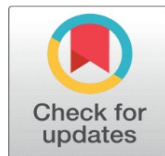
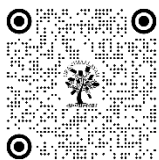


THE ROLE OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) INITIATIVES IN PROMOTING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the transformative impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives on women's socio-economic status and empowerment across diverse regions and sectors. Through primary data collection, the study provides an in-depth analysis of how various CSR strategies affect women's economic conditions and their overall empowerment. The results reveal significant variations in the effectiveness of these initiatives, influenced by regional and sectoral contexts. Key successful strategies are identified, demonstrating the potential of CSR programs to drive meaningful socio-economic improvements for women. This study highlights the critical importance of designing CSR interventions that are tailored to the unique needs and conditions of different regions and sectors, ensuring maximum positive impact on women's socio-economic development and empowerment. Companies are developing and implementing CSR initiatives that empower women because they understand the significant impact gender parity has on organizational success and societal growth. The goal is to determine which approaches are most beneficial in promoting the professional and personal growth of women. Additionally, the study will evaluate the concrete results of these endeavors while also investigating the obstacles and constraints encountered by organizations. It will analyze CSR in depth to provide beneficial insights into how it may be used to empower women and contribute to gender equality initiatives. The goal is to make these gains meaningful and sustainable. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives that aim to empower women show a sea change in how corporations feel about gender equality. It shows that people realize that empowering women is crucial for society as a whole and for businesses to be more sustainable. Businesses are constantly improving their methods, and these initiatives will have a significant influence on how gender equality and economic development are shaped in the future. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives that prioritize women's empowerment should use a multi-pronged approach, tackling both structural obstacles and employees' specific areas of growth. Supportive environments that promote gender equality and increase opportunities for women can be created by businesses through the integration of targeted activities into their CSR programs. These tactics not only aid women in climbing the corporate ladder, but they also have a positive impact on society as a whole. Companies may make a significant difference in women's empowerment through their CSR initiatives. Women empowerment is not merely a slogan but a prerequisite for an optimal capacity for overall development of a family, society, nation and a sustainable world. The study emphasizes the need of organizations committing to women's empowerment and constantly evaluating and improving their methods to tackle new issues and make the most of their effect. Companies can improve their CSR initiatives and have a significant impact on organizational performance and society advancement by implementing the best practices found in this research.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); Women's Empowerment; CSR Strategies; Socio-economic Status; Economic Development; Women's Economic Conditions; CSR Initiatives.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) aligns business operations with social values. CSR focuses on the social, environmental, and financial success of a company -the triple bottom line, with the goal being to positively impact society while achieving business success. As corporate social responsibility (CSR) continues to evolve, companies looking to show their commitment to sustainable development and social fairness are finding that empowering women is a crucial area of attention. Organizations are putting several CSR initiatives meant to support women's growth and inclusion into practice as they become more aware of the inherent benefits of gender diversity. These programs and projects include a wide range of topics related to women's empowerment, from legislative lobbying and community-based support to leadership development programs and mentoring. This development reflects a broader realization that empowering women improves organizational performance, creates a more inclusive economy, and promotes social change. In the midst of this expanding tendency, it's critical to comprehend how various CSR strategies affect women's lives and advance gender equality.

The role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in various industries is becoming more important. Companies are developing and implementing CSR initiatives that empower women because they understand the significant impact gender parity has on organizational success and societal growth. Leadership development programs, mentorship initiatives, policy lobbying, and community participation are all part of the spectrum of approaches that this comparative study aims to examine and assess. The research seeks to discover best practices that other organizations can implement by analyzing case studies from various industries. The goal is to determine which approaches are most beneficial in promoting the professional and personal growth of women. Additionally, the study will evaluate the concrete results of these endeavors while also investigating the obstacles and constraints encountered by organizations. This article will analyze CSR in depth to provide beneficial insights into how it may be used to empower women and contribute to gender equality initiatives. The goal is to make these gains meaningful and sustainable.

