning aspiring students into top-tier engineers, ensuring India's reputation as the world's tech hub remains intact. And then there's healthcare, where companies like Biocon are creating affordable solutions for underserved communities, blending compassion with commerce.

In India, CSR and sustainability are about more than just glossy annual reports. They're a testament to the country's ingenuity, heart, and ability to turn challenges into opportunities. The journey may be peppered with potholes—both literal and figurative—but with a touch of humor and a lot of heart, India's corporate sector is steering towards a greener, fairer future. On a recycled-tire bicycle, of course!

Prashant Das
Associate editor

FEEDBACK

CSR TIMES

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COVER STORY

INTEGRATING SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS INTO THE CSR AGENDA IN 2025

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

In 2025, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has emerged as more than a moral compass; it is now a fundamental pillar of business strategy. With the world facing escalating challenges such as climate change, inequality, and dwindling natural resources, organizations are embracing their role as agents of change. This shift reflects a confluence of societal expectations, regulatory pressures, and the rising importance of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks alongside the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

From philanthropy-driven origins, CSR has evolved into a sophisticated approach that integrates social and environmental priorities into the very fabric of business operations. Let's explore how forward-thinking companies are using innovation to address global challenges while creating long-term value, supported by case studies of industry leaders setting benchmarks for sustainability.

CSR's Transformation in 2025

Historically rooted in charitable donations and community welfare initiatives, CSR has grown into a strategic necessity for businesses. In 2025, organizations face scrutiny not only from consumers but also from investors and policymakers who demand accountability beyond financial performance. Today's CSR is measured by its tangible contributions to environmental preservation, social equity, and ethical governance.

ESG Goals: The Backbone of Modern CSR

The ESG framework has become the driving force behind modern CSR, offering businesses a roadmap to achieve sustainable growth while addressing critical global concerns. Companies are implementing ESG initiatives to:

- **Combat Climate Change:** By reducing emissions and transitioning to renewable energy sources.
- **Promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI):** Building a more inclusive workforce.
- **Strengthen Ethical Governance**: Ensuring transparency and accountability in decision-making.
- **Invest in Communities**: Supporting education, healthcare, and local development.

Aligning CSR with the SDGs

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations serve as a universal framework for sustainability efforts. Businesses are leveraging these goals to design impactful strategies targeting key areas such as:

- **Climate Action (SDG 13):** Pioneering carbon-neutral initiatives.

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

- **Gender Equality (SDG 5):** Promoting women's leadership and empowerment.
- **Quality Education (SDG 4):** Closing educational gaps to foster future-ready talent.
- **Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12):** Embracing circular economy models.

Industry Innovations in Sustainability

Technology Sector: Leaders in Green Innovation
Tech giants like Microsoft and Google exemplify sustainable innovation. Microsoft's groundbreaking "Carbon

Removal" program underpins its pledge to be carbon-negative by 2030. Google's $5.75 billion "Sustainability Bond" finances renewable energy projects, energy-efficient infrastructure, and community housing.

Automotive Sector: Driving the Electric Revolution
Electric vehicles (EVs) are reshaping the automotive industry. Tesla's leadership has spurred traditional automakers like Ford and General Motors to accelerate their electrification strategies. Ethical sourcing of raw materials like cobalt, integral to EV batteries, has also become a priority, with companies partnering with NGOs to ensure supply chain integrity.

Retail Sector: Championing the Circular Economy
Retailers such as H&M and IKEA are embedding sustainability into their business models. H&M's "Conscious Collection" uses eco-friendly materials, while IKEA's climate-

Challenges and the Road Ahead

Despite progress, embedding social and environmental priorities into business agendas is fraught with hurdles, including high costs, difficulties in impact measurement, and navigating complex regulatory landscapes. Collaborative efforts with governments, NGOs, and industry partners are proving essential to overcoming these barriers.

Looking forward, the companies poised to succeed are those that:

1. **Embed CSR into Core Values**: Sustainability must permeate every level of the organization.
2. **Adopt a Long-Term Vision**: Investments in sustainability yield lasting benefits.
3. **Foster Transparency:** Openly communicating successes and challenges builds stakeholder trust.

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

positive initiatives and furniture rental programs aim to reduce waste.

Exemplary Case Studies

- **Unilever**: The "Sustainable Living Plan" has helped reduce its supply chain emissions by 64% since 2010. Through initiatives like Project Shakti, it empowers women entrepreneurs in rural India, combining SDGs 5 (Gender Equality) and 8 (Decent Work).
- **Patagonia**: Known for its environmental activism, Patagonia donates 1% of sales to conservation efforts. Its "Worn Wear" program encourages reuse, aligning with circular economy principles.
- **Mahindra Group:** Under its "Rise for Good" initiative, the group's afforestation projects and renewable energy ventures address climate and social equity.
- **Tata Group:** Tata Power and Tata Steel lead sustainability efforts, from installing rural solar microgrids to promoting water conservation.
- **Infosys**: Achieving carbon neutrality in 2020, the IT leader supports education and healthcare through its foundation while fostering inclusivity through hiring initiatives.

Innovations Powering the ESG Agenda

The integration of cutting-edge technologies is accelerating CSR progress:

- **Artificial Intelligence**: Optimizing energy use and reducing waste.
- **Blockchain**: Ensuring transparency and ethical sourcing in supply chains.
- **Green Financing**: Sustainability-linked loans and bonds incentivize responsible corporate practices.

Conclusion

As the world navigates an era of heightened social and environmental awareness, CSR in 2025 stands at the forefront of a global transformation. Companies that integrate sustainability into their DNA are not just meeting today's demands—they are setting the stage for a more equitable, resilient future. While the journey is far from over, the innovations and commitments of today's leaders inspire hope for a sustainable tomorrow.

In a world where opportunities often remain out of reach for the deserving, GAIL (India) Limited has taken a bold step to rewrite the narrative. Guided by its unwavering dedication to creating a brighter and more equitable future, GAIL has made education the cornerstone of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) vision.

Recognizing that quality education holds the key to unlocking potential and driving sustainable development, GAIL's initiatives address the most pressing challenges faced by underserved communities—education, employment, and healthcare. At the heart of these efforts lies a flagship program that is nothing short of transformative: GAIL Utkarsh.

GAIL INDIA LTD.
CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF FLAGSHIP CSR PROJECT - 'GAIL UTKARSH'

GAIL Utkarsh: Igniting the Spark of Ambition

Launched in 2009, GAIL Utkarsh is more than a program; it's a lifeline for economically disadvantaged yet immensely talented students. By targeting aspiring engineers from Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, this initiative opens the doors to India's most prestigious institutions like IITs and NITs. Through scholarships and high-quality coaching, GAIL Utkarsh ensures that no dream is abandoned due to financial constraints.

From its humble beginnings with 23 students, the program has grown into a movement of inspiration and achievement. By

2023-24, the initiative's reach had expanded exponentially, with over 1379 students appearing for its written test—a testament to its impact and the hope it has sparked in countless young minds. With a success rate of 91%, more than 1250 students have gained admissions into prestigious IITs, NITs and reputed engineering colleges across nation.

The true magic of GAIL Utkarsh lies in its ripple effect.

Every student who steps into this program carries not just their own aspirations but also the potential to uplift their communities. This initiative goes beyond academic success—it empowers individuals to transform their worlds, creating a legacy of progress and possibility.

As GAIL continues to fuel the dreams of the next generation, it stands firm in its belief that education is the most powerful catalyst for change. With every student it empowers, GAIL reaffirms its promise to build a future where no talent is wasted, and no dream is left unrealized.

Because at GAIL, tomorrow isn't just another day—it's a world of endless possibilities.

Shri Ayush Gupta
Director (HR), GAIL India Ltd

"Education is not merely a pathway to individual success; it is the cornerstone of thriving communities and a progressive nation. At GAIL, we deeply value the transformative power of education and are wholeheartedly committed to nurturing young talent through our flagship CSR initiative, GAIL Utkarsh. Every dream realized through this initiative is not just a personal triumph—it reinforces our belief in building a society enriched with educated, empowered, and dependable youth ready to shape a brighter future."

Mr. Saiyam Saxena
Gail Utkarsh Super-100, Kanpur (2020-21)
NIT Bhopal (Computer Science and Engineering)
Software Engineer-1 (CISCO, Bengaluru)

As I reflect on my transformative journey with CSRL through Super-100, Kanpur Centre, I am reminded of the invaluable lessons learned and experiences gained here along with the outstanding academics. The coaching for IIT-JEE and mentorship I received at CSRL laid the foundation for my personal growth and professional success.

After the counselling, I was able to secure a seat at NIT Bhopal in my undergraduate degree in Computer Science and Engineering. I applied the principles learned at GUS-100, Kanpur to academic excellence. I actively engaged in various extracurricular activities as I was the Head of Sponsorship and Marketing at Indian Society for Technical Education, MANIT which honed my skills in teamwork, communication, and innovation. The strong foundation laid by CSRL enabled me to balance academic rigor with leadership responsibilities, ultimately leading to my graduation.

In the very starting of my final year of graduation, with consistency and hard work, I am able to secure a placement offer as a software Engineer -1 at CISCO, Bengaluru.

And today I can proudly say that CSRL not only provides the best academic facilities but also empowers their students with many soft skills such as leadership, discipline and confidence.

As I embark on this new chapter in my journey, I remain committed to upholding the principles instilled in me by CSRL. I aspire to inspire others, paying it forward by sharing my experiences and insights gained through this transformative journey.

Mr. Gyaneshwar
GAIL Utkarsh Super 100, Kanpur (2019-20)
IIT Ropar (Electrical Engineering), Batch: 2020-2024
Working as Software Engineer at Aviso AI

Raised in a humble household with three siblings, I quickly understood the importance of determination and hard work in overcoming life's challenges. My father, employed at a paper factory, worked tirelessly to support us and ensure we had the essentials for a stable life. However, with limited financial resources, affording private coaching for competitive exams like JEE Advanced seemed like an unattainable dream.

From a young age, I had a strong passion for technology and problem-solving, and I aspired to study at one of the prestigious IITs. However, my dream felt distant due to our financial constraints. That's when I came across CSRL—a program designed to support students from underserved backgrounds. It was a turning point in my life.

CSRL's program was unlike anything I had encountered before. It not only provided access to quality coaching but also fostered a sense of community and belonging. The mentors were more than just educators—they were guides and motivators who believed in our potential even during moments when we doubted ourselves. Their innovative teaching methods, coupled with an emphasis on problem-solving and resilience, helped me grow both academically and personally.

The structured curriculum, mock exams, and continuous feedback at CSRL instilled in me the confidence to face the challenges of the JEE. Their holistic approach prepared me to handle not just the academic pressure but also the emotional and mental challenges that come with such high-stakes exams. When I finally secured admission to IIT Ropar, it felt like a dream come true—not just for me, but for my entire family. My father's sacrifices and relentless efforts had paid off, and I could see the pride in his eyes.

My time at IIT Ropar was transformative, providing me with a world-class education and a strong foundation for my career. After graduating, I joined Aviso AI as a software engineer, where I now contribute to cutting-edge technology solutions. The journey from a modest background to a global company was made possible by the support and mentorship I received through CSRL.

Looking back, I am deeply grateful for the opportunities CSRL provided me. It wasn't just an educational program; it was a catalyst that changed the trajectory of my life. Today, as I work on innovative projects and mentor others, I carry forward the lessons of determination, resilience, and gratitude that CSRL instilled in me. My story is a testament to the power of education and the impact of having someone believe in your dreams.

Shri NK Bharali
Director General of CSRL

"Over the years, the story of CSRL has unfolded as a testament to what relentless dedication and purpose can be achieved. With concerted efforts of all its stakeholders over the years, it has been possible to sow seeds of change, cultivating dreams and transforming lives. The journey is not just about education—it is about igniting potential, inspiring resilience, and leaving an indelible mark on the canvas of human aspiration. This journey is a testimonial to the undeniable fact that when hope and action come together, the impact is nothing short of transformative."

Mr. Gomati Prasad
GAIL Utkarsh Super 100, Uttar Pradesh (2017-2018)
IIT Roorkee (Electrical Engineering)
AAIAir Traffic Controller (Begumpet Airport, Hyderabad, Telangana)

I grew up in a small village called Nainajhala in Sant Kabir Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, as part of a large family of 15 members. My father, a stone mason, worked tirelessly to support us, but financial struggles were a constant part of our lives. Despite the challenges, I always held onto my dream of achieving something significant through education.

I aspired to study engineering at a prestigious institution like IIT. However, preparing for competitive exams like JEE seemed nearly impossible due to the lack of resources.

That's when GAIL Utkarsh Super 100, a collaboration between CSRL and GAIL, changed my life. Getting selected for this program in Kanpur was a turning point. The structured preparation, rigorous tests, and the unflinching support of the faculty and staff gave me the confidence to chase my dreams.

The program prepared me for the challenges of JEE, and in 2017, I cleared the JEE Advanced exam, earning admission to IIT Roorkee in Electrical Engineering. I still remember the questions people asked my father about how he would afford my college fees. GAIL's scholarship of ₹60,000 for the first two years not only helped pay for my education but also gave my family the

strength to believe in my journey.

In 2021, I graduated as an engineer, and I felt a strong desire to give back. I joined CSRL as an Academic Officer at the very centre where I had prepared for JEE. For three years, I worked with aspiring students, sharing my experiences and guiding them to achieve their dreams. While working at CSRL, I continued preparing for competitive exams. In 2024, I successfully cleared ICAR, SSC CGL, and AAI (Air Traffic Control) exams. I joined BARC Mumbai in September 2024, but my dream role came when I received the offer to join AAI as an Air Traffic Controller. I'll be starting this new chapter at Begumpet Airport, Hyderabad, in February 2025.

Looking back, I am filled with gratitude. GAIL Utkarsh Super 100 didn't just provide me with academic support; it gave me hope and transformed my life. My father's words, "Right practice will make you perfect," stayed with me throughout this journey. The impact of CSRL and GAIL goes far beyond individual success stories like mine. They are creating opportunities for underprivileged students across the country, empowering us to dream big and achieve what once seemed impossible.

