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## Social corporate responsibility

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### Abstract

This work explores the evolution, importance, and impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India and globally. It argues that beyond creating wealth for shareholders, businesses have a broader societal obligation, a notion supported by historical and modern examples. Highlighting the Gandhian philosophy of trusteeship, the paper underscores the necessity for businesses to engage in ethical practices and contribute positively to society, including employee welfare, environmental sustainability, and human rights. It emphasizes the shift from traditional philanthropy to integrated CSR strategies that address socio-economic and environmental challenges. The article also touches upon the legal frameworks and government initiatives encouraging CSR, illustrating its pivotal role in bridging the gap between economic growth and social development, especially highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic's challenges.

**Keywords:** Corporate social responsibility (CSR), social development, ethical practices, environmental sustainability

### Introduction

“No success in material terms is worthwhile unless it serves the needs or interests of the country and its people and is achieved by fair and honest means”. JRD Tata Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas’, the motto propagated by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi may be newly coined but has been the focal point of social thinkers and socially conscientious business leaders for quite some time. The aim is to ensure that the benefits of business reach all the stakeholders for the sustainability of the society as well as the corporates. Economic growth coupled with the transit of business from traditional to multinational corporations (MNCs) has led to an increasing number of interrelated issues in the society. The pace of economic growth is much faster than social growth and coupled with the ill distribution of wealth which leads to a wider gap among the rich and the poor, raising certain issues among the social environment leading to certain form of vulnerability among the stakeholders. There is a requirement for the provision of welfare and social safety nets for all the stakeholders in the society. A system of government regulations, voluntary codes and standards by the corporates that provide adequate social security net not only for its management and directors but for the transformation of all other stakeholders including but not restricted to staff (And their families), clients, communities, members of the value chain and other company associates, regulators, actors of civil society and the media. The Gandhian philosophy of trusteeship may be not only for the business’s responsibility towards society at large but also for the sustainability of corporates in the long run.

Primarily business may have been perceived as wealth creators for its shareholders, but it has the ability to go much further than that. It has the ability to induce and stimulate an inclusive socio-economic transformation. The philosophy of giving back to the society was an essential component of our culture, followed since time immemorial by traditional Indian companies, which somehow got side lined with the advent of MNCs over a period of time. In order to ‘Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas’, the motto propagated by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi may be newly coined but has been the focal point of social thinkers and socially conscientious business leaders for quite some time. The aim is to ensure that the benefits of business reach all the stakeholders for the sustainability of the society as well as the corporates. Economic growth coupled with the transit of business from traditional to multinational corporations (MNCs) has led to an increasing number of interrelated issues in the society.

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Primarily business may have been perceived as wealth creators for its shareholders, but it has the ability to go much further than that. It has the ability to induce and stimulate an inclusive socio-economic transformation. The philosophy of giving back to the society was an essential component of our culture, followed since time immemorial by traditional Indian companies, which somehow got side lined with the advent of MNCs over a period of time. In order to those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society. Bowen in certain circles is also regarded as one of the earliest supporters of corporate social responsibility. However, it was only in the 1990s, when the German pharmaceutical firm, Betapharm, decided to introduce CSR as a business policy, that the word 'Corporate Social Responsibility' became popular. A halt in sales in 1997 owing to the inter changeability of products by other businesses brought the company on the brink of closure, which resulted the company to realize that customers could not distinguish between cost and quality in the generic drugs market. Hence the company decided to embrace CSR as a declaration of the company's principles under its business strategies and took a strategic advantage by creating the 'Betapharm After-Care Foundation'. Its aim was to develop and spread the patient and company relationship and meet unmet needs, which led to the company's revival at a great extent. What initially started as a 'Social Sponsoring' quickly turned into a Corporate Social Responsibility.

For a humanitarian cause, most corporate bodies traditionally see CSR as an expansion of a monetary contribution. This tradition has not only persisted but has also grown with many corporate businesses engaging in social development not as a sustainable development involving all stakeholders but as a philanthropic activity. With the concept of globalization, privatization and deregulation in business in the last two decades, debates on CSR have not only acquired great significance but has also become the buzz word in certain business conferences and circles. CSR has increasingly gained prominence in the corporate sectors with business organizations realizing that "business cannot succeed in a society that fails". The businesses have started to recognise that the company has to return to the society from which it has taken as it has progressed. In Indian context the ever-widening gaps between the rich and poor necessitated corporate interests in social concerns, necessitating fresh demands for more corporate responsibility and bringing more prominence to the term corporate social responsibility. Business leaders

realized the importance of participation in community development to ensure the goodwill of the community for their license to operate and increasingly started to profess and practice social responsibility. Realizing that a business can exercise positive social change in society through CSR and working with partners to trigger such change, it was felt that it is vital to move beyond charity and donations and build trustworthy and sustainable relationships with community at large for the growth and success of the business.