The phrase "women's empowerment" refers to a larger set of ideas related to gender and power. In the simplest of words, it is basically the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development as well as shine as equals in society. This article is based on a theory that views gender as a process that encompasses all of these aspects of human life, rather than only a social construction, practice, or performance (Linstead & Pullen, 2005). Express the view that "gender is not the construction or outcome of a performance but is imminent within those performances making them productive of new molecular connections in the meshwork of identity." According to Nayak and Kehily (2006), this leads to the realization that gender is not fixed but rather is constantly being constructed. This is significant for women's empowerment because it calls into question the usefulness of using "women" or "woman" as a fixed category of identity, function, or even performance. Feminist organizational scholars who have studied leadership have previously demolished the language of a hierarchical binary between men and women (Acker, 1990), but the assumptions made about the men and women participating in CSR professionals have not yet been subject to similar criticism.

➤ Women's Empowerment through CSR

A woman's right to full equality with a man's in the home, community, workplace, and nation is what we mean when we talk of women's empowerment. The goal is for them to reach a point when they can foster their own personal growth by making decisions on their own. Due to gender inequality, women in Indian society continue to have a lower status. In order to truly empower women, they need also be granted equal rights to males. Since they make up about half of the population, they represent effectively half of the country's strength and should not be viewed as a subordinate gender. Since women are naturally more patient and hard-working, they are in a better position to advance their nation (Mogaji, et al., 2021).

A major change in how companies tackle gender inequality and contribute to society advancement is the empowerment of women through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Ethical labour practices, community engagement, and environmental sustainability have traditionally been part of corporate social responsibility. Nevertheless, with the growing global conversation surrounding gender equality, more and more corporations are directing their corporate

social responsibility initiatives towards empowering women. Gender equality is a moral necessity and an engine for economic growth and innovation, which is why our strategic focus is based on that realisation (Das, 2022).

The increasing dedication of corporations to incorporating gender considerations into their fundamental business procedures is shown in the various measures they have implemented to support women's empowerment. In order to help women advance in their careers, many programs provide them with leadership training, mentorship opportunities, and skill development specifically designed for them. To further remove structural obstacles and advance fair practices in the workplace and beyond, more and more businesses are taking part in policy advocacy (Basargekar, 2008).

Furthermore, effective corporate social responsibility programs often have an impact outside of the office as well, shaping community-based initiatives that promote women's health, education, and entrepreneurship. By funding these kinds of programs, businesses help foster an atmosphere where women can succeed in all aspects of life, including the workplace, in leadership roles, and in the community. This all-encompassing method highlights how CSR may revolutionize efforts to promote sustainable development and gender equality (Pimpa & Phouxay, 2017).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives that prioritise women's empowerment show a sea change in how corporations feel about gender equality. It shows that people realise that empowering women is crucial for society as a whole and for businesses to be more sustainable. Businesses are constantly improving their methods, and these initiatives will have a significant influence on how gender equality and economic development are shaped in the future (Jadhav & Koli, 2011).

➤ **Strategies for Women Empowerment through CSR**

The well-being of women has mainly focused on educational and economic empowerment. Companies can leverage their CSR platforms to raise awareness about women's rights, gender equality and social issues. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives that aim to empower women should use a multi-pronged approach, tackling both structural obstacles and employees' specific areas of growth. Supportive environments that promote gender equality and increase opportunities for women can be created by businesses through the integration of targeted activities into their CSR programs. CSR initiatives by companies to promote advocacy and create awareness will help change societal mindsets and challenge gender stereotypes. It will boost their self-esteem and encourage them to assert their societal rights. These tactics not only aid women in climbing the corporate ladder, but they also have a positive impact on society as a whole. Companies may make a significant difference in women's empowerment through their CSR initiatives by implementing the following measures (Azizah & Hati, 2024).