Mr. Saurabh Jha
GAIL Utkarsh Super-100, Kanpur (2019-20)
IIT Delhi (Mathematics and Computing)
Software Engineer (Samsung, Delhi)

Growing up in a small rural village, I witnessed first-hand the struggles of my family to make ends meet. My father, a hardworking farmer, ensured we had the basics, but financial constraints often overshadowed my dreams of pursuing quality education. Despite the odds, my fascination with mathematics and science kept my aspirations alive, fueling my ambition to study at the prestigious IIT Delhi.

The turning point in my journey came when I learned about CSRL through a senior from my school. The initiative is a beacon of hope for students from underprivileged backgrounds, offering them the tools and guidance to break barriers and chase their dreams. I applied to the program with hope, and being selected felt like the first step toward a brighter future.

At CSRL, the rigorous academic framework and the unwavering support of the faculty transformed my potential into performance. The structured curriculum, coupled with regular mock tests and feedback sessions, honed my problem-solving abilities and boosted my confidence. The program's focus on conceptual clarity was pivotal in my preparation for the highly competitive JEE Advanced exam.

CSRL instilled in me a sense of discipline and resilience. The collaborative environment, where students and mentors worked together with a shared purpose, was truly inspiring. The result of this combined effort was life-changing: I secured admission to IIT Delhi.

This achievement was not just a personal milestone but also a moment of immense pride for my family and my community. It reinforced the belief that with the right guidance and determination, even the most ambitious dreams are within reach.

CSRL's collaboration with GAIL exemplifies the transformative power of education and corporate social responsibility. Together, they have not only opened doors for countless underprivileged students like me but also demonstrated the profound impact of investing in human potential. My story is just one among many that stand as a testament to their vision and commitment.

Today, as I embark on this new chapter at IIT Delhi, I carry with me not just the hopes of my family but also the gratitude for the opportunities made possible by CSRL and GAIL. Their combined efforts have not just transformed my life—they have empowered a ripple of change that will continue to inspire generations.

At IIT Delhi, I gained exposure to advanced technology and was challenged to think critically and innovate. The rigorous academic environment and diverse community helped me grow both professionally and personally. Upon graduating, I joined Samsung in Delhi as a software engineer, where I now contribute to projects aimed at delivering impactful technological solutions. Looking back, the role of CSRL in my journey is undeniable. The program provided not just academic guidance but also encouragement and mentorship.

Mr. Vikas Singh
Gail Utkarsh Super-100 ,Kanpur (2020-21)
IIT Roorkee (Electronic and Communication)

I hail from Bargadwa, a small village in the district of Maharajganj, near Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh. My father, Mr. Jayhind Singh, is a farmer, and our family's livelihood depends entirely on agriculture. Growing up in a modest household, I always dreamt of pursuing higher education and building a better future for myself and my family.

After completing senior secondary school, I began preparing for admission to a state government engineering college, hoping to secure a seat in a reputable institution. However, my performance in the UPTU exam fell short of expectations, leaving me disheartened.

The first COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 was a particularly challenging time for my family. Financial constraints made it nearly impossible to consider taking a drop year or enrolling in expensive coaching programs, which typically cost ₹2-3 lakhs. Even online lectures, priced at ₹10-15K, were beyond our reach. I hesitated to approach my father about these expenses, fully aware of our financial limitations.

At that critical juncture, a chance encounter changed my life. An uncle visiting our home mentioned CSRL, an initiative providing free, high-quality coaching for students from underprivileged backgrounds. His daughter was already enrolled in CSRL Gail Utkarsh Super 100 in Kanpur, and he encouraged me to apply. With his support and guidance, I was fortunate to secure admission to the program. It felt like a dream come true—a glimmer of hope during a difficult time. Joining CSRL marked a turning point in my life. The exceptional faculty created a supportive and transformative learning environment. They went above and beyond to ensure we mastered concepts in mathematics, physics, and chemistry. Their dedication wasn't limited to academics; they provided invaluable mental and emotional support, helping us navigate the challenges of JEE preparation.

Whenever I or my peers struggled with focus or self-doubt, the faculty and project managers personally stepped in. Their encouragement and belief in our potential reignited our determination and kept us motivated. The teachers were incredibly dedicated, often staying late after classes to address our doubts. They didn't just teach—they inspired us with life lessons and real-world examples that built our confidence and resilience. Their approach made learning engaging and accessible, helping me overcome my initial hesitation and nervousness.

The support extended beyond the classroom. The office staff were equally supportive, assisting with logistical and financial challenges. On several occasions, they helped arrange funds, often offering assistance from their own pockets, reassuring me to repay only when it was convenient. Their kindness and empathy made a profound impact on me. Today, with the unwavering support of CSRL Gail Utkarsh Super 100, I have achieved what once seemed impossible—I secured admission to IIT Roorkee in Electrical Engineering. This milestone has brought immense pride and joy to my family, my village, and everyone who stood by me.

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION IN INDIA:
HOW CSR IS BRIDGING THE LEARNING GAP

CSR Times Bureau

Education is the cornerstone of a nation's development, and in India, its transformative power is crucial to empowering millions of young minds. However, systemic challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of access to quality teaching, and socio-economic barriers persist, especially in rural and underserved areas. To address these gaps, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives by Indian companies have emerged as a powerful catalyst in transforming the education landscape. These efforts are enabling access to quality education, promoting digital learning, and fostering skill development in areas that need it the most.

Bridging the Educational Divide

The Indian Constitution guarantees the Right to Education (RTE), yet the implementation faces numerous hurdles, particularly in rural areas. Overcrowded classrooms, lack of basic facilities, and untrained teachers impede learning outcomes. CSR initiatives are increasingly stepping in to address these deficiencies by creating robust education programs that aim to leave a lasting impact.

Supporting Access to Quality Education

Many companies have adopted a

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

hands-on approach to support schools and improve educational infrastructure. For instance, Tata Steel runs the "Thousand Schools Program" to enhance the quality of primary education in rural Odisha and Jharkhand. This program focuses on capacity building for teachers, creating child-friendly infrastructure, and engaging communities to ensure long-term impact.

Similarly, Hindustan Unilever's Project Shiksha partners with schools to provide teacher training, classroom resources, and extracurricular activities to improve holistic learning. By equipping educators with modern teaching techniques and providing students with essential resources, these initiatives ensure that quality education

reaches marginalized communities.

Empowering Digital Learning

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the digital divide in education, with millions of students in rural areas unable to access online learning. Recognizing this challenge, Indian companies have leveraged technology to bridge the gap.

Infosys Foundation, through its "Digital Literacy Program," provides rural youth access to computer education and online learning platforms. The program trains teachers in using digital tools effectively, ensuring students benefit from modern teaching methods.

Similarly, HCL Technologies introduced the "HCL Foundation My

School Program," which integrates digital learning tools into school curriculums. It equips schools with smart classrooms and provides students with tablets and laptops, empowering them to stay abreast of the digital revolution.

Promoting Skill Development and Vocational Training

In addition to formal education, CSR initiatives are addressing the need for skill development to prepare students for employability in a competitive job market. Programs aimed at vocational training and entrepreneurial development have proven vital in equipping youth with skills that go beyond traditional education.

Mahindra Group's Nanhi Kali Program focuses on the education of underprivileged girls while also offering vocational training to older students. This dual approach ensures that girls not only complete their education but are also prepared for future opportunities.

Larsen & Toubro's Construction Skills Training Institutes (CSTIs) provide training in construction-related skills for rural youth, helping them secure employment in the industry. This initiative directly addresses the skill gap in India while boosting the livelihoods of underserved communities.

Fostering Holistic Development

Many CSR initiatives extend beyond academics to focus on the overall development of students. Nutrition,

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

mental health support, and extracurricular activities are being integrated into educational programs to foster holistic growth.

For example, ITC's Primary Education Program combines academic support with health and hygiene awareness, ensuring that children are physically and mentally prepared for learning. Through its Mid-Day Meal Program, Akshaya Patra, supported by corporate partners like Infosys and Wipro, ensures that children receive nutritious meals, improving attendance and learning outcomes.

Community Engagement and Sustainable Models

A standout feature of CSR-driven educational programs is their emphasis on community involvement. Many companies actively involve parents, local authorities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to ensure sustainability.

Vedanta Group's Nand Ghar Project collaborates with state governments to modernize anganwadis (childcare centers), turning them into hubs of learning, health, and nutrition. This initiative provides early childhood education and empowers mothers through skill development, ensuring a ripple effect in the community.

Challenges and the Way Forward

While the impact of CSR initiatives in education is commendable, challenges remain. Limited scalability, lack of coordination among stakeholders, and varying levels of accountability can hinder progress. To overcome these issues, companies must focus on forging partnerships, adopting data-driven approaches to measure impact, and aligning their initiatives with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Conclusion

In India, CSR is no longer limited to charitable giving; it has evolved into a transformative force in bridging the learning gap. Through targeted interventions in quality education, digital learning, and skill development, companies are not only fulfilling their social responsibility but also investing in the future of the nation. With continued efforts, CSR initiatives have the potential to create an equitable education system that empowers every child, irrespective of their socio-economic background, to realize their full potential.

The collaboration between businesses, communities, and governments is crucial to ensure that education becomes a tool for empowerment, breaking the cycle of poverty and paving the way for a brighter future. In doing so, India can take significant strides towards its vision of an educated, skilled, and prosperous society.

THE GREEN SHIFT: HOW CSR IS EMPOWERING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

By Vatika Singh
Sub Editor - CSR Times

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

Climate change, one of the most pressing challenges of our time, has sparked a global call to action. In India, this call resonates deeply as businesses take proactive steps to mitigate their environmental footprint. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a powerful mechanism driving sustainable development in the country. Indian companies are leading the charge by adopting renewable energy, reducing waste, and integrating sustainability into their core operations, proving that economic growth and environmental stewardship can go hand in hand.

The Role of CSR in Addressing Climate Change

India's CSR mandate under the Companies Act, 2013, requires qualifying businesses to allocate 2% of their profits towards social and environmental causes. While early CSR initiatives were predominantly philanthropic, the focus has shifted towards addressing long-term sustainability challenges. In light of the global climate crisis, companies are increasingly aligning their CSR efforts with India's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2070 and

meeting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Renewable Energy Adoption: Powering a Green Future

One of the most significant contributions of CSR in combating climate change is the adoption of renewable energy. Leading Indian conglomerates are making substantial investments in solar, wind, and biomass energy projects.

Reliance Industries Limited (RIL), for instance, has pledged to become net carbon zero by 2035. Through its New Energy Business, RIL is investing heavily in solar panel manufacturing and green hydrogen technology. Adani Group, another industrial giant, has committed $50 billion over the next decade to develop 45 GW of renewable energy capacity, making India a global hub for clean energy.

These initiatives are not just reducing greenhouse gas emissions but

also creating jobs in the green energy sector, contributing to economic growth while safeguarding the environment. Smaller enterprises and startups are also leveraging CSR funds to implement localized solar and wind energy solutions, particularly in rural areas with limited access to electricity.

Waste Management and Reduction

Waste management has emerged as a critical area of focus for CSR in India, given the country's escalating waste generation problem. Indian companies are addressing this issue by promoting waste reduction, recycling, and circular economy practices.

ITC Limited's Wellbeing Out of Waste (WOW) program has set a benchmark in urban waste management. By educating households about segregation and recycling, the program has reached over 1,200

municipalities and collected thousands of tons of recyclable waste. Similarly, Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) has implemented a Plastic Circular Economy initiative, ensuring that all its plastic packaging is reusable, recyclable, or compostable by 2025.

Innovative startups, often supported by CSR funding, are creating eco-friendly solutions such as bioplastics, upcycled products, and waste-to-energy technologies. These initiatives not only reduce landfill contributions but also raise awareness about responsible consumption and production patterns.

Water Conservation and Sustainable Agriculture

Water scarcity is another pressing issue exacerbated by climate change. Indian businesses are using CSR programs to enhance water conservation and support sustainable agriculture.

Tata Steel's Thrive Water Security Program exemplifies efforts to improve water management in drought-prone regions. By building check dams, rejuvenating water bodies, and implementing efficient irrigation systems, the initiative has benefited thousands of farmers and communities. Meanwhile, Mahindra & Mahindra's Project Hariyali promotes sustainable agriculture through afforestation drives and training for farmers on eco-friendly practices.

These programs reflect how businesses are addressing water-related challenges holistically, ensuring both ecological and socio-economic benefits.

Energy Efficiency and Carbon Reduction

Beyond renewable energy, Indian companies are optimizing their energy use and reducing carbon emissions through innovative practices. Wipro's Carbon Neutrality Program is a standout example, leveraging energy-efficient buildings, green data centers, and electric vehicle adoption to lower emissions. Infosys, another tech leader, became carbon neutral in 2020, years ahead of its peers, by implementing energy-saving measures and investing in community-based offset projects.

Industries in sectors such as cement, steel, and chemicals— traditionally associated with high emissions—are also utilizing CSR strategies to decarbonize their operations. Ultratech Cement, for example, has adopted energy-efficient kilns and alternative fuels, significantly reducing its carbon footprint.

The Social Dimension of Sustainability

While environmental sustainability is at the forefront of CSR efforts, its social dimension is equally critical. Companies are empowering communities to adapt to climate change by providing education, skills training, and access to clean technologies. Programs such as the Coca-Cola Foundation's Anandana promote rainwater harvesting and sustainable livelihoods, particularly in rural areas.

By integrating social and environmental goals, Indian businesses are addressing climate change while fostering resilience and equity among vulnerable populations.

Challenges and the Road Ahead

Despite these commendable efforts, challenges remain. Regulatory hurdles, insufficient funding for large-scale projects, and a lack of awareness among smaller businesses often hinder CSR's impact. To overcome these barriers, collaboration between the public and private sectors is essential. Partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations can amplify the reach and effectiveness of CSR initiatives.

As India strides towards a sustainable future, the role of CSR in addressing climate change will only grow in importance. Businesses must continue to innovate, invest, and collaborate to tackle the environmental challenges of our time.

Conclusion

The green shift in Indian CSR reflects a profound transformation in how businesses view their role in society. By embracing renewable energy, reducing waste, and fostering sustainable practices, Indian companies are demonstrating that environmental responsibility is not just good ethics but also good economics. In the fight against climate change, CSR is not merely a compliance requirement—it is a powerful tool for creating a greener, more inclusive India.