CSR spending is not just important for companies but is undoubtedly extremely vital for all the stakeholders i.e. the people, community at large, customers and employees and the planet as a whole. CSR is seen by outsiders and corporations themselves as an essential part of the corporate world. The government encourages companies to contribute to the requirements of community welfare, education, research, and growth in order to promote the idea of CSR. "To enrich quality of life of the society we operate in, we need to give back to the society manifolds than what we get from it"-as articulated by JRD Tata is not rhetoric but needs to be followed by the corporate houses in letter and spirit.

CSR needs government, corporate and individual efforts to attain the required outcomes. In order to reinforce the government's hands, the country's supreme source of legal authority, the 'Grundnorm' of all powers, the Constitution of India under Art. 297 vests natural resources in the Union of India and Art. 39(b) requires distribution of resources to sub serve the common good. The Supreme Court of India in national textile case while talking about duties and responsibilities of a business towards the society is surely referring to corporate social responsibility of corporates. In this landmark judgement while referring to corporate social responsibility, the Apex court has remarked "if a company has the resources and has come a long way in its progress, it owes a debt to the society and the community in which it has progressed and it is agreed that if a company has caused some loss to its surrounding areas, it is its obligation to make up that loss, whether technical or environmental, as part of its CSR". India is the first country in the world to make CSR mandatory, following an amendment to the Companies Act, 2012 in April 2014.

The concept of CSR is not limited to what is written in Act but expects a company to reach much beyond than what is required by law so as to:

- Treat its employees fairly and with respect
- Operate with integrity
- Ethical business dealings with all its customers, suppliers, lenders, and others
- Respect all human rights
- Environment sustainability for future generations
- Be a good corporate citizen and responsible neighbour in the community.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability is the commitment of a company to its stakeholders to conduct business in a transparent and ethical way that is economically, socially and environmentally viable. Stakeholders include staff, investors, shareholders, customers, company associates, civil society organizations, government and non-governmental organizations, local communities, environment and the society. CSR's evolving perspective focuses on accountability to shareholders rather than profit maximization. Considering the fact that corporations are significant in situations in today's world, it

is only natural that they raise societal expectations of them playing a significant role in achieving this objective. By implementing CSR, the right way, corporations can protect human rights of the citizens and increase sustainability.

Until now, corporate social responsibility had been a notion whereby businesses willingly contributed for a better community and a cleaner environment, but CSR is a much broader term than what it is usually understood. Beyond philanthropic, ethical, legal and discretionary aspect, CSR has one more aspect that has not been properly explored. It is behavioural aspect of CSR. Human behaviour is directly affected by their emotional and social status. Behavioural aspect of CSR seeks to improve the emotional and social aspect of life that directly affects the behaviour of the people. It says about quality of life, which encompasses physical, emotional and social aspect of life. Those CSR initiatives that aim to improve these three aspects of human life come under behavioural aspect of CSR. Corporate sector has significant impact on people's socio-psychological status, which in turn affect their behaviour. This is also intended to link the concept of sustainable development to the level of the company's sustainability.

Human rights are part of the social, environmental and economic activities of corporates as one has a direct bearing on the other. The companies financial aspect is affected by labour rights that require businesses to pay fair wages, but by paying fair wages, the labour satisfaction level increases with increased production involving financial aspects. Human rights, such as the right to non-discrimination and the right to clean and secure drinking water, are affected by the environmental aspects of corporate activity. Children human rights covered under Article 32, UNCRC, elaborating the child's right to protection from financial exploitation should be protected by the corporates through the inclusion in its CSR activities. There is an increasing feeling that corporates have a significant role to play in the enforcement of international human rights standards though the primary responsibility still lies with national governments. Corporate impact on human rights have significantly increased over recent decades as the political influence and corporate financial power has increased and as corporations are playing the role of government by providing services previously provided by government. Corporations have acknowledged that respecting human rights of all stakeholders, not only of those who are corporate citizen. This could be indirect contact such as supplier workers or individuals residing in fields impacted by the operations of a corporation or direct contact such as staff or clients.