- **Leadership Development Programs:** Leadership development programs are one of the most effective corporate social responsibility techniques for empowering women. The goal of these initiatives is to provide women the support, encouragement, and training they need to reach the highest levels of leadership in their respective fields. Executive development, workshops on decision-making and strategic thinking, and mentorship by more senior leaders are all possibilities for these initiatives. A lot of organisations are doing their part to assist women succeed in the workplace by providing them with opportunities to develop their leadership skills (Jatana & Crowther, 2007).
- **Mentorship and Sponsorship Initiatives:** When it comes to women's professional growth, mentorship and sponsorship play a vital role. Formal mentorship programs, in which seasoned professionals advise and encourage rising female talent, are a common

component of CSR strategy. Further, sponsorship promotes women's growth by giving them chances to work on high-profile initiatives and advance in their careers. Through these programs, women are able to connect with other professionals, learn about different career paths, and receive individualised advice on how to advance in their chosen fields (Srivastava, 2024).

- **Training and Skills Development:** One such successful tactic is to put money into education and professional development. Organisations may do their part to empower women by providing them with opportunities to hone their management, entrepreneurial, and technical chops. Skills like digital literacy, financial management, and leadership may be taught in workshops, taken online, or certified. Businesses may further women's professional development, economic freedom, and job success by enhancing their competencies.

- **Policy Advocacy and Reform:** An effective strategy to remove structural obstacles to women's advancement is to advocate for policies that do just that. Equal pay, parental leave, and anti-harassment laws are all examples of workplace rules that could be supported by corporate social responsibility programs. Additionally, businesses might take part in advocacy campaigns that target national or international public policy in an effort to promote gender equality and women's advancement.
- **Community-Based Programs:** Community-based programs extend the impact of CSR initiatives beyond the workplace and into local communities. These programs can support women's entrepreneurship, education, and health. For example, companies might fund scholarships for young women, support women-led businesses, or provide resources for women's health and wellness initiatives. By investing in the broader community, businesses contribute to creating an environment where women have the resources and support necessary to thrive.
- **Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives:** Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives aimed at empowering women should prioritise diversity and inclusion in the workplace. This involves doing things like building support networks for women, introducing diversity training, and cultivating inclusive working cultures. To further guarantee that women have fair chances to thrive and progress within the company, companies should also establish goals for gender diversity in recruiting and promotion policies.
- **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Flexible work arrangements are increasingly recognized as a key strategy for supporting women, particularly those balancing work and family responsibilities. CSR initiatives may involve implementing policies that offer flexible working hours, remote work options, and parental leave. Such arrangements can help women manage their professional and personal lives more effectively, reducing barriers to career advancement and improving overall job satisfaction.
- **Financial and Entrepreneurial Support:** Providing financial and entrepreneurial support is another impactful CSR strategy. Companies can offer grants, loans, or investment opportunities to women entrepreneurs, helping them start or expand their businesses. CSR initiatives can promote financial inclusion for women and facilitate access to financial services, including microfinance and financial literacy programmes. Apart from encouraging women to seek opportunities, it will also reduce their problems stemming from financial dependency on male relatives and contribute to household and community development. Additionally, businesses may provide business development resources, such as workshops on business planning, marketing, and financial management. This support fosters economic empowerment and encourages women to pursue entrepreneurial ventures.
- **Awareness and Education Campaigns:** Awareness and education campaigns play a critical role in changing perceptions and promoting gender equality. CSR initiatives may involve creating campaigns that highlight the achievements of women, raise awareness about gender issues, and advocate for equal opportunities. These campaigns can engage both internal and external stakeholders, fostering a culture of respect and support for women's empowerment.

2. OBJECTIVES

1. To study the impact of CSR initiatives on women's socio-economic status.
2. To analyze and understand the impact of CSR initiatives on women's empowerment in various regions.
3. To assess the impact of CSR initiatives on women's economics in different regions or sectors.