Dr. K.K. Upadhyay

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

2025 VISION: INTEGRATING DEI INTO CSR FOR SUSTAINABLE IMPACT

Diversity invites everyone to the party; inclusion asks them to dance, while equity lets all savour the rhythm. By 2025, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) must transcend mere words to become strategic, actionable imperatives within corporate social responsibility (CSR) agendas. Embedding DEI into CSR isn't just a moral imperative; it's a strategic advantage in our interconnected world. This year offers a unique chance to redefine CSR strategies by weaving DEI principles throughout. DEI is more than meeting quotas or hosting workshops; it's about creating workplaces where all individuals, including stakeholders and communities, feel valued and empowered. A robust DEI agenda enhances employee engagement, creativity, and decision-making, ensuring both social responsibility and business success.

In India, companies are increasingly recognizing the importance of DEI initiatives as part of their CSR efforts. According to a survey by Willis Towers Watson (WTW) in 2022, 71% of Indian organizations are offering DEI initiatives such as inclusion and diversity training, accessible office spaces, and gender-neutral workplace communication. These efforts not only promote a more inclusive work environment but also contribute to the broader social goal of reducing inequalities and fostering a culture of respect and equality. By integrating DEI into their CSR agendas, companies are not only doing good but also enhancing their reputation and driving sustainable growth.

Spark Minda exemplifies commitment to DEI both as an organizational value and through its CSR activities. Their "Saksham" project under the CSR initiatives focuses on empowering People with Disabilities (PWD) by providing skill development and employment opportunities. This holistic approach not only fosters an inclusive workplace culture but also contributes to the social responsibility of the company, ensuring sustainable growth and community upliftment.

As we move forward, let us commit to creating workplaces where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, ensuring that no one is left behind in our collective journey toward a better future.

Dr. K.K. Upadhyay
Professor & Chairperson - Centre for Sustainability & CSR, Birla Institute of Management Technology (BIMTECH)

INITIATIVES BY INDIAN COMPANIES

The year 2024 witnessed Indian organizations demonstrating exceptional commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), addressing critical socio-economic and environmental challenges. Here is a brief overview of some of the remarkable CSR initiatives undertaken during the year:

In 2024, several Indian organizations demonstrated exceptional commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) across various sectors. Here are some notable initiatives:

1. Reliance Industries Limited
Reliance Industries advanced its renewable energy projects, aiming to become India's largest developer in this sector. The company announced plans to produce 100 GW of renewable energy by 2030 and commenced production of low-cost solar cells at its Jamnagar facility.

2. Apollo Tyres Limited
Apollo Tyres invested ₹15.7 crore in CSR initiatives, impacting over 1.23 million people. Their programs focused on healthcare, education, and environmental sustainability.

3. Adani Group
The Adani Group committed to investing $100 billion over the next decade in green energy projects, including the development of 10 GW of hydroelectric projects internationally, aligning with India's net-zero emissions goal by 2070.

4. Tata Consumer Products Limited
Tata Consumer Products spent ₹20.12 crore on CSR, benefiting over 1.39 million individuals. Their initiatives spanned healthcare, education, rural development, women empowerment, and environmental sustainability.

5. Asian Paints Limited
Asian Paints allocated ₹90.8 crore to CSR activities, focusing on vocational skills, health and hygiene, water stewardship, and disaster management. The company also pledged to achieve 100% renewable energy usage by 2030.

6. Synopsys India
Synopsys India invested in 27 projects in collaboration with 20 NGO partners, contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

7. Games24x7 Foundation
The Games24x7 Foundation launched the 'Wheels of Change' initiative, distributing 1,000 bicycles to schoolgirls in Maharashtra to address transportation challenges and promote education.

These initiatives reflect a strategic approach by Indian organizations towards sustainable development and societal well-being in 2024.

The CSR initiatives undertaken by Indian organizations in 2024 showcased a strategic approach to creating sustainable impact. By addressing pressing societal and environmental challenges, these organizations not only contributed to nation-building but also set benchmarks for global CSR practices. The spirit of collaboration between corporates, governments, and civil society was a significant highlight, promising a brighter and more inclusive future for India.

INITIATIVES BY INTERNATIONAL COMPANIES

In 2024, numerous global organizations demonstrated a strong commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) through various impactful initiatives. Here are some notable examples:

1. Gucci (Kering Group)

Gucci, under the Kering Group, adopted science-based targets to combat biodiversity loss as part of the Science Based Targets Network (SBTN). The company focused on protecting land and reducing freshwater usage through actions like water recycling and ecosystem protection.

2. Cisco

Cisco secured the top spot on PEOPLE's 2024 'Companies That Care' list for the second consecutive year. The company invested $130 million in homelessness prevention and implemented inclusion mandates for partners, reflecting its commitment to social justice and community support.

3. United Airlines

United Airlines advanced environmental sustainability in aviation with its United Airlines Ventures (UAV) Sustainable Flight Fund. This fund supports startups developing sustainable aviation fuels (SAF) made from waste materials, offering a cleaner alternative to traditional jet fuel without needing engine modifications.

4. Gilead Sciences

Gilead Sciences actively addressed health disparities through initiatives targeting AIDS and viral hepatitis in underserved communities. The company's Zeroing In program allocated $3 million to support HIV-affected rural communities in the U.S., improving access to crucial healthcare services.

5. Estée Lauder

The Estée Lauder Companies, in collaboration with Amanda Gorman, launched the Writing Change initiative to enhance literacy and mentorship for at-risk youth. This program provided writing workshops and educational support to over 500 young people through partnerships with organizations like WriteGirl.

6. Amazon

Amazon took steps to help its suppliers decarbonize by launching the "Sustainability Exchange," an initiative aimed at measuring and reducing emissions within its supply chain. This effort addresses scope 3 emissions, which constitute a significant portion of corporate emissions.

7. Walmart

Walmart collaborated with HSBC to offer favorable financing to suppliers who meet specific environmental criteria, incentivizing sustainable practices throughout its supply chain.

These initiatives reflect a growing trend among global corporations to integrate CSR into their core operations, addressing environmental sustainability, social equity, and community development.

EMBEDDING SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES INTO THE CSR STRATEGY FOR 2025

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

Col. Prakash Tiwari

India is on the move, and a large number of infrastructure projects are being developed in hinterland and coastal areas. The Viksit Bharat@2047 is the vision of the Government of India to make India a developed nation by 2047. This encompasses development through economic growth, social progress, environmental sustainability, and good governance. It seeks to reimagine India's infrastructure for easier, faster movement of goods and people through ports modernisation, connectivity, industrialisation, coastal community development, coastal shipping, and the development of inland waterways.

The development of these large infrastructure projects has environmental and social impacts. There are well-established processes for mitigating the environmental impacts, and some of our processes and acts are at par with developed nations and the rules and regulations of the leading financial institutions of the world. It needs to be recognised that the impacts don't necessarily play out linearly in relation to the intensity of action. While land acquisition might lead to impacts on livelihoods, its seriousness might be lowered in the construction stage because other economic avenues, like labour markets, open up. However, the seriousness resurfaces at a later stage during operations. It also needs to be recognised that the consequences of impacts on communities might differ.

The human-environment connection focuses on the complex systems of interaction between humans and their environment and examines the roles of social, cultural, and psychological factors in the maintenance or disruption of ecosystems. Development activities lead to biodiversity and cultural

heritage loss, besides the psychological stress created by displacing or altering the natural environment. These issues, along with pollution, need to be tackled by Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) through Social Impact Assessments (SIA).

I feel that CSR in 2025 and the coming years should address the adaptive problems in urban and rural environments from the climate change point of view by understanding the interrelationship between technological and environmental changes and coming up with innovative projects. CSR should develop projects from the SIA studies carried out for various projects. The SIA studies are presently weak in livelihood analysis with ecosystem service elements, lack rights and development-opportunity aspects (particularly in engagement processes and disaggregation of data collected), and propose conventional mitigation measures which may or may not be grounded in data or needs analyses.

The Private-Public Social Development approach rarely touches on the above aspects, often due to a lack of study time, experience, and project owners' lack of interest or trust. Corporates should ensure that they conduct solid SIA studies so that these studies assist them in conceiving CSR projects for poverty alleviation. The SIA will provide evidence of how ecosystems function and how the services they provide support or undermine efforts to alleviate poverty and/or enhance well-being for poor people. This involves linking the social, natural, and political sciences to address a series of focused research questions and evidence challenges using systems thinking, acknowledging the interconnectedness of social and ecological systems.

Corporates have to develop specific strategies to minimise, mitigate, or compensate for the adverse environmental and social impacts of their projects. While strategizing, they have to understand that there is a fundamental interdependence between the company and the communities. The well-being and future prospects of the company are inextricably linked with the happiness of its communities. The companies' Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) values and standards are dynamic and involve constant effort for improvement. Thus, they should not be theoretical constructs but based on best practices within the company and elsewhere.

Company processes are as important as outcomes, and so essentially, the means must be as ethical as the ends. To ensure that the strategies and objectives are appropriate and optimal, they must be designed and implemented in a participatory and transparent manner. It is also essential that there is coordination and cooperation between institutions and agencies within and outside the company. Corporates should ensure that overlaps are avoided, and each learns from the experience (and expertise) of the other, ensuring that the good work done by one is not inadvertently undone by another.

Corporate investments in biodiversity conservation must prioritize protecting ecosystems such as mudflats, wetlands, grasslands, forests, and critical habitats, as they serve as natural barriers against environmental disasters, particularly those related to climate risks. Key measures include restoring mudflats and mangroves, improving wetland functionality through sustainable water management, and safeguarding grasslands through restoration efforts and keystone species conservation. Forest conservation efforts should focus on creating wildlife corridors, undertaking reforestation with native species, and promoting community-led eco-tourism to reduce the impacts of linear infrastructure. Moreover, adopting biodiversity-compatible designs and selecting strategic locations for green infrastructure can help minimize habitat disruption, further supported by offsets and biodiversity credit markets. Through these integrated efforts, combined with robust ecosystem research and community participation, businesses can effectively tackle biodiversity challenges and promote ecological and social resilience.

Col Prakash Tiwari (Retd),
Member Infra 1 and CRZ,
Expert Appraisal Committee,
Ministry of Environment, Forest and
Climate Change

TURNING WASTE INTO WEALTH: CSR'S ROLE IN INDIA'S WASTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

India generates approximately 62 million tons of municipal solid waste annually, with a significant portion left untreated or ending up in overflowing landfills. The burgeoning waste problem poses environmental, health, and socio-economic challenges, particularly in urban areas. However, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a vital tool for addressing these challenges. By funding and implementing innovative waste management projects, companies in India are turning waste into wealth and fostering sustainable living.

From recycling and composting initiatives to cutting-edge waste-to-energy technologies, CSR-driven efforts are transforming India's waste management landscape while contributing to cleaner cities and enhanced quality of life.

The Need for Robust Waste Management Systems

Urbanization and population growth have exacerbated India's waste management woes. According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), only 25% of municipal waste is scientifically processed, while the rest is either burned, creating air pollution, or dumped, leading to soil and groundwater contamination.

Recognizing waste as a resource rather than a liability, businesses are stepping in with CSR initiatives that promote recycling, segregation, and sustainable waste disposal practices.

Recycling Initiatives: Giving Waste a New Lease of Life

Recycling lies at the heart of sustainable waste management. CSR

projects focused on recycling aim to recover valuable materials, reduce landfill burden, and create employment opportunities in the recycling sector.

1. ITC's Well-being Out of Waste (WOW) Program

ITC' s WOW Program is a flagship CSR initiative aimed at promoting source segregation and recycling. Active in cities like Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Pune, the program educates households, schools, and businesses about waste segregation and partners with municipal bodies to collect and recycle dry waste. To date, WOW has recycled over 700,000 tons of dry waste, creating a circular economy for paper, plastic, and metals.

2. Coca-Cola India's Circular Economy Projects

Coca-Cola India has pioneered several initiatives to tackle plastic waste. Under its World Without Waste program, the company has committed to collecting and recycling 100% of the plastic it produces by 2030. Partnering with NGOs, Coca-Cola has set up Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) in cities like Delhi and Mumbai, enabling efficient segregation and recycling of plastic waste.

3. HUL's Plastic Recycling Goals

Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) has implemented an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) model to ensure the collection and recycling of post-consumer plastic. Through its Plastic Circular Economy initiative, HUL has recycled over 100,000 tons of plastic waste, contributing to cleaner urban environments and resource conservation.

Composting: Converting Organic Waste into Gold

Composting offers a sustainable solution for managing biodegradable waste, transforming organic matter into nutrient-rich fertilizer. CSR initiatives in composting are not only addressing urban waste challenges but also supporting sustainable agriculture.

1. Maruti Suzuki's Zero-Waste Approach

Maruti Suzuki has set up composting units at its manufacturing plants and community areas near its facilities. By composting food and garden waste, the company has significantly reduced the volume of organic waste sent to landfills. The compost produced is used for landscaping and distributed to local farmers, closing the waste loop.

2. Biocon Foundation's Community Composting Projects

The Biocon Foundation has implemented decentralized composting systems in rural and urban Karnataka. By providing composting kits and training to households and schools, the foundation has empowered communities to manage organic waste locally, reducing transportation costs and landfill dependency.

3. Ambuja Cement Foundation's Agri-Focused Composting

Ambuja Cement Foundation has integrated composting with its agricultural initiatives. By promoting vermicomposting and providing technical support to farmers, the foundation has enabled sustainable farming practices while managing organic waste effectively.

Waste-to-Energy Solutions: Harnessing Energy from Trash

Waste-to-energy (WTE) technologies offer an innovative approach to tackling non-recyclable waste while generating renewable energy. CSR projects are increasingly investing in WTE facilities to address India's dual challenges of waste management and energy security.

1. NTPC's Garbage-to-Power Plants

The National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) has launched waste-to-energy projects in partnership with municipal corporations. In Delhi, NTPC has set up a plant that converts segregated municipal waste into refuse-derived fuel (RDF) for power generation, reducing landfill loads and producing clean energy.

2. JSW Energy's Waste Utilization Initiatives

JSW Energy is harnessing waste as a fuel for its power plants, reducing dependence on coal and minimizing waste disposal issues. By converting industrial and municipal waste into

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

energy, the company is contributing to cleaner cities and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

3. Dalmia Cement's Alternative Fuels

Dalmia Cement has embraced co-processing, a technique that uses non-recyclable waste as an alternative to fossil fuels in cement kilns. This innovative approach has enabled the company to achieve a high thermal substitution rate, reducing emissions and landfill dependency.