Corporations also respond to the fact that CSR programs implemented by companies can influence consumer and investor decisions, as it is expected by many consumers and investors that corporates act in a socially responsible manner. Corporates develop sustainability by protection of human rights as it increases the faith of the employees as well as of the society. Corporates have come to realize that sustainability effort as part of CSR in its operation by recycling, water conservation, energy efficiency etc not only helps companies in reduction in operating cost but is also important to the stakeholders. Customers also acknowledge those socially responsible companies which leads to increased revenues and better customer satisfaction. An 11-year study by Harvard University of corporations that emphasized stakeholder management discovered that corporations that are socially accountable and viable had

sale growth times and employment growth 8 times than that of "Shareholder first" companies: Company as an essential of its triple bottom line, focuses on improving the working conditions of its employees, people in its supply/distribution chain, which helps in increased productivity with better quality product.

The notion of the last few centuries that the company as an entity for the shareholders belongs to an economic system of bygone era and is really a myth in present times. In modern times, the notion that the sole aim of corporate is to create wealth for its stakeholders is neither practical nor advocated. It is believed by many business houses that the role of business in our society should not be restricted to creating wealth for its owners and promoters, but also for society's welfare. As per the present-day socio-economic thinkers, a corporation is a social institution with responsibilities and duties to the society in which it works and progresses.

Over the years, CSR practices in India have evolved from notions of pure philanthropy and charity to social development of all stakeholder's which the current global trend is. CSR is depicted by the contributions undertaken by companies to society through various business related activities and social investments. The Tata group is a leading light towards CSR in India through its contribution in developing Jamshedpur into a model township. In fact, the Tata group continues to have well-established community development programmes at most of its industrial sites. It is being visualized with present experience that the companies with strong CSR will have increased access to capital that might not otherwise have been available. Even the lending institutions are cautious and are considering CSR part of directors' report as an important parameter for granting loans. Moreover, with these attitudinal changes of buyers, sellers, suppliers, lenders, and other stake holders, it is felt that CSR can be an essential brand building to enhance the company's reputation amongst the stakeholders.

### **Evolution of corporate social responsibility**

There is an impressive history associated with the evolution of the concept and definition of Corporate Social Responsibility. The general understanding of the term, 'Corporate Social Responsibility', is that business has an obligation to society, which extends beyond its narrow obligation to its owners or shareholders. This idea has been discussed throughout the twentieth century, but it was Howard R. Bowen's book 'Social Responsibilities of Businessman' published in 1953, which was the origin of modern debate on the subject. Since then, the topic of corporate social responsibility has been explored extensively. Bowen reasoned that there would be general, social and economic benefits that would accrue to society, if business recognized its broader social goals in its decisions.

### **Importance of corporate social responsibility**

Corporates interact with society in many ways. They invest in facilities, produce and sell products, employ people and subcontract or in-source many activities. They also have an impact on the environment by the nature of their activities, by using valuable resources, or creating by-products, which influence the physical environment. Their interaction with society is through their employees and the many facets of society around them. Further, corporates may act explicitly as responsible, for either emotional reasons or business purposes.



As the organization is a part of the society, it cannot function in isolation. So there is an obligation and responsibility from the part of the corporate to take action that protects and improves the welfare of society as a whole along with their own interest. The society plays a pivotal role in the success of any organization. Hence, no organization can achieve long-term success without fulfilling the responsibility towards the society. Originally, businesses were seen strictly as economic entities with the primary responsibility for producing goods and rendering services required by a society. This is the classical view held by Milton.

Friedman and Hayek, Theodore Levitt and others. According to Friedman (1971)

“Corporate social responsibility is beyond the basic purpose of business and violates the responsibility of business to its owners, the stockholders”. However, over time, business came to see their role in broader perspectives.

With the business environment being characterized by various developments including the shift of power from capital to knowledge, increased levels of literacy and the shrinking of geographical boundaries due to faster means of travel and communication, people are, by and large, becoming conscious of their rights, which has led to a rise in the expectations of society from business.