3. HYPOTHESIS AND RESEARCH MODEL

H1: There is a significant impact of CSR initiatives on women's socio-economic status across different regions.

H2: There is a significant impact of CSR initiatives on women's empowerment in various regions.

H3: There is a significant impact of CSR initiatives on women's economic outcomes in different sectors.

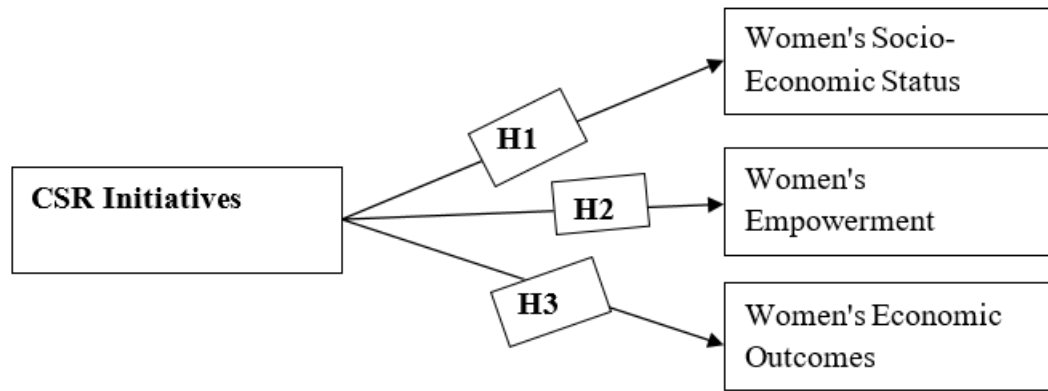


Figure 1: Research Model

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on gender equality and women's empowerment, integral to Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), experienced notable growth following the SDGs' introduction in 2015. Beloskar et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review of 1,713 research articles from the Web of Science Core Collection and Scopus, shedding light on the evolving focus of management literature. Their analysis revealed persistent gender segregation at the executive level despite comparable male and female executives. The study identified key research areas, including board diversity, financial performance, and corporate social responsibility policies, with a significant concentration on studies from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia published post-2016. Additionally, Rao et al. (2023) examined the effects of gender diversity on corporate boards, finding that it positively influenced financial performance, decision-making, creativity, and shareholder value. Their findings, supported by case studies of leading companies like IBM, Apple, and General Motors, emphasized the economic benefits of gender diversity and highlighted the strategic importance of comprehensive diversity plans, as exemplified by Satya Nadella's initiatives at Microsoft. Both studies underscored the critical need for continued research and practical strategies to address ongoing challenges in gender diversity and empowerment.

Singh and Yadav (2023) explored the alignment of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a means of achieving global prosperity and peace by 2030. Their study highlighted how Indian law mandates corporations to allocate a portion of their revenues for CSR, thereby influencing ethical practices and sustainable development. They examined the connection between the SDGs and specific provisions of the Companies Act of 2013 (Section 135), emphasizing a shift from profit maximization to resource preservation and ethical corporate behavior. Concurrently, Dixit et al. (2023) investigated the role of social entrepreneurial leadership in women's empowerment in India. Their research, using interviews and NVivo for content analysis, demonstrated that social entrepreneurial leadership significantly enhances women's empowerment by fostering financial independence, autonomy, self-confidence, and creativity. The study underscored how supportive startup environments and benchmarking in social entrepreneurship contribute to empowering women and driving societal change. Both studies collectively underscore the impact of legal frameworks and entrepreneurial leadership in advancing gender equality and sustainable development.