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite these remarkable initiatives, CSR-driven waste management projects face several challenges:

Lack of Segregation at Source: Many households and businesses do not segregate waste, complicating recycling and composting efforts.

Inadequate Infrastructure: Insufficient waste collection and processing facilities in smaller towns and rural areas limit the impact of CSR projects.

Behavioral Barriers: Raising awareness and changing public attitudes towards waste segregation and recycling remains a significant hurdle.

However, the opportunities for scaling CSR initiatives are immense. Public-private partnerships, policy support, and the integration of advanced technologies such as AI and IoT can amplify the impact of these projects.

The Socio-Economic Impact of CSR in Waste Management

CSR initiatives in waste management are not just solving environmental problems—they are driving socio-economic development. These projects create jobs in waste collection, recycling, and composting, empowering marginalized communities. Additionally, they promote a culture of sustainability, encouraging responsible consumption and waste reduction.

Conclusion: Toward a Zero-Waste Future

CSR's role in India's waste management system underscores the transformative power of corporate intervention. By turning waste into wealth through innovative recycling, composting, and waste-to-energy projects, businesses are paving the way for cleaner cities and sustainable living.

To achieve a zero-waste future, collaboration between corporations, governments, and citizens is essential. As more companies embrace the mantra of sustainability, India is poised to emerge as a global leader in innovative waste management solutions. Together, these efforts remind us that in waste lies an untapped wealth—waiting to be harnessed for a better tomorrow.

Innovating **Now**
Shaping **Next**

NET
ZERO
by 2038
Scope-1 and Scope-2
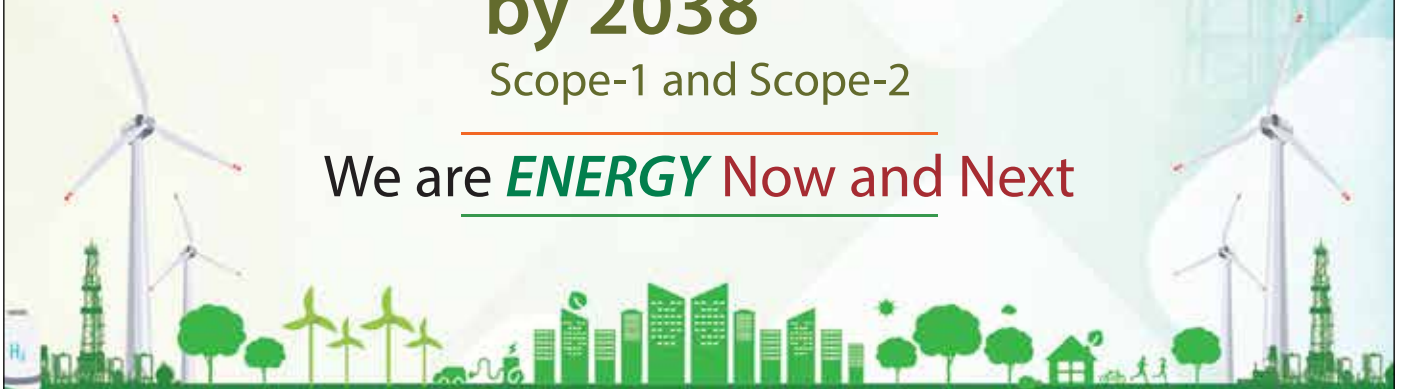
We are *ENERGY* Now and Next

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

CIRCULAR ECONOMY THROUGH THE LENS OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

By Air Marshal VPS Rana PVSM VSM(Retd)

Paris Climate Agreement, UN Sustainable Development Goals and many other international treaties have emphasised on Circular Economy (CE) to mitigate the climate change crisis. It is now gradually being embraced by the corporates as well as our society. Through adopting a sustainable lifestyle, we play an integral part in creating a healthy planet for all. The Indian way of life had always had this concept at each household and village level, where each item was repaired, reused, repurposed, restored, renovated and was replaced only when it could no longer be used any further in any manner. Organic life style was

the norm with every waste being composted at household level and used for agriculture. There was no concept of land fill either. Now the same is being emphasised by the proponents of CE. Products that conform to CE standards need to have a long functional life, be simple to repair, be able to be reconditioned, and be used multiple times before being discarded. Through actions such as reducing waste, reusing goods, and recycling materials, citizens and businesses alike can successfully implement a CE within society.

A linear economy on the other hand, follows the "take-make-dispose" method and, in the process, creates tons of waste each year as goods and materials are disposed much before

extracting their maximum value. After industrialisation set in, the economy was being measured by the rate and quantum of production. It worked towards creating larger demands which further led to a vicious cycle of higher production putting more pressure on all our natural resources. Essentially, the linear economy's main goal is to produce and sell as many products as possible which creates huge waste. The world today generates in excess of 2 billion tonnes of municipal solid waste annually with more than 1/3rd of it not being managed in an environment-friendly manner, thus polluting our air, soil and water.

The CE is essential to safeguard our planet. It yields significant benefits to our agriculture, domestic, and industrial sector of our society. The CE, through its carbon-free and restoration of the ecosystem approach, addresses major global issues of biodiversity loss, resource scarcity, global warming, and pollution. As a closed loop system, where goods and materials retain their maximum value, a CE aims to restore the environment by reducing consumption of finite resources which drastically lessens production of waste.

The corporates have a great role to play in propagating the CE. Companies can undertake their social responsibility through two routes; one by adopting the practices of green businesses that reduce dependency on natural resources, enhance the life-cycle by creating smart modular products and second by promoting social projects that improve the

circular economy at the supported community level. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in a broader sense, involves businesses taking responsibility for their impact on society and the environment. Embracing a CE within CSR initiatives can lead to sustainable business practices that benefit both the company and the community.

The CE concept encourages the use of natural resources for long-term consumption and reuse. Its goal is to replace the current linear economic paradigm of low-cost, quick fabrication and discard, with long-lasting commodities that can be easily repaired, deconstructed, or recycled. A CE production model would encourage repairing, refurbishing, and reusing products to extend their usefulness before they reach their natural end-of-life. Similarly, the corporates with the help of suitable Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can implement social projects that enhance circularity in a given region by initiating environmental friendly initiatives to uplift the society and local economy.

NGOs are the important component of the Implementation strategy of CSR projects to follow the CE path. They are well-positioned to collaborate with businesses and drive impactful CSR projects that promote a CE. By leveraging their expertise, networks, and on-ground presence, NGOs can play a pivotal role in initiating and implementing initiatives that foster sustainability and circularity. The NGOs specialise into various facets of implementation strategies, awareness campaign,

impact assessment and capacity building etc that could be very handy in CSR implementation ensuring CE. Through their community connections, local knowledge, and project management skills, NGOs can help businesses create meaningful and lasting positive impacts. Collaborative efforts between NGOs and businesses not only drive CE practices but also contribute to sustainable development and a more resilient future.

Integrating CE principles into CSR initiatives, aligns businesses with sustainable practices and creates a

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

positive impact on society and the environment. By adopting these initiatives, companies can contribute to reducing waste, fostering a more resilient and regenerative economic system by conserving the resources. Embracing a circular economy within CSR, demonstrates a commitment to responsible business practices and a sustainable future. Some of the examples of CSR initiatives, to promote a CE are as under-

- Research, Development and Innovation on Circularity of Businesses.
- Enhancing Product Life through Modular Designs and Refurbishment.
- Smart Energy Solutions and Water Management.
- Recycling and Smart Waste Management.
- Environment Friendly Packaging.
- Reduced Logistical Cost and Circular Supply Chains.
- Reducing and Repurposing the Waste.
- Organic Farming and Waste Reduction.
- Capacity Building, Awareness Campaigns, Partnerships and Collaborations.

The CE concept can be implemented at strategic as well as operational level through the involvement of the governments for impacting policy formulations, Corporates through smart product and processes and the community through smart consumption pattern and efficient waste management and disposal. Hence, citizens, governments, businesses, and civil society must implement a CE to minimize waste and address environmental consequences, such as the acceleration of climate change and pollution, resulting from a linear economy. Joint sensible efforts by all stakeholders can address complex challenges of climate change and create scalable solutions for a balanced economy.

By Air Marshal VPS Rana PVSM VSM(Retd),
Chief Advisor Himalay Unnati Mission

QUOTES

On the occasion of the International Day of Education and National Girl Child Day, we celebrate the transformative power of education and its role in shaping a brighter, more equitable future. These special days underscore the importance of inclusive and quality education, particularly for girls, as a means to empower individuals and uplift communities. To mark this occasion, we bring you inspiring quotes from CSR professionals who are driving impactful initiatives to ensure that education reaches every child, especially the girl child, helping them unlock their potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

KG Umesh
Director–HR, Himalaya
Wellness Company

"New developments in CSR are changing how businesses create an impact. At Himalaya Wellness Company, we have seen a growing focus on health, nourishment, education, and hygiene as pivotal to uplifting our communities. On International Day of Education, we support school infrastructure needs, community-driven school initiatives, and fostering the well-being of the community to help reduce access barriers. CSR today isn't just about giving back—it's about empowering communities with innovative, scalable solutions that ensure lasting change. Through initiatives like Akshaya Patra and Muskaan, we're not only creating opportunities but also nurturing dreams and building a more inclusive tomorrow. Together, let's empower lives, one step at a time!"

"Promoting education is a key objective under Delhivery's CSR policy, within which we have focused on the girl child. Our partnership with Avanti Fellows highlights the same, under which we are supporting 25 girl students from low-income households currently in high school. The partnership is providing these students test preparation guidance and mentorship that will help them get placed into top-tier Science and Technology colleges across India. The program has seen its students more than double their household income on graduating and escape the cycle of intergenerational poverty."

Digvijay Sujlana,
Vice President - Government Relations &
Head of CSR at Delhivery

"Addressing the emissions generated by landfills requires sustained and inter-generational efforts - which is why it is vital to engage youth to counter the issue. Since its launch in 2018, the Bottles for Change initiative under Bisleri's Greener Promise has become a significant movement that inspires youth and citizens by creating awareness sessions to responsibly use and dispose plastics. We are proud to collaborate with young minds from universities located in Delhi NCR, Punjab, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. Their participation is essential to the promise of a greener future. On this International Day of Education, we reaffirm our commitment to this mission and pledge to empower more young minds to spearhead sustainable progress."

Mr K Ganesh
Director - Sustainability &
Corporate Affairs, Bisleri
International Pvt Ltd

"Investing in the holistic development of a girl child goes beyond education - it is about contributing towards her dreams, health, safety, and opportunities. This National Girl Child Day, let us commit to a more wholesome approach that is when we invest in a girl's overall growth, we not only provide her with the strength and support but also with the resources she needs to thrive. Together, we can help build a world where every girl holds the power to change the world."

Dr Geetanjali Chopra
Founder at Wishes &
Blessings NGO

"Education is the foundation of progress, and every child, irrespective of gender, deserves equal access to it. On this International Day of Education and National Girl Child Day, we reaffirm our dedication to empowering youth and women through education and lifelong learning. In the past year, through our CSR initiatives, we installed digital smartboards, establishing over 100 smart classrooms. We also empowered more than 25,000 youths with skill development and an equal number of women with digital financial literacy training. Our journey continues as we strive to create an inclusive environment where every individual has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive."

Himanshu Priyadarshi
Chief Public Affairs, Communications
and Sustainability Officer, Hindustan
Coca-Cola Beverages (HCCB)

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

"JAL HAI TO KAL HAI": THE ROLE OF CSR IN INDIA'S WATER CRISIS

ater scarcity is a critical challenge in India, with nearly 600 million people facing high to extreme water stress. The situation is exacerbated by depleting groundwater reserves, erratic monsoons, and inefficient water management. Recognizing the urgency of the crisis, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in India have increasingly focused on water conservation, rainwater harvesting, and improving access to clean water, especially in rural areas where the impact of water scarcity is most acute.

This report examines how CSR-driven projects are addressing India's water crisis, ensuring not only environmental sustainability but also enhancing the quality of life for millions of Indians.

The Magnitude of India's Water Crisis

India's water woes are multifaceted. According to the NITI Aayog, the country ranks 120th out of 122 countries in the Water Quality Index. Rural areas, home to 65% of the population, are particularly vulnerable, as they depend heavily on groundwater for drinking and irrigation. Overexploitation of resources and climate change have further strained water availability.

In response, CSR has emerged as a key driver of sustainable water solutions. Companies across sectors are leveraging their resources and expertise to implement impactful water projects, with a focus on conservation, harvesting, and accessibility.

CSR Projects in Water Conservation

Water conservation lies at the heart of many CSR initiatives, aimed at mitigating water wastage and preserving natural water resources.

1. ITC's 'Mission Sunehra Kal'

ITC's flagship CSR initiative, Mission Sunehra Kal, emphasizes watershed management. The program has developed over 12,000 water harvesting structures, rejuvenated village ponds, and ensured better irrigation for agricultural lands. These efforts have created a sustainable water supply for over 1.2 million acres of farmland, significantly boosting agricultural productivity and livelihoods.

2. Hindustan Unilever's 'Project Prabhat'

Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) has undertaken several water conservation projects under its CSR arm, Project Prabhat. By engaging local communities, the project has promoted water stewardship and implemented micro-irrigation systems in water-stressed regions. HUL's initiatives have helped save millions of liters of water while empowering farmers with efficient irrigation practices.

3. Reliance Foundation's Water Management Programs

Reliance Foundation has focused extensively on watershed development, groundwater recharge, and community awareness. In Rajasthan, a state notorious for its water scarcity, the foundation has constructed check dams and undertaken desilting activities to restore water bodies, benefitting thousands of households.

Rainwater Harvesting: Capturing Nature's Bounty

Rainwater harvesting is a cost-effective and sustainable solution to address water shortages. Several CSR initiatives are tapping into this practice to improve water availability in rural and urban areas alike.

1. Coca-Cola Foundation's Anandana Initiative

Coca-Cola Foundation's Anandana has been a game-changer in promoting rainwater harvesting. Collaborating with NGOs and local governments, the initiative has built rooftop rainwater harvesting systems in schools and public institutions, particularly in drought-prone states like Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. These systems provide clean water for drinking and sanitation, reducing dependence on external water sources.