An organization receives inputs from society in the form of skilled / unskilled labour, raw material and natural resources, and, in turn, offers goods and services to society. Thus, businesses depend on society further existence and it is in their interest to take care of society. Businesses cannot operate or in vacuum. Like individuals, businesses also need to live in the real world, i.e., in society.

Corporate Social Responsibility involves a commitment by a company towards the sustainable economic development of the society, It means engaging directly with local communities, identifying their basic needs, and integrating their needs with business goals and strategic intend. The government perceives CSR as the business contribution to the nation’s sustainable development goals. Essentially, it is about how business takes into account the economic, social and environmental impact of the way in which it operates. Simply stated, CSR is a concept, which suggests that commercial corporations must fulfil their duties of providing care to the society.

According to Goyder (1951) <sup>[13]</sup>, industry in the twentieth

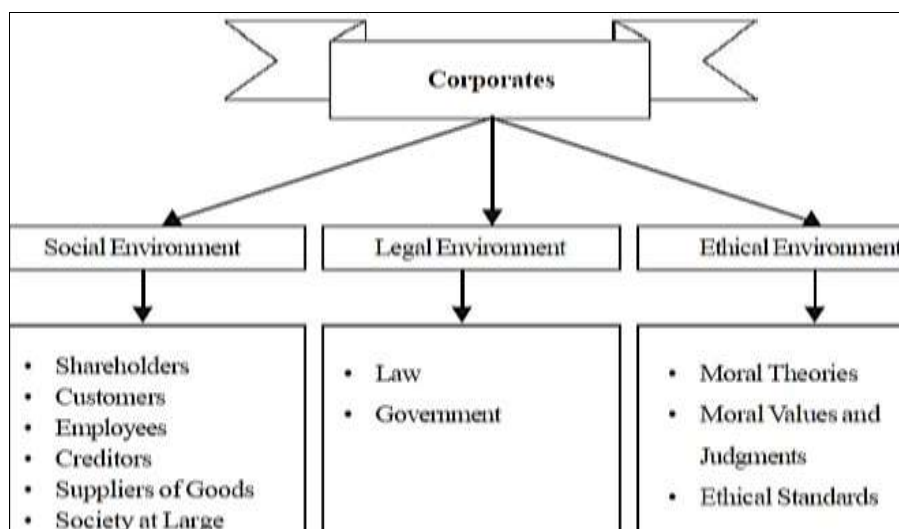
century can no longer be regarded as private arrangement for enriching shareholders. It has become a joint enterprise in which workers, management, consumers, the local government and trade union officials, all play a part. Goyder pleaded that business has to be accountable to the public at large and he sought to equate the suggestion of a responsible company with the trusteeship concept advocated by Gandhiji, the aim of which is to ensure that private property is used for the common good.

Business today is realizing that the world is not made up of strangers. There is a human bondage. There are customers, employees, suppliers of goods, shareholders and the competitors. Most firms today recognize and realize that they have obligations to the society that extend beyond economic performance. This concept came to be known as “corporate social responsibility”. Thus, the business has an obligation to consider the impact of its activities on all stakeholders who constitute broader segments of society.

The managers of large corporations and smaller businesses came to realize that they have responsibilities that extend beyond their own stockholders to a wide range of parties dependent on or affected by corporate performance. These parties are known as stakeholders. Freeman’s (1984) <sup>[13]</sup> classic definition of stakeholders, arguably the most popular definition cited in the literature (Kolk and Pinske 2006) <sup>[14]</sup>, proposed that stakeholders are ‘any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of a corporation’s purpose’. In addition to a company’s shareholders, its stakeholders include its employees, the communities in which it operates, suppliers, customers, government and society at large. In the opinion of Davis Blomstorm (1975) <sup>[15]</sup>, it is the obligation of decision makers to take actions that protect and improve the welfare of society as a whole along with their own interest.

Protecting and improving are two aspects of social responsibility. “To protect” implies avoiding negative impact on society, whereas “to improve” implies creating positive benefits for society.

The business class should render their support to the general people. If they will be uplifted socially and economically, the productivity of the corporate is also bound to increase. The Corporates are to act according to the environmental factors given in below Figure like social, legal and ethical environment.