Das (2022) explored the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in empowering women by examining its impact on overcoming societal constraints and fostering decision-making agency among women in West Bengal, India. Despite the region's cultural and traditional challenges, the study highlighted how CSR initiatives could address gender bias and support women's advancement, particularly through reformatory policies related to wages and compensation. In contrast, Rosca et al. (2020) focused on the role of women in social entrepreneurship within Base of the Pyramid contexts in Colombia and India. Their study used a multiple case study methodology to reveal that women entrepreneurs, driven by a strong desire to effect social change, navigate uncertainties by shifting between causality and effectuation strategies. This research underscored the unique challenges female entrepreneurs face in emerging markets and the inclusive strategies they employ to promote socio-economic development.

Together, these studies illustrate the diverse approaches and critical impacts of CSR and social entrepreneurship in advancing women's empowerment, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities in these fields.

Al Salmi and Khan (2019) conducted a comparative analysis of CSR practices between Oman Liquefied Natural Gas Company LLC (Oman LNG) and Oman India Fertilizer Company (OMIFCO), revealing that while both companies made significant social impacts through their CSR initiatives, their efforts lacked quantifiable evaluation and coordination. The study highlighted the need for structured communication channels and standardized CSR practices to enhance effectiveness and prevent redundancy. Similarly, Narwal and Singh (2013) provided a comparative analysis of CSR practices between Indian companies and multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in India. Their study found that while there were minor variations in the significance and focus areas of CSR between Indian firms and MNCs, both groups embraced key CSR approaches such as environmental marketing, sustainable development, and community assistance. The study demonstrated that MNCs adapted to local CSR standards, reflecting a convergence in CSR practices across different contexts. Together, these studies illustrate the diverse CSR practices and the need for improved coordination and standardization to maximize social impact.

5. METHODOLOGY

The study uses a primary research technique that combines quantitative approaches to examine the impact of several CSR strategies for women's empowerment. For this research, we will be surveying and interviewing corporate social responsibility (CSR) managers, women's empowerment program participants, and those who have benefited from these programs. The implementation, obstacles, and effects of various CSR strategies can be fully understood with the help of these key data collection methods. While surveys will measure the effect and efficacy of particular programs across different industries, interviews will give more detailed insights into participants' experiences and perspectives. In addition, focus groups with women who have participated in CSR programs can provide insightful criticism on the programs' usefulness and suggestions for enhancement. In order to compare and contrast the techniques used by various organizations, the gathered data will be examined for commonalities, success factors, and possible gaps. With this approach, we can be sure that our evaluation of CSR programs' effects on women's empowerment will be thorough and applicable to the real world, and we can use that information to inform concrete suggestions for how to make these programs even more effective.

6. FINDINGS

6.1 Demographics

Table 6.1: Demographic Profile

S No.	Demographic Factors	Category	N	Percent
1	Gender	Female	86	43.0%
		Male	114	57.0%
2	Age	Less than 20 Years	48	24.0%
		21-30 Years	56	28.0%
		31-40 Years	53	26.5%

		More than 40 Years	43	21.5%
3	Education Qualification	Higher secondary education	55	27.5%
		Undergraduate degree	56	28.0%
		Postgraduate degree	40	20.0%
		Other	49	24.5%
4	Monthly income	Below 20,000	50	25.0%
		20,000-40,000	40	20.0%
		40,000-60,000	43	21.5%
		More than 60,000	67	33.5%
5	How familiar are you with CSR strategies related to women's empowerment?	Very familiar	47	23.5%
		Somewhat familiar	46	23.0%
		Not very familiar	43	21.5%
		Not familiar at all	64	32.0%
	Have you ever been involved with or	Yes	148	74.0%