2. Maruti Suzuki's Rainwater Harvesting Projects

Maruti Suzuki has implemented rainwater harvesting systems across its manufacturing plants and neighboring communities. Its efforts have replenished groundwater tables and supported agricultural activities in Haryana, where water scarcity is a recurring issue.

3. Tata Group's Multi-Pronged Approach

The Tata Group has been a pioneer in integrating rainwater harvesting into its CSR framework. Tata Steel's Thrive Water Security Program involves constructing rainwater collection structures and restoring traditional water systems in Jharkhand and

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

Odisha, improving water access for thousands of rural families.

Improving Access to Clean Water

Beyond conservation, CSR initiatives are playing a pivotal role in providing access to clean and safe drinking water, particularly in rural India where potable water is often a luxury.

1. PepsiCo India's Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Program
PepsiCo India's WASH initiative focuses on providing safe drinking water to underprivileged communities. Through partnerships with local NGOs, the company has installed community water purification plants in Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, addressing the twin challenges of water scarcity and waterborne diseases.

2. Mahindra & Mahindra's 'Nanhi Kali' and Water Accessibility Projects
While Project Nanhi Kali supports education, Mahindra & Mahindra's CSR also targets clean water accessibility. In drought-hit areas of Maharashtra, the company has established water filtration units, ensuring safe drinking water for schools and villages.

3. Bosch India's Safe Water Projects
Bosch India's CSR programs emphasize innovation to deliver clean water. The company has developed low-cost water filters and distributed them in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, where fluoride and arsenic

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

contamination in groundwater pose significant health risks.

The Socio-Economic Impact of CSR Water Initiatives

CSR-driven water projects go beyond addressing immediate water needs; they contribute to long-term socio-economic development. Improved access to water reduces the burden on women and children, who often spend hours fetching water, enabling them to pursue education and livelihood opportunities. Efficient irrigation systems increase agricultural productivity, enhancing farmers' incomes. Additionally, community-led water conservation efforts foster a sense of ownership and sustainability.

Challenges in Scaling CSR Water Projects

Despite their success, CSR water initiatives face several challenges. Limited community participation, inadequate maintenance of water structures, and fragmented efforts often hinder long-term impact. To address these challenges, companies must adopt an integrated approach, collaborating with government bodies, NGOs, and local communities to ensure scalability and sustainability.

The Road Ahead: Towards Water Security

India's water crisis demands concerted action from all stakeholders. As businesses continue to align their CSR strategies with the country's water priorities, they must also embrace innovation. Advanced technologies like IoT-enabled water sensors, AI-driven water management systems, and desalination plants can amplify the impact of traditional solutions.

Additionally, the government's Jal Shakti Abhiyan provides a platform for public-private partnerships, enabling CSR programs to align with national water conservation goals.

Conclusion

Water is the lifeline of India's economy and society, and addressing its scarcity is a moral and ecological imperative. CSR initiatives in water conservation, rainwater harvesting, and clean water accessibility are not just alleviating immediate crises but also paving the way for sustainable development. By fostering collaboration, innovation, and community participation, these efforts embody the ethos of "Jal Hai to Kal Hai"—ensuring a secure and sustainable future for generations to come

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
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The Mahakumbh Mela 2025
A CELEBRATION OF CULTURE, UNITY, AND CSR'S ROLE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

By Prashant Das

Associate Editor-CSR Times

The Kumbh Mela dates back thousands of years to ancient Hindu texts. It is profoundly rooted in the mythical account of the Samudra Manthan (ocean churning), during which drips of the nectar of immortality fell in four locations: Prayagraj, Haridwar, Nashik, and Ujjain.   The Mahakumbh Mela, one of the world's largest religious and cultural gatherings, is an event that captivates millions of pilgrims, tourists, and spiritual seekers. Held every 12 years, this grand spectacle attracts people from across the globe, offering a platform for faith, culture, and social integration.

The Mahakumbh Mela 2025, which will take place in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh from 13th Jan till 26th Feb 2025, is poised to be a transformative event, not only for the devotees but also for the corporate sector. As India prepares for this grand occasion, the intersection of the Mahakumbh Mela with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is an opportunity for businesses to actively contribute to the nation's social, environmental, and economic well-being.

A Global Celebration Rooted in Tradition and Unity

The Mahakumbh Mela has deep roots in India's cultural and religious history. It is believed that the gathering marks a cosmic alignment that allows for spiritual cleansing and the redemption of sins. Millions of devotees gather to bathe in the sacred rivers, particularly the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Sarasvati in Prayagraj, hoping to attain spiritual purification.

The scale of the event is colossal. With over 120 million visitors expected during the 2025 Mahakumbh Mela, it offers an unparalleled opportunity to bring

people together, celebrating unity, peace, and harmony. The event also plays a crucial role in the local economy, with tourism, hospitality, transportation, and infrastructure getting a significant boost.

While the Mahakumbh Mela is primarily a religious gathering, the social and environmental challenges of managing such a massive congregation are profound. This is where CSR initiatives, aligned with sustainable development goals, come into play.

CSR and SDGs: A Perfect Alignment for the Mahakumbh Mela

The Mahakumbh Mela provides an ideal opportunity for businesses to invest in CSR projects that address critical social and environmental issues while contributing to the fulfillment of SDGs. Several SDGs directly relate to the themes of the Mahakumbh, including clean water, sanitation, gender equality, climate action, and sustainable economic growth. By collaborating with the government and local authorities, CSR initiatives can make a lasting impact on both the event and the surrounding communities.

1. Clean Water and Sanitation: Ensuring a Safe Environment for Pilgrims

One of the central concerns of the Mahakumbh Mela is ensuring that the rivers, particularly the Ganga, remain clean and safe for the millions who will bathe in them. The Ganga is already at

the forefront of India's water purification efforts, and CSR initiatives can support these efforts by contributing to the cleaning and rejuvenation of the river.

Corporates can participate by funding the installation of water filtration systems, building modern sanitation facilities for pilgrims, and running waste management programs. Companies can also promote awareness on the significance of keeping sacred water bodies clean, aligning their CSR efforts with SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation.

For example, major water treatment companies could collaborate with local authorities to set up filtration plants, ensuring that the water pilgrims bathe in is safe and hygienic. Additionally, waste disposal units can be introduced across the event's sprawling venues, ensuring that waste doesn't pollute the sacred river.

2. Sustainable Infrastructure: Building the Foundations for the Future

The Mahakumbh Mela sees massive infrastructure development, from temporary roads, bridges, and camps to medical facilities. CSR can play an essential role in ensuring that these infrastructures are built sustainably, minimizing their impact on the environment and maximizing their long-term benefits for the local communities.

Corporates involved in construction and infrastructure development can adopt green building principles, use sustainable materials, and prioritize energy-efficient solutions for temporary structures. Such initiatives would contribute to SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure. Companies specializing in renewable energy solutions can set up solar-powered lights and heating systems at various venues, reducing the carbon footprint of the event.

Moreover, corporate investments in transportation infrastructure can ensure smoother and greener mobility, such as electric buses, carpooling programs, and bike-sharing facilities,

promoting SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities.

3. Gender Equality and Empowerment: Ensuring Safe Spaces for Women

Ensuring gender equality and safety is a significant challenge at large gatherings like the Mahakumbh Mela. The presence of women pilgrims is substantial, and their safety and empowerment should be a priority. CSR programs can help by setting up women's safety booths, creating women-friendly spaces, and running awareness campaigns on gender equality.

Businesses can partner with NGOs and government agencies to create gender-specific health and hygiene facilities and ensure access to adequate medical care. Furthermore, by supporting local women entrepreneurs, CSR initiatives can empower women in the surrounding communities, aligning with SDG 5: Gender Equality.

For example, CSR funds can be directed toward promoting women-run stalls, small businesses, and vocational training programs, ensuring the economic empowerment of

women within the local economy.

4. Climate Action: Addressing Environmental Sustainability

With millions of people converging at the event, managing the environmental impact of the Mahakumbh Mela is critical. CSR efforts can help reduce the carbon footprint of the event by promoting waste-to-energy solutions, reducing plastic usage, and encouraging the use of sustainable products.

Companies can play a role by investing in clean energy sources for the event, supporting rainwater harvesting projects, and organizing tree-planting campaigns. Aligning with SDG 13: Climate Action, businesses can offset the carbon emissions generated during the event and contribute to the long-term environmental sustainability of the region.

5. Local Economic Empowerment: Supporting Community Growth

The Mahakumbh Mela offers an opportunity to boost the local economy, with businesses working closely with the communities in

Prayagraj. CSR initiatives can provide job opportunities, training, and skill development for the local population, aligning with SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth.

For instance, local artisans and food vendors can be empowered through CSR programs that support their businesses and create a platform for their products and services. Furthermore, corporate partners can fund vocational training programs that prepare locals for hospitality, tourism, and event management jobs, which are essential during the Mela and in the post-event period.

Conclusion: Building a Sustainable Legacy Through CSR

As the Mahakumbh Mela 2025 approaches, the potential for CSR initiatives to align with SDGs is vast. By focusing on water conservation, waste management, gender equality, sustainable infrastructure, and local economic empowerment, businesses can contribute significantly to making the event a model for sustainable and inclusive growth.

The Mahakumbh Mela, with its spiritual significance, offers a unique platform for businesses to demonstrate their commitment to CSR and sustainable development while leaving a lasting impact on India's social and environmental landscape. By supporting this grand gathering, corporates not only contribute to a historic event but also play a pivotal role in shaping the future of India's development, one step at a time.

THE ROLE OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN MISSION VIKSIT BHARAT 1947-2047

Maanisa Das
Sub Editor-CSR Times

As India marches toward its centenary of independence in 2047, the ambitious vision of "Mission Viksit Bharat" emerges as a blueprint for transforming the nation into a developed, inclusive, and sustainable global power. While the government plays a pivotal role in this journey, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) serves as a critical partner in realizing this mission, aligning corporate endeavors with national goals of equitable development and sustainability.

CSR, mandated by Section 135 of the Companies Act 2013, is not merely a compliance measure for businesses in India but an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to societal and environmental progress. With India striving for sustainable growth under initiatives like "Make in India," "Digital India," and "Atmanirbhar Bharat," CSR can accelerate progress by addressing challenges in education, healthcare, rural development, and environmental sustainability.

One of the most significant contributions of CSR lies in bridging socio-economic disparities. Through CSR initiatives, companies can provide access to quality education, vocational training, and employment opportunities to underserved sections of society. Empowering the youth aligns directly with India's demographic dividend,

creating a skilled workforce that fuels economic growth.

Healthcare, another critical area, can benefit immensely from CSR-driven initiatives. Investments in primary healthcare infrastructure, maternal and child health programs, and digital health solutions can ensure healthier communities, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, where government resources are often stretched.

CSR also plays a vital role in environmental sustainability—an integral part of Mission Viksit Bharat. Corporations adopting green technologies, supporting renewable energy projects, and undertaking afforestation and water conservation initiatives contribute to combating climate change while promoting

sustainable industrialization.

Moreover, CSR encourages community involvement and fosters partnerships between corporations, NGOs, and government bodies, creating a collective force for social change. This collaborative approach amplifies the impact of national schemes like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and Skill India.

As India envisions itself as a global leader by 2047, CSR is not just a corporate obligation but a catalyst for inclusive development. By integrating social, economic, and environmental objectives into their business strategies, companies can drive Mission Viksit Bharat forward, ensuring a brighter and more equitable future for all citizens.

SKILL INDIA: HOW CSR PARTNERSHIPS ARE SHAPING THE WORKFORCE OF TOMORROW

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

By Maanisa Das
Sub Editor - CSR Times

India's youth population, often termed the country's "demographic dividend," holds immense potential to propel the nation into a global economic powerhouse. However, this potential remains largely untapped due to persistent skill gaps and high unemployment rates. The need to equip young Indians with industry-relevant skills has led to a surge in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives aimed at skill development. These programs, often in collaboration with NGOs and government initiatives, are playing a pivotal role in shaping India's workforce of tomorrow, particularly in emerging industries like technology and green energy.

The Skill Gap Challenge India's unemployment rate hovered around 7.8% in 2024, with many graduates unable to find jobs due to mismatched skills. According to the India Skills Report 2023, only 50% of Indian graduates were considered employable. Furthermore, a report by the World Economic Forum highlights that 60% of India's workforce will require reskilling by 2030 to keep up with the evolving job market. Sectors like technology, artificial intelligence (AI), renewable energy, and healthcare are witnessing exponential growth, but they require specialized skill sets that are not part of conventional education. Recognizing this gap, Indian companies have been leveraging their CSR funds to address the problem at its root.

CSR Contributions to Skill Development

The Companies Act, 2013, mandates companies with a certain revenue threshold to allocate 2% of their average net profits towards CSR activities. Skill development has emerged as a prominent focus area, with companies like Tata, Infosys, Reliance, and Adani investing heavily in creating opportunities for India's youth.

Tata Group: Pioneers in Skill Development

The Tata Group, under its CSR initiatives, launched the Tata STRIVE program, which focuses on vocational training for underserved communities. Since its inception, Tata STRIVE has trained over 1.5 million youth across India, with a placement rate of over 70%. The program emphasizes skills in high-demand sectors like IT, hospitality, and green energy.

Infosys Foundation: Tech-Focused Skilling

The Infosys Foundation has partnered with the Skill India Mission to provide digital training. Through its Springboard platform, the foundation has reached over 2 million learners, offering courses in artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and cybersecurity. These courses are designed to prepare youth for jobs in the fast-evolving tech industry.

Reliance Foundation: Empowering Rural Youth

The Reliance Foundation runs the Dhirubhai Ambani Vocational Institute, which has trained over 500,000 individuals in areas like retail

management, renewable energy, and logistics. Its collaboration with NGOs ensures that youth in rural areas gain access to quality training and employment opportunities.

Collaborations with NGOs and Government

CSR programs are increasingly relying on partnerships with NGOs and government initiatives to maximize impact.

NGO Collaborations

NGOs like Pratham and Smile Foundation play a vital role in bridging the skill gap. For instance, Pratham's Skill Development Program has partnered with multiple corporations to train youth in trades like plumbing, carpentry, and electrical work. These initiatives have benefited over 100,000 individuals annually, with 60% securing employment within six months of training.