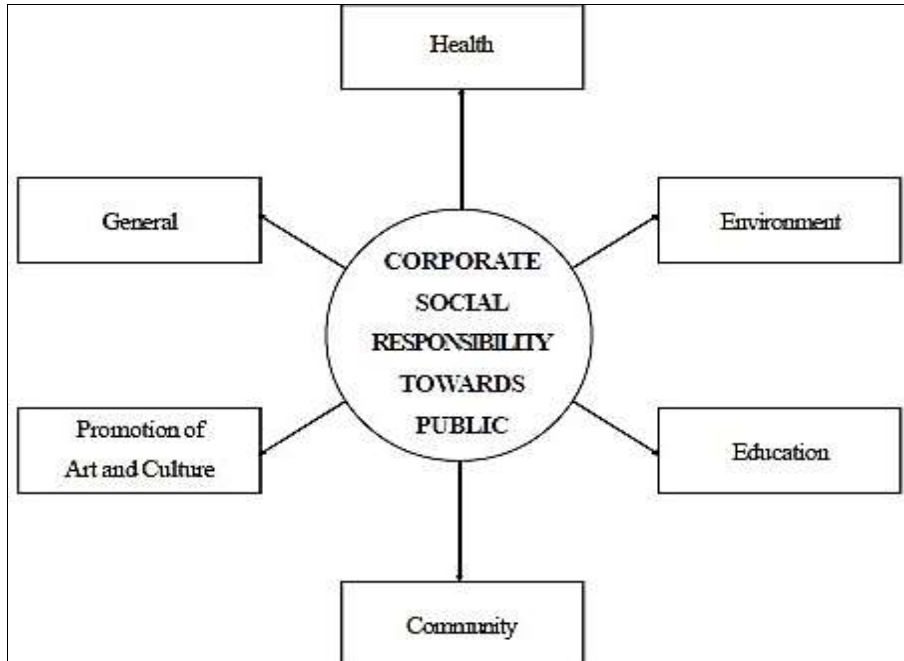


Source: Sethi (1991) <sup>[16]</sup>

Fig 1: Corporates and Environmental Factors

As per the above figure Corporate Social Responsibility is an obligation of the organization to act in a way that serves both its own interests and interests of its many external communities and environmental factors such as social environment including customers, employees, creditors,

suppliers of goods, society and legal environment comprises of state and local governments. To get successful results the corporate should hold moral values and judgments and ethical standards.



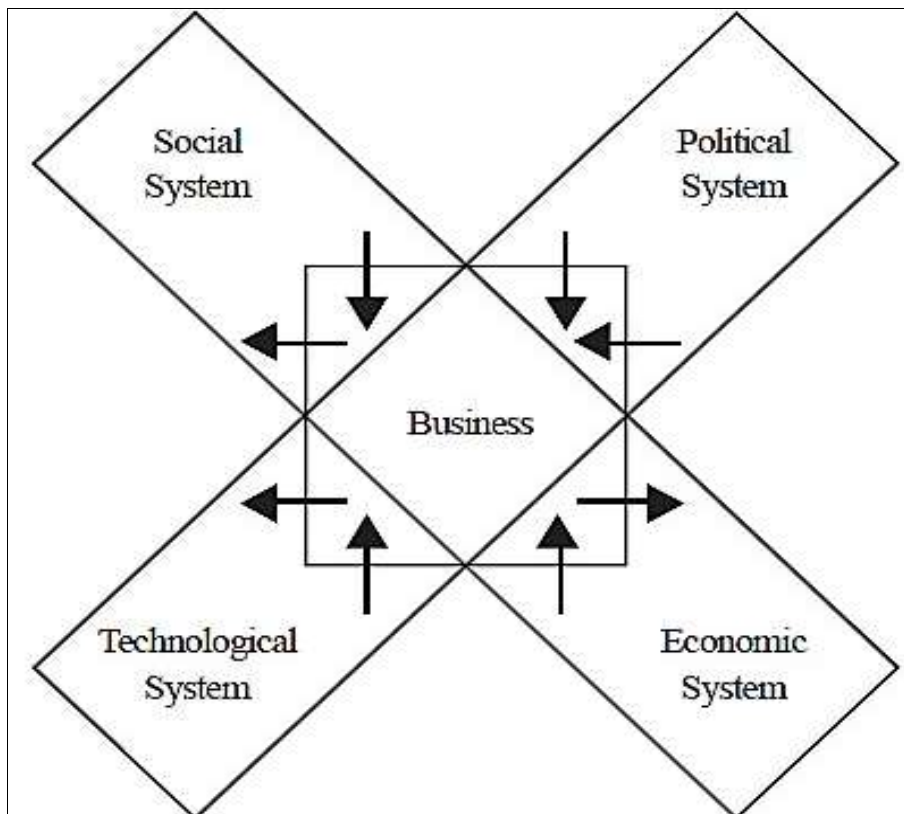
Source: Adapted from Kamatchi. P, 2002 <sup>[17]</sup>