6	benefited from a CSR initiative aimed at women's empowerment?	No	52	26.0%
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Table 6.1 presents demographic data and responses related to familiarity with and involvement in CSR initiatives aimed at women's empowerment. Among the participants, a higher proportion are male (57%) compared to female (43%). In terms of age distribution, the largest group is between 21-30 years (28%), followed by those under 20 years (24%), 31-40 years (26.5%), and those over 40 years (21.5%). Educational qualifications are fairly evenly distributed, with the largest group holding an undergraduate degree (28%), followed by higher secondary education (27.5%), other qualifications (24.5%), and postgraduate degrees (20%). Monthly income levels vary, with the highest percentage earning more than 60,000 (33.5%), followed by those earning below 20,000 (25%), between 20,000-40,000 (20%), and 40,000-60,000 (21.5%). Regarding familiarity with CSR strategies related to women's empowerment, 32% of respondents are not familiar at all, while 23.5% are very familiar, 23% are somewhat familiar, and 21.5% are not very familiar. When it comes to involvement or benefits from CSR initiatives, a substantial majority of 74% have either been involved or benefited from such initiatives, whereas 26% have not.

6.2 Hypothesis

H1: There is a significant impact of CSR initiatives on women's socio-economic status across different regions.

Table 6.2: Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R ²	F	t-value	p-value	Hypothesis Result
H1	Women's Socio-Economic Status -> CSR Initiatives	.161	.026	5.255	2.292	.023	Supported

The table 6.2 regression analysis results support the hypothesis that CSR initiatives have a significant impact on women's socio-economic status across different regions. The beta coefficient of 0.161 indicates a positive relationship between CSR initiatives and women's socio-economic status. The R² value of 0.026 suggests that CSR initiatives explain 2.6% of the variance in women's socio-economic status, is statistically significant given the p-value of 0.023. The t-value of 2.292 further confirms that the impact is statistically significant, leading to the conclusion that CSR initiatives do indeed positively influence women's socio-economic status.

H2: There is a significant impact of CSR initiatives on women's empowerment in various regions.

Table 6.3: Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R ²	F	t-value	p-value	Hypothesis Result
H2	Women's Empowerment -> CSR Initiatives	.146	.021	4.342	2.084	.038	Supported

The table 6.3 regression analysis reveals that CSR initiatives have a statistically significant impact on women's empowerment across various regions. The beta coefficient of 0.146 indicates a positive relationship between CSR initiatives and women's empowerment, with an R^2 value of 0.021 suggesting that CSR initiatives explain 2.1% of the variance in women's empowerment. The t-value of 2.084 and a p-value of 0.038 confirm that this relationship is statistically significant at the 5% level. Therefore, the hypothesis that CSR initiatives significantly impact women's empowerment is supported by the data.

H3: There is a significant impact of CSR initiatives on women's economic outcomes in different sectors.

Table 6.4: Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R ²	F	t-value	p-value	Hypothesis Result
H2	Women's Economic Outcomes -> CSR Initiatives	.150	.023	4.561	2.136	.034	Supported

The table 6.4 regression analysis indicates that CSR initiatives have a statistically significant impact on women's economic outcomes across different sectors. The beta coefficient of 0.150 suggests a positive relationship between CSR initiatives and women's economic outcomes. The R^2 value of 0.023 implies that CSR initiatives explain 2.3% of the variance in women's economic outcomes. The t-value of 2.136 and the p-value of 0.034 confirm that this relationship is statistically significant at the 5% level. Thus, the hypothesis that CSR initiatives significantly impact women's economic outcomes is supported.

7. CONCLUSION

The importance of focused corporate initiatives in promoting gender equality is highlighted by the comparative research of CSR strategies for women's empowerment. The success of CSR lies in practicing it as a core part of a company's development strategy. The results show that different initiatives, like mentoring, community-based support, and leadership development programs, all have a role in women's empowerment, but that the success of these approaches is frequently affected by their implementation setting. A well-rounded CSR strategy will have both internal and external methods for support, well-defined objectives, and the active participation of all relevant stakeholders. The study emphasizes the need of organizations committing to women's empowerment and constantly evaluating and improving their methods to tackle new issues and make the most of their effect. Companies can improve their CSR initiatives and have a significant impact on organisational performance and society advancement by implementing the best practices found in this research. Companies who want to promote women's empowerment through their CSR initiatives can use the study's findings as a springboard for more research and as a set of practical recommendations.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None.

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