Government Partnerships

The Skill India Mission, launched in 2015, aims to train over 400 million people by 2025. CSR partnerships with this mission have accelerated its progress. Companies like Maruti Suzuki and Mahindra have joined hands with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to establish skill centers. As of 2023, over 25 million individuals had been trained under Skill India, with a significant portion funded through CSR contributions.

Focus on Emerging Industries
Technology

With India poised to become a global tech hub, companies are focusing on preparing a digitally literate workforce. CSR programs by Wipro, HCL, and Tech Mahindra offer specialized training in AI, machine learning, and data analytics. According to NASSCOM, over 40% of tech jobs in 2024 required advanced digital skills, and CSR-funded training programs have been instrumental in meeting this demand.

Green Energy

The global shift towards sustainability has created a surge in demand for skilled workers in green energy sectors. CSR initiatives like the Adani Skill Development Centre focus on solar energy installation, wind turbine maintenance, and energy efficiency. These programs have trained over 100,000 individuals, many of whom now contribute to India's renewable energy capacity, which is expected to reach 500 GW by 2030.

Healthcare

The pandemic underscored the importance of healthcare professionals. CSR-funded programs by companies like Biocon and Dr. Reddy's Laboratories are training youth in paramedical services, diagnostics, and elder care, addressing the shortage of skilled healthcare workers in India.

Impact and Future Potential

The impact of CSR in skill development is evident in the numbers. According to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Indian companies spent ₹13,829 crore on CSR activities in 2022-23, with skill development accounting for a significant share. Over 10 million youth have directly benefited from these programs in the last decade, many of whom now hold stable jobs in high-growth industries.

However, challenges remain. Many CSR programs face scalability issues and a lack of alignment with industry requirements. To address this, companies are increasingly adopting data-driven approaches to measure the impact of their initiatives and ensure alignment with future workforce needs.

Conclusion

CSR initiatives in skill development are not just acts of corporate philanthropy—they are investments in India's future. By equipping youth with industry-relevant skills, these programs are addressing unemployment, bridging skill gaps, and preparing the workforce for emerging industries.

As India aspires to become a $5 trillion economy, the synergy between CSR, NGOs, and government initiatives will be crucial in ensuring that the country's youth are not only employable but also empowered to lead in a rapidly changing global landscape. The focus on emerging sectors like tech and green energy highlights the forward-looking approach of these initiatives, positioning India as a leader in the industries of tomorrow.

Creating Pathways to Education
HOW K12 SCHOOLS IS BRIDGING THE GAP

Imagine being denied the right to learn simply because of your circumstances or where you live. For Nara (*Name changed to protect identity) from Afghanistan, this was her reality. After formal education for girls was banned beyond Grade 6, her dreams of continuing school seemed impossible. K12 Schools stepped in, providing a safe, flexible, and high-quality online learning environment tailored to her needs. Today, Nara is a Grade 8 student, studying through our Cambridge-certified curriculum and on track to take her board exams in two years. Her journey is a powerful reminder of how accessible education can transform lives and create pathways to a brighter future.

K12 Schools is at the forefront of advancing Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by breaking barriers and providing globally recognized and locally relevant education to underserved communities. As registered partners with USAID and collaborators with UNICEF, we are committed to ensuring no child is left behind. With over 5,000 students enrolled globally, our social impact programs have directly benefited more than 700 students, including those from marginalized, climate-affected, and conflict zones.

In India, K12 Schools is bridging the education gap with tailored online and hybrid learning models that combine Indian and international curricula. Our 21st-century courses prepare students for a rapidly evolving world. A recent pilot project with Diksha School reached over 450

students in Delhi's slum areas, showcasing the transformative power of technology-driven education.

In Saran District of Bihar, we've established a state-of-the-art Robotics Lab, bringing STEM education to remote areas. This innovative space fosters creativity, critical thinking, and hands-on learning, inspiring students to dream beyond traditional boundaries.

Despite progress, millions of children in India still face barriers to education. Through scalable, technology-driven solutions, K12 Schools is breaking these barriers and creating opportunities for children to thrive.

Technology-Driven Learning with Impact

At the heart of K12 Schools' success is our AI-enhanced Learning Management System (LMS), which provides real-time insights into students' progress. Parents and other stakeholders can monitor attendance, academic performance, and assessments, while teachers receive actionable data to tailor learning experiences. This transparency ensures trust and accountability, making it an ideal solution for CSR-funded initiatives.

CSR Benefits and Opportunities for Partnership

Partnering with K12 Schools is not just about funding education—it's about creating measurable impact and aligning with global and national priorities:

- Measurable Impact: CSR donors can track the progress of each and every student supported, from academic achievements to career pathways, via our LMS.
- Brand Visibility and Reputation: Supporting education enhances CSR partners' reputation as socially responsible organizations committed to community development.
- Employee Engagement: Opportunities to involve employees in mentorship, workshops, or community interactions add meaningful engagement to CSR programs.

Ways to Partner

1. Sponsor Scholarships: Help underprivileged children access globally accredited education, creating pathways to success.
2. Fund Classrooms: Enable the establishment of hybrid or virtual classrooms in underserved regions.
3. Invest in Technology: Contribute to enhancing K12 Schools' LMS and digital tools to improve learning outcomes.

Our scalable model accommodates students and educators from any demographic, making it an ideal solution for regions with specific needs. With CSR support, we aim to expand into underserved areas in India, where hybrid education models can revolutionize learning access.

Join Us in Transforming Lives Through Education

As partners of UNICEF and USAID, K12 Schools is equipped to drive meaningful change through collaborative efforts. Whether it's sponsoring scholarships, funding classrooms, or investing in technology, your support can create a lasting impact for students in need.

Together, we can build a brighter future!

SPORTS MINISTER DR. MANSUKH MANDAVIYA CHAIRS FIRST-EVER CSR ROUND TABLE FOR SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

Photo: PIB

In a major effort towards strengthening the Indian sports ecosystem in order to host the 2036 Olympic Games, Honourable Union Minister of Youth Affairs & Sports Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya urged corporates to adopt one sport during the first-ever corporate round-table conference on Thursday.

Dr. Mandaviya emphasized a vision to position India among the top five global sports performers by 2047, as the nation marks 100 years of independence. Aiming to bridge the gap between aspirations and execution, he stressed the critical role of Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) in building sustainable sports infrastructure and talent development programs. He also proposed that PSUs from the Centre support state-level requirements to achieve sporting excellence.

"Each corporate entity should focus on a single sport to ensure dedicated attention and optimal resource allocation, while also enabling effective athlete branding to align with CSR investments and promotional activities," Dr. Mandaviya said.

The Union Minister also asked the corporates to contribute towards upgrading sports facilities in existing district-level schools in line with the District Level Sports Schools in Gujarat. He proposed developing Olympic Training Centres, sports academies, funding the training and coaching of Target Olympic Podium Scheme athletes and to be actively involved in the organisation of national leagues in disciplines where it is yet to be staged.

More than 40 corporate houses and organisations working in the sports ecosystem shared their knowledge and opinion in a first-ever Open House session with the Sports Minister, and lauded the initiative saying that it can become a gamechanger for the Indian Sports ecosystem.

Speaking after the meeting, JSW Sports MD Parth Jindal said, "This is the first time that the honourable Sports Minister spent so much time with the corporate sector – almost three hours he spent. He wanted to understand our opinion, our view on how to take Indian sports forward. The government is already doing a lot of incredible work in sports and even the corporates are doing their bit but how to collaborate so that the athletes are happy and we can improve our medal tally at the 2036 Olympics."

Dalmia Cement Bharat MD Puneet Dalmia also expressed his company's interest in developing District Level Sports Schools, one of the key infrastructure development plans of the CSR partnership. "Being a father, I personally believe that engaging a young generation to play sports is of utmost importance with the kids spending almost 7-8 hours on mobile phones and tablets. If we want to produce a healthier and fitter generation, we have to penetrate into Tier 2/3 cities and towns, where sports is still not a priority. The Dalmia Group is present in 14 states and 27 cities and we would like to develop sports infrastructure at the district level," Mr Dalmia said.

The corporates can also become thematic partners for Khelo India mission, indigenous sports, para sports and sports for women programmes apart from the establishment of sports science centres and performance testing labs.

SPECIAL CLEANLINESS MEASURES UNDER NAMAMI GANGE MISSION REDEFINE CLEANLINESS AT MAHAKUMBH 2025

Photo: PIB

Under the National Clean Ganga Mission, the Uttar Pradesh government has implemented special cleanliness management measures at a cost of Rs. 152.37 crore for Mahakumbh 2025. These initiatives combine modern technology with traditional practices to ensure a clean and sustainable environment for the sacred event.

Maintaining the purity of the Ganga, effective waste management, and creating plastic-free zones are top priorities for the organization of Mahakumbh 2025. The event is being presented as a benchmark for environmental responsibility, with a strong emphasis on maintaining cleanliness throughout the fair area.

Over 28,000 toilets, including 12,000 Fiber Reinforced Plastic (FRP) toilets equipped with septic tanks and 16,100 prefabricated steel toilets with soak pits have been installed across the fairgrounds. These toilets aim to promote an eco-friendly approach while ensuring cleanliness. Additionally, 20,000 community urinals have been set up to ensure a comfortable and hygienic experience for devotees for improved sanitation.

To enhance effective waste management in the event area, 20,000 trash bins have been installed to help segregate waste at the source, while encouraging its reuse and recycling. To further streamline waste collection and disposal, 37.75 lakh liner bags have been provided. The strategies adopted for Mahakumbh 2025 will not only set high standards for cleanliness but also demonstrate the country's commitment to environmental sustainability.

Mahakumbh 2025 is not just a religious event but a model example of environmental conservation and cleanliness. It highlights the efforts of the government towards maintaining the purity of the Ganga, sustainable waste management, and creating plastic-free zones. Through this sacred event, awareness about cleanliness and environmental protection will be raised in society. This cleanliness initiative for Mahakumbh 2025 will inspire not only the present generation but also future ones. Mahakumbh 2025 emerges as the confluence of devotion and environment stewardship in the history of sacred events.

All India Business & Community Foundation (AIBCF)

The National Conference on Mission Viksit Bharat 1947 To 2047 was organized by the All India Business & Community Foundation (AIBCF) on Thursday, 16th January, at the prestigious Indian Habitat Centre, New Delhi, Delhi, aimed to foster the growth and recognition of small and medium-sized businesses, start-ups, individuals, and corporations across India and to honour organizations for their commendable CSR efforts in giving back to society.

The occasion was graced by eminent guests of honours including Shri Surendra Nath Tripathi, Retd. IAS, Director General, Indian Institute of Public Administration, Dr. Manoj Garg, Retd. IAS, Hon. President – All India Business & Community

Foundation, Shri Amod Kumar Kanth, Retd. IPS, Founder & General Secretary, Prayas JAC Society, and Air Marshal VPS Rana PVSM, VSM (Retd.). The gathering attracted huge participation from several business leaders, CSR professionals, and numerous industry experts from across India. The event also honoured the presence of distinguished international guests including H.E.

Ms. Jacqueline Mukangira, High Commission of the Republic of Rwanda to India, H.E. Prof. Joyce Kakuramatsi Kikafunda, High Commissioner of the Republic of Uganda to India, and Mr. Jules Debrailly, Trade Counsellor Embassy of France. More than 200 delegates attended the event from various countries.

The summit, powered by Tata

Steel, commenced with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp, followed by a warm welcome speech of Dr. Manoj Garg, Retd. IAS, Hon. President – All India Business & Community Foundation.

Following him, Shri Surendra Nath Tripathi, Retd. IAS, Director General, Indian Institute of Public Administration, Shri Amod Kumar Kanth, Retd. IPS, Founder & General Secretary, Prayas JAC Society and Air Marshal VPS Rana PVSM, in their address to the gathering, highlighted the immense power harnessed when government and society at large join hands to work in convergence.

The event progressed with an engaging panel discussion on the theme 'Fostering Collective Action: Multi-Sector Collaboration for Promoting Ethics and Responsible Business Practices,' moderated by Dr. Somnath Singh, Deputy Director, UN Global Compact Network India (UN

GCNI). During the course of the event, several Summit partners also showcased their corporate presentations on their CSR endeavours, bringing their projects to life on screen.

The summit recognized prominent organizations in the respective fields with AIBCF CSR and Sustainability Awards for their CSR projects. Among the distinguished recipients were Central Coalfields Limited, Panasonic Life Solutions India, Billion Hearts Beating Foundation, Haldia Energy Limited, Mobility India, and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL), Bina Refinery (BR), and various others. This distinguished recognition celebrates the visionary strategies and impactful initiatives undertaken by businesses to integrate corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability practices into their core ethos. Embracing a holistic

approach, the focus is on highlighting the profound commitment of these enterprises towards addressing societal challenges, advancing sustainable development goals, and setting benchmarks for responsible business practices. Beyond 'success in profitability' this champions the ethos of ethical conduct, community engagement, and environmental preservation.

Concluding the event, in the vote of thanks Mr. Prashant Das, Secretary - All India Business & Community Foundation acknowledged the contributions of all stakeholders and the sponsors - Tata Steel, SBI, REC, NTPC, NHPC, Canara Bank, Powergrid, National Insurance Company, Bank of India, Indian Oil, PNB, Oil India, LIC, ONGC, PSB, RCF etc. Mr. Prashant also reiterated dignitaries' agreement on the foundational vision of the summit.

Mr. Shreyas Sathe
CEO, Hybrid AdTech Pvt. Ltd.
Business & Community Award for Business Leadership in Digital Advertising

Pioneering India's AdTech Landscape from Humble Beginnings to Global Recognition

Mr. Shreyas Sathe has navigated a remarkable journey that seamlessly intertwines his Indian heritage with international business acumen. Raised in a lower-middle-class family in India, he imbibed the values of perseverance and hard work from his mother, who tirelessly supported their family through challenging financial times. His academic journey took him to the prestigious halls of Grenoble Ecole De Management in France. Despite the accolades, the road to success was far from easy, with him spending a year sleeping on the floor—a stark reminder of the disparity between ambition and reality. The turning point in his career came during his time in Berlin, where he recognized the potential of blending Indian traditions with global business strategies. This realization laid the groundwork for his future endeavors, including establishing Hybrid in India.

In 2017, he embarked on a new chapter with Hybrid Europe, which paved the way for his vision of Hybrid India. Hybrid empowers brands and agencies with its globally recognized ad tech ecosystem, rooted in over a decade of development expertise and driven by AI and ML algorithms. Offering a comprehensive suite of solutions, including Hybrid Platform and Contextual Marketing Suite VOX, the company delivers tailored strategies to enhance digital advertising performance across diverse markets.

In 2020, amidst the uncertainties brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, he seized the opportunity to launch Hybrid India. At the age of 30, he started Hybrid India out of a small 6 ft x 6 ft room with the single aim of helping his countrymen in distress.

His belief in India's potential soon proved to be correct.

In the first three months after its inception, Hybrid India achieved a positive return on investment, and the company has been growing at an amazing pace ever since. From a team of two, the company expanded to 30+ employees across four offices in Gurugram, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Bangalore, with plans to increase the workforce to 50+ and expand to other major cities in India.

However, his dreams were not limited to the boundaries of India. He led the company's entry into Southeast Asia, with operations set up in Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand, thereby extending Hybrid's influence and reach.

The journey of Mr. Shreyas Sathe is a vivid narrative of the power of resilience, innovation, and a profound bond with one's roots. The journey has been marked by significant sacrifices, including leaving a comfortable life in Germany, enduring months without a salary, and navigating uncharted business territories. Nevertheless, the benefits have been significant, both financially and in terms of satisfaction obtained from significant accomplishments with Hybrid India. His accolades include "Outstanding Professional & Contributor to Nation-Building" by the Indian Achievers' Forum, "Emerging Leader of the Year" at the Fortune Leadership Awards along with various acclaims within the Indian advertising industry.

His recognition as the president of the Jury and ambassador from India at the Red Apple Awards and National Advertising Forum in Russia served as a platform to share his success story, further highlighting India's potential on the global stage. Through Hybrid AdTech, Shreyas has not only shaped the future of advertising in India and beyond but has also paved the way for future leaders in the industry.

Mr. Dhanesh Bhardwaj MRICS
Sr. Consultant, DB Project Management Consultants
Business & Community Award for Professional of the Year

Engineering professional with 43 years of experience in Hospitality and High-end Commercial projects: Mr. Dhanesh Bhardwaj shares his journey of excellence

Mr. Dhanesh Bhardwaj an Engineering Professional with experience of 43 yrs in Project Management & expertise in Hospitality Greenfield & High-End Commercial Projects.

He Started his career in 1981 after completing his Diploma in Civil Engineering as Trainee Engineer with Sapoorji & Pallanji for a Project Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. Colaba, Mumbai.

While working simultaneously he completed his BE civil & MBA in project Management, also managed to grab the opportunity of Hospitality Greenfield project in early days of career which was a big push to get established in Hospitality Projects.

Always believe in Team Work, knowledge sharing with subordinates & give importance to all team members with sharing ideas & technology to enhance the quantity & timely delivery of projects.

Lucky to get, heading the team from early days of career & successfully completed the Taj, Marriott, Sarovar, Hyatt, Intercontinental & Mahindra Holidays Greenfield Projects. Always headed the projects from the planning stage till handing over to operational team with their full satisfaction.

He was also a Pioneer Engineer in India to Head the project with new technology in India, Year 2001 'Top-Down Construction of Hotel ' building, Intercontinental Marine Drive, Mumbai. It was a challenge to complete the Super structure first, then construction of basement touching to sea & handed over the project in Scheduled time.

As a Freelance Consultant now enjoying the career to support beginners & train them to prove their skill & adopt the latest technology. He is very optimistic in all circumstances and hoping to help with the Goal of a more robust & self-reliant India.

Mr. Suri Nuthalapati
Data & AI Practice Lead Americas, Cloudera
Business & Community Award for Global Excellence

A Visionary Leader and Innovator in Data & AI Excellence: Mr. Suri Nuthalapati shares his journey

Mr. Suri Nuthalapati is a visionary leader and innovator in Data, Analytics, and Artificial Intelligence with a proven track record of driving innovation, delivering enterprise solutions, and fostering community impact. Currently serving as the Data & AI Practice Lead, Americas at Cloudera, he is renowned for his expertise in Big Data, Machine Learning, AI, and cloud-native architectures.

With over a decade of experience, he has successfully led transformative projects for global enterprises. At Cloudera, he played a pivotal role in developing cutting-edge solutions like DocGenius AI, an AI chatbot platform that streamlines workflows, designed to reduce time-to-value for enterprise AI use cases. His leadership extends beyond technical delivery, shaping strategic roadmaps and enabling businesses to scale their data and AI capabilities effectively.

An entrepreneur at heart, his contributions extend far beyond corporate walls. As the founder of Trida Labs, he created a modern SQL editor that empowers data practitioners across industries. Through Farmioc, he has created solutions for Indian agriculture sector by leveraging data analytics to help farmers and traders make informed decisions, enhancing sustainability and productivity. These entrepreneurial ventures highlight Suri's commitment to blending innovation with societal impact.

His influence extends into academia and thought leadership. He is a member of prominent organizations such as Forbes Technology Council, Entrepreneur Leadership Network, IEEE, and various AI think tanks. His thought leadership is evident in his widely read publications and keynote addresses, where he inspires professionals to embrace the transformative potential of AI.

Known for his strategic vision, entrepreneurial mindset, and commitment to excellence, he continues to make significant contributions to the fields of Data and AI, enabling businesses to thrive in an increasingly data-driven and digital economy, leaving a lasting impact on both technology and society.

Mr. Arnab Dey
Vice President, JPMorgan Chase & Co.
Business & Community Award for Professional of the Year

Mr. Arnab Dey: A Visionary Leader in Financial Technology and Innovation

Mr. Arnab Dey is an accomplished technology leader with over two decades of experience in software application management, architecture, design, and development, specializing in the financial technology (FinTech) sector. Currently serving as Vice President and Lead Software Engineer at JPMorgan Chase & Co., Arnab has consistently pushed the boundaries of innovation, spearheading transformative projects that have reshaped the financial services landscape.

His academic journey began in Kolkata, India, where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Mathematics from Calcutta University and a Master's degree in Computer Applications from the West Bengal University of Technology. Over the years, he has built an impressive career, holding key positions at renowned organizations like Cognizant Technology Solutions, ADP, and PwC, before joining JPMorgan Chase.

A hallmark of his career has been his ability to modernize legacy systems and integrate cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain, and cloud computing. One of his notable achievements includes rewriting over 60 legacy modules at JPMorgan to enable seamless cloud migration, significantly enhancing efficiency and reducing costs. His architectural expertise and leadership ensured the successful delivery of critical projects such as the First Republic Bank migration and the Dodd-Frank compliance module.

His contributions have not gone unnoticed. He is a recipient of the ISTRA 2024 Outstanding Technical/Digital Innovation of the Year Award, the Indian Achiever Forum Award, and the Global Recognition Award. Additionally, his thought leadership is reflected in over 20 research papers published in esteemed international journals, solidifying his position as a global innovator in FinTech.

With a relentless commitment to innovation, he continues to lead groundbreaking projects that drive technological excellence, making a lasting impact on the global financial ecosystem.

Mr. Aravind Nuthalapati

Cloud Technology Leader - Data and AI, Microsoft

Business & Community Award for Professional of the Year

Pioneering Excellence in Cloud, Data, and AI: Mr. Aravind Nuthalapati shares his journey of success

Mr. Aravind Nuthalapati, Cloud Technology Leader – Data and AI at Microsoft, is a pioneer and recognized leader in cloud computing, big data, and artificial intelligence. With over 12 years of professional experience, he has consistently delivered innovative solutions that empower organizations to modernize their data ecosystems, unlock analytics potential, and drive strategic growth.

At Microsoft, he has led cloud transformative initiatives, designed robust big data architectures and implemented Azure-powered solutions tailored to meet complex business needs. He is celebrated for his ability to align technical excellence with business goals, enabling enterprises to optimize performance while reducing costs. His expertise in Azure Cloud, Data and AI technologies has positioned him as a trusted advisor, helping organizations solve pressing challenges and scale their operations effectively.

His influence extends beyond technology into thought leadership and professional mentorship. As a member of prominent organizations such as the Forbes Technology Council, IEEE, he actively contributes to shaping the future of cloud, data, and AI. His thought leadership is evident in his widely read articles on platforms like Forbes and DZone, where his insights inspire professionals globally to embrace the transformative potential of data-driven and AI-powered innovations.

Renowned for his strategic vision, thought leadership, and steadfast dedication to excellence, he consistently delivers remarkable contributions to the fields of Cloud, Data, and AI. His work not only advances technological frontiers but also leaves a lasting impact on businesses and society, solidifying his stature as a visionary thought leader and a pioneer in his domain.

Ms. Agrani Punj
Head of International Business, Supervac Industries LLP
Business & Community Award for Business Excellence

Driving Global Success: Ms Agrani Punj's Story of Leadership and Business Excellence

As the Head of International Business at Supervac, Ms Agrani Punj has transformed the company into a global leader in the metallizing consumables segment of the packaging industry. Over her tenure, she has achieved exceptional results, including a 2x increase in total revenue and a 2,000% growth in exports, as verified by audited balance sheets of FY 2018-19 and estimated figures for FY 2024-25. Expanding Supervac's footprint to over 37 countries, she has positioned the company as a trusted name in the global market while showcasing India's innovation and manufacturing excellence.

Driving innovation has been a cornerstone of her journey. Recognizing the need for collaboration and knowledge-sharing in the industry, she launched The Legends of Metallizing Podcast on platforms such as (YouTube, Spotify, LinkedIn), which has garnered over 3,000 listeners globally. It is the only podcast in the world that caters specifically to the metallizing industry.

She also created The World of Metallizing Newsletter, a technical publication read by over 500 professionals worldwide. These initiatives have established Supervac as a thought leader in the industry, fostering collaboration and addressing global challenges.

In addition to business success, she has actively contributed to industry development through expert contributions on international platforms. She delivered a talk on "Major Threats Facing the Metallizing Industry" at the 2023 R2R USA Conference in Milwaukee, highlighting her commitment to addressing critical challenges. Her research was featured in Converting Quarterly, the No. 1 print and online technical resource for the web-processing, converting and finishing industry, based in the United States of America. As a member of the R2R Sustainability Committee of the ARC (Association of Roll-to-Roll Converters), she is shaping sustainable practices and future industry standards.

Beyond professional achievements, she is deeply committed to creating social impact. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Supervac, in collaboration with the Ambulance Couple, played a vital role in distributing over 100,000 food packets to the underprivileged, showcasing their dedication to societal well-being.

Supervac has invested in workforce development, empowering employees with the skills to excel in a global industry. Their commitment to quality and compliance has earned them certifications such as the ISO 9001, ISO 14001, SA 8000, OHSAS 18001 and recognition for export excellence from the Indian and German governments. These accolades reflect their operational excellence and reinforce Supervac's global reputation.

Her vision is to drive sustainable growth, expand Supervac's market presence, and foster innovation and collaboration. She is committed to building long-term value for Supervac and contributing to the advancement of the metallizing industry while ensuring her efforts benefit society at large.

Mr. Sadhasivam Mohanadas
Enterprise Architect Principal, Elevance Health Inc.
Business & Community Award for Professional of the Year

Mr. Sadhasivam Mohanadas – A Global Leader in AI, Big Data, and Transformative Technology

Mr. Sadhasivam Mohanadas is a visionary technology leader with over 18 years of experience driving innovation at the intersection of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Big Data, and Cloud Computing. His passion for creating scalable and impactful solutions has positioned him as a global expert in solving complex challenges across industries, particularly in healthcare, where his work has transformed how data is utilized to improve outcomes.

He began his professional journey with a degree in Computer Science from Anna University, India, in 2005. Early in his career, he worked with Infosys and Cognizant Technology Solutions, gaining expertise in enterprise architecture, data warehousing, and advanced analytics. These experiences laid the foundation for his technical and strategic leadership, enabling him to build large-scale, data-driven solutions that address real-world problems.

Throughout his career, he has played a pivotal role in designing and implementing systems that leverage the power of data to create meaningful impact. His ability to bridge cutting-edge technologies with organizational and societal needs has enabled him to tackle global challenges such as public health crises, cost efficiency in healthcare, and equitable access to services.

He developed predictive analytics and dashboards during COVID-19, showcasing AI's role in crisis management. He led the creation of FHIR-compliant platforms for secure global data exchange and integrated social determinants of health into systems to promote equity in healthcare. Through the Blue Button 2.0 initiative, he empowered patients with secure access to their health data. He also designed scalable cloud-based systems, enabling industries like healthcare and finance to handle vast data demands efficiently.

His work is not limited to a single geography or industry—it has global relevance. His ability to align advanced technologies with critical needs has resulted in solutions that are not only innovative but also impactful. Whether through AI-driven personalized medicine, real-time pandemic response systems, or cost-efficient data platforms, his contributions have addressed challenges individuals, organizations, and governments worldwide face.

His leadership extends beyond technology. He mentors emerging technologists and fosters innovation and collaboration across teams and industries. He believes in empowering others to push boundaries and create solutions that drive technical excellence and societal progress.

He envisions leveraging technology to address humanity's critical challenges. Over the next decade, he aims to advance AI and machine learning in personalized medicine for tailored global treatments, develop scalable systems resilient to crises, and promote ethical AI practices that ensure fairness, transparency, and inclusivity.

His work reflects a global perspective—addressing universal challenges like healthcare access, equity, and sustainability. By focusing on solutions prioritizing scalability, security, and compliance, he has created platforms and frameworks that can be adapted across industries and geographies.

Ms. Astha Puri

Senior Data Scientist, CVS Health

Business & Community Award for Women Empowerment

An accomplished AI Specialist and Data Scientist in Healthcare: Ms. Astha Puri shares her journey

Ms. Astha Puri, an accomplished AI Specialist and Data Scientist, has emerged as a trailblazer in healthcare innovation through responsible AI practices. With a passion for leveraging AI to improve patient outcomes, she has significantly impacted the industry by architecting cutting-edge recommendation systems and fostering a culture of ethical AI.

Her transformative journey began with her academic pursuits, including a master's degree in Business Analytics from the University of Minnesota and an executive certificate in Machine Learning from MIT. These experiences laid the foundation for her groundbreaking work in healthcare.

Her innovative approach has led to numerous accolades, such as being featured in Marquis Who's Who in America, and nominations for the Phenomenal Women in Technology Award and Women Tech Global Awards. Her project on predictive analytics in patient care earned her the Golden Zenith Award for excellence in education and innovation, highlighting her ability to bridge technical expertise with meaningful healthcare solutions.

Her work extends beyond her technical contributions. As a mentor and advocate, she has empowered aspiring AI professionals, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and ethical practices. Her influence has reshaped healthcare AI, ensuring it prioritizes human well-being.

With global recognition and a series of impactful projects, she continues to revolutionize healthcare. Her dedication to responsible AI serves as an inspiration, paving the way for a future where technology enhances lives while preserving the principles of humanity.

Mr. Naresh Babu Kilaru

Lead Observability Engineer, LexisNexis

Business & Community Award for Professional of the Year

An innovative technologist who has changed the paradigms of Observability, AI, and Data Analytics: Mr. Naresh Babu Kilaru shares his journey of excellence

Mr. Naresh Babu Kilaru is an innovative technologist who has changed the paradigms of Observability, AI, and Data Analytics. He plays a very influential role in developing a vision to put modern monitoring for cloud-native stacks into operation. This comprises advanced-level designing and implementation for state-of-the-art monitoring in environments like Kubernetes, ECS Fargate, and EC2 with ensured reliability, scalability, and efficiency in each operations benchmark. He integrated AI-powered frameworks into traditional monitoring for proactive response to challenges and reduced system downtimes.

Besides being an astute engineer, he lives two other identities: that of a prolific researcher and an avid writer. He has written more than 20 research articles and two widely acclaimed books. His publications, Principles of Artificial Intelligence: A Comprehensive Guide and Introduction to Artificial Intelligence and Deep Learning, are considered the Bible in the tech industry and have been cited many times all over the world. These works reflect his commitment to knowledge advancement and enabling professionals with the tools to shine in an ever-evolving technological landscape.

The main patents by him, among others, concern a "System for Dynamic Authentication of Communication Devices to Enhance Cybersecurity" and an "AI-Based Digital Clock." These inventions not only solve very complicated challenges in technology but also those concerning security. His work with a Silicon Valley Bank on predictive monitoring and intelligence reporting further underlines his aligning of innovation with the imperatives of business objectives.

Accolades coming his way speak volumes about his excellence and the impact of him. He was recognized as the International Best Researcher of the Year, 2024, by the Asia International Research Awards for his leadership in the advancement of technology and was accorded the status of Senior IEEE Member.

Beyond his technical achievements, he is also a committed mentor, mentoring upcoming engineers on platforms such as ADPList. Innovation, education, and mentorship form the continuing legacy of this bright mind, inspiring generations of technologists to come.

Mr. M. Nashvwiin
Director, AAD Consultants
Business & Community Award for Business Excellence

With a mantra of You've got to think about big things while you're doing small things, so that all the small things go in the right direction:

Mr. M Nashvwiin shares his journey of success

More than a decade ago along with his friend & fellow architect Mr. Amit Kantak, Mr. M Nashvwiin co-founded AAD Consultants, in Mumbai, based on this simple principle.

A formidable Architecture & Interior Design practice today, AAD Consultants has grown significantly while always ensuring that the larger goals of sustainability & wellness always guide their design sensibilities. As a Director at AAD Consultants, he uses his vast experience of over 25 years of Professional experience specializing in corporate interiors, to transform spaces into integrated, functional and visually appealing environments of distinct style and purpose.

He firmly believes that Design is where Science and Art merge.

Every design endeavour must be towards enhancing the quality of the space to make a positive difference to the user. Sustainability in its true perspective is what he has always adapted in the projects at AADC keeping Economic, Environmental and Social Aspects in Mind.

Building upon his extensive exposure to the working styles of various corporate organizations across diverse industries, he distils the best practices from each and amalgamates them into designs that work effortlessly as great workspaces. He has worked on multiple typologies and still considers himself a learner as he constantly tries to better every attempt. According to him, the most fulfilling aspect of being a designer is knowing that with a thoughtful heart whatever one creates is going to be unique.

Design is a seamless blend of various dynamics such as form, function, light, textures etc. It is when all these dynamics gel together that the quality of space which you envision at the inception comes to life. His approach to design emphasizes meticulous planning and attention to detail.

He has showcased his Architectural vision consistently over more than two decades earning numerous recognitions & rewards. But the best acknowledgement of his skills & talents is being the consistent choice, as an Architect, for his prestigious clients which includes marquee global conglomerates such as the JSW group, the Aditya Birla Group and the Tata group to name a few.

Akshaya Patra Foundation serves 20,000 Pilgrims with Meals everyday at Maha Kumbh

The Akshaya Patra Foundation has set up a special camp at the upcoming Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, starting from January 13, 2025. The Uttar Pradesh government has allocated one acre of land near the Sangam area for Akshaya Patra's kitchen. The Foundation's National President, Shri Bharatarshabh Dasa, shared that their goal is to serve wholesome 20,000 meals every day during the event.

The customized Akshaya Patra kitchen is equipped with various tools to aid in food preparation, and is expected to serve 20,000 people during the Maha Kumbh Mela on a daily basis. From cooking to delivery, the temporary kitchen is set to operate daily with cleanliness and quality as the top priorities.

The Akshaya Patra Foundation is a not-for-profit organization that strives to address classroom hunger and malnutrition in India.

Infosys and Indian Institute for Human Settlements Host BioConserve Summit 2025 to Advance the Urban Sustainability Dialogue

Infosys - a global leader in next-generation digital services and consulting - jointly convened the inaugural BioConserve Summit 2025, on January 7, 2025 with the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS), India's national knowledge institution committed to its urban transformation. This event, held at the Infosys Bengaluru campus, brought together diverse stakeholders, including individuals representing academic and research institutions, architectural firms, NGOs, corporates, and government bodies, to co-create biodiversity conservation strategies for urban spaces and campuses.

Biodiversity preservation requires urgent collective action. The BioConserve Summit 2025 served as a collaborative platform for knowledge sharing among experts from academia, research, government bodies, and industry. The discussions ranged from the critical issue of biodiversity loss to land sharing approaches, ecological restoration planning, urban biodiversity integration, campus sustainability, among other similar topics. Recognizing the significant role of large urban campuses in supporting biodiversity, the summit explored how these spaces can be designed, managed, and utilized for conserving ecosystems and supporting sustainable environments through innovative solutions and collaborative action.

Infosys is a global leader in next-generation digital services and consulting. Over 300,000 of our people work to amplify human potential and create the next opportunity for people, businesses and communities.

'Illness to Wellness' Handwashing Awareness event highlights it as the most cost-effective way to boost personal and public health

In a dedicated effort to promote hygiene and healthier practices among children, the ASSOCHAM Foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility (AFCSR), the social arm of ASSOCHAM organised an "Illness to Wellness" Handwashing Awareness event at the Navy Children School, New Delhi. Supported by hygiene brand Savlon, the initiative focused on fostering cleaner habits and raising awareness about the crucial role of hand hygiene in preventing the spread of illness. Frequent handwashing is one of the most effective and cost-efficient ways to prevent illness and curb the spread of infections. This key message was delivered to students in an engaging and fun way through a video, which highlighted the correct handwashing techniques. The video aimed to instill these essential hygiene habits from an early age, encouraging children to embrace healthier practices and reduce the risk of infections and serious diseases.

The event saw over 600 students from grades III to V, along with teachers and staff, actively participating in interactive quizzes and live demonstrations. Experts guided students on the correct techniques of handwashing and explained its importance in reducing the spread of illnesses such as colds, flu, and other infections. The event culminated with a pledge, where students committed to consistently practicing proper hand hygiene and spreading awareness about the importance of washing hands thoroughly.

PepsiCo India and The Social Lab organize the sixth annual Plog Run in Gurugram, Marking Swachh Bharat Diwas

PepsiCo India, in collaboration with The Social Lab (TSL), led the 6th edition of the Plog Run at Leisure Valley, Gurugram. The initiative embodies the spirit of its guiding principle, 'Partnership of Progress,' bringing together organizations and communities for collective action. Aligned with the Government of India's Swachh Bharat Mission, Plog Run brings together fitness and sustainability, with volunteers collecting plastic waste while jogging.

Celebrated Paralympian Akhlesh Kumar flagged off the Plog Run along with Jagrut Kotecha, Chief Executive Officer, PepsiCo India & South Asia; Sahil Arora, Chief Executive Officer, The Social Lab (TSL); and Vikas Bhatia, Executive Director-Group ESG Head, Varun Beverages Ltd.

The Plog Run 2024 in Gurugram witnessed an early morning start, with participants coming together for a special warm-up session led by CultFit and an exciting game of football on Gatorade Turf Finder before setting off for plogging, i.e. Jogging through the Leisure Valley area. Participants collected plastic waste, bringing fitness and environmental cleanliness together in a unified effort.

This year's Plog Run saw close to 500 participants, including employees from The Social Lab, PepsiCo India, and Varun Beverages, students, volunteers, and local citizens, collecting over 400 kilograms of plastic waste around Leisure Valley Sector 29. The collected plastic waste will be segregated and recycled for further use.

GREEN EDUCATION: WHY SUSTAINABILITY SHOULD BE A CORE PART OF SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Mrs. Nirali Dagli

Principal, Kalorex Future School, Ahmedabad)

Introduction

With climate change and resource depletion dominating global concerns, schools have a crucial role in preparing students to face these challenges. One effective way to achieve this is by incorporating sustainability into the core curriculum. Teaching students about sustainability helps develop environmentally conscious habits and prepares them to take meaningful action for the planet's future. Sustainability is increasingly becoming part of academics. Schools across the globe are recognizing the need to teach environmental responsibility as a fundamental skill. While extracurricular efforts like eco-clubs and green initiatives are commendable, integrating sustainability into routine learning will have a greater impact. Countries like Finland, Sweden and Canada are leading in green education, incorporating sustainability into their curriculam.

Why should sustainability be in the core curriculum?

Habit formation: Like languages or maths, sustainability must be practised regularly. When students learn and apply sustainable habits early, they become a part of their daily lives.

Photo: Shekhar Ghosh

Moulding young minds: School students are at an impressionable age, making it the ideal time to introduce habits and principles of sustainability.

Spiral learning method: Sustainability education benefits from the spiral learning method, which involves revisiting a concept in progressively deeper contexts to reinforce sustainable practices.

Interdisciplinary impact: Sustainability connects with multiple subjects - science, social studies, economics and even arts. By introducing sustainability across the curriculum, schools can encourage holistic thinking on environmental issues.

What Kalorex is doing?

At Kalorex Group, we are actively working towards promoting sustainability. The group is working on the 5 tenets of sustainability, viz. Recycle, Reduce, Conserve Water, Save Energy, and Plant and Nurture Trees. The Group has pledged to plant and nurture 1 lakh trees. Each one of us is a part of the Green Guardian initiative. There is rainwater harvesting system in all our schools and most have solar panels to generate electricity. Kalorex students have undertaken initiatives like using only steel tiffin instead of plastic tiffin, avoiding plastic bags, and using cloth bags. Kalorex group is an active contributor of Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation's Mission Three Million Trees and our honourable PM Shri Narendra Modiji's initiative - 'Ek ped Maa ke naam'.

Conclusion

Sustainability education is essential for preparing students for environmental challenges. By making it a core part of the school curriculum, we can nurture environmentally aware citizens ready to make a positive impact. At Kalorex Future School, we are committed to leading this green revolution in education.

ADVANCING SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP IN 2025

Brig Rajiv Williams, YSM (Veteran)

Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Agenda in 2025 will continue to focus on activities conducted beyond the mandatory requirement of investing 2 % of their profits as per the Company's Act 2013. Besides the other 14 thematic areas, where investments have been carried out in the past decade, interventions on 'Social' and 'Environment' will remain key drivers of change. It will also be a conscious effort on the part of business in 2025 to increasingly focus on human rights due diligence because CSR is not just about legal obligation but it is an important business tool as it brings in brand value, improves community relations and attracts socially conscious investors and customers.

With increasing pressure on corporations to close the gaps toward a carbon neutral economy, the ESG framework has also come to centre stage. However all activities directly connected to 'E' and 'S' have to be aligned to the UN SDGs and impact measured.

Key SDG drivers in Strategic Development 2025

- SDG 1 – If we see over the past decade, poverty alleviation has been targeted on a war footing with various thematic CSR initiatives trying to uplift the 270 million people living below poverty line. Corporations over the next few years have to collaborate with other corporations and further strengthen existing government institutions to mitigate the problems

- SDG 3 – Good health and well-being - Great strides have been made in improving people's health in recent years. 146 out of 200 countries or areas have already met or are on track to meet the SDG target on under-5 mortality. However, inequalities in health care access still persist. The COVID-19 pandemic and other ongoing crises have impeded progress towards Goal 3. Childhood vaccinations have experienced the largest decline in three decades, and tuberculosis and malaria deaths have increased compared with pre-pandemic levels.

- SDG 4 – Education beyond just numbers is what has to be carried out. It is the quality of education that matters The NEP – 2024 has a clear framework but it is important to plug the gaps in quality education, which will involve in streamlining the implementation process and bringing in technology

- SDG 6 – WASH programs, ensuring clean drinking water and improving the health indices linked to water borne disease and clean air merit adequate attention by corporations and require additional investments in CSR

- SDGs 7 and 13 – These SDGs essentially focus on 'Energy' and 'Climate change' respectively. What does this involve in the ever growing population scenario, with scarce natural resources and lack of funding resources to combat the problem of sustainable energy usage. There is a need of reducing carbon footprint and opting for quicker steps to move toward alternate sources of energy, especially for heavy industries

- SDG 17 – Collaborations are critical in sustainable development and inclusive growth. Hence it is important for collectivisation of resources and seeing a larger growth vision together.

Conclusion

Hence it is a systematic approach that enhances the scope of CSR discussion and addresses the current trends such as investment-driven CSR models and the Social Stock Exchanges (SSE), which connect social enterprises and NGOs with funding opportunities. In addition, employee volunteering has been a game changer with company profits soaring in the USA, where volunteer programs involving 1. 2 billion volunteers resulted in a USD 41.5 billion increase in business profits. Hence 2025, marks an important year to know and show a corporation's effort toward inclusivity and growth and make CSR even more relevant with ESG adding value to the efforts.

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