Fig 2: Corporate Social Responsibility towards the society at large

**Business and social responsibility**

Business plays a significant role in economic, social, political and technological affairs. So business owes responsibilities to all segments of society. Wealth of a

country is to a great extent controlled by business. This gives business and its executives “enormous power” to affect the lives of employees, consumers, shareholders, etc. Business and its Stakeholders



Source: Porter and Kramer 2009 <sup>[18]</sup>

Fig 3: Business and the total environment

### Corporate social responsibility in India

The post-independence governments in India, in the last six decades, have undertaken many development initiatives. Still the problems of poverty, environmental degradation, lopsided access to wealth, or a lack of basic amenities have necessitated a multi-pronged approach to social development in India. Although the government continues to improve the conditions of the socially and economically deprived sections of society through various development programs, the business and voluntary sectors are expected to complement the government's efforts. In addition, civil society organizations, such as consumer action groups or advocacy groups, have placed much pressure on companies to adopt better business practices and be more responsive to society's misery. The good news is that many Indian companies traditionally have accepted a social obligation beyond the creation of wealth for shareholders.

Company involvement in social-development projects in India can be traced back to the pre-industrialization era when traders and merchants contributed large sums of money for the betterment of their communities and the needy. Merchants, traders, and wealthy businessmen historically have responded to the problems of the society in their own way. Even after independence, when India faced the challenge of ensuring equitable socio-economic development across the country, many business houses—such as the Tatas, Birlas, and Bajajs—became involved in social-welfare programs and helped the community grow. Due to the initiation of economic reforms and the failure of the state, the responsibility of social welfare shifted to the corporate sector.

Companies can be regarded as socially responsible only if they provide greater benefit for all stakeholders, in particular, take measures for the welfare of their employees as well as the larger society. The corporate sector in India has accepted social responsibility as a part of their business principle. Many business managers in India, being very much in favour of corporate social responsibility, have made philanthropic practices part of their organizational culture. This is compared with developed countries, where because of strong and resourceful governments and their social-security programs, the corporate concern is not much on the under-privileged but rather on limiting the negative environmental impacts of the industrial activities.

The Government of India in 1976 inserted the term socialist in the preamble of constitution thereby committing itself to ensuring a developmental process which would be guided and spearhead by the state. But the ground situation changed after reform in 1991 as the corporate world was keen to exploit the opportunities that were being provided by the new economic outlook of the state. There was tremendous race amongst the business houses to expand the economic horizon. Even before the Department of public enterprise (DPE) guidelines for CSR were released by Government of India in 2009 by P.M Dr. Manmohan Singh in his address at the general meeting of confederation of Indian Industries, in 2007 on a ten point social charter for the corporate of which CSR was a part. He clarified that corporate social responsibility must not be defined by tax planning strategies alone rather it should be defined within the framework of a corporate philosophy which factors the needs of the community and the regions in which a corporate entity function, he called it a part of Indian culture heritage which Mahatma Gandhi called trusteeship. He appealed to the industry through CII. While many proponent of CSR

including P.M Dr. Manmohan Singh uphold that CSR is not a western concept and trace it to the trusteeship model of Mahatma Gandhi. For Gandhi trusteeship was a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one.

### Role of CSR during the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic caught the world by surprise, spreading like wildfire and causing fatal illness and economic hardship for individuals and organizations alike. The implications of the pandemic's spread have resulted in widespread socio-economic disruption, halting supply chains, global trade, the ways businesses and organizations access finances and other associated "normal" business activities. As such, the ability for the public and businesses to cope has rested primarily on government initiatives, such as the PPP programme, which don't always work as intended. Thanks to this, we are now seeing an upswing in the number of large businesses and enterprises pulling together and offering support to their smaller counterparts as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. This movement will be vital in our work to reclaim the future and kick start local economies.

With the definition of CSR locked down, it's pretty clear what we saw, an upswing in enterprise-led initiatives during the pandemic. Not only there plenty of struggling small businesses needed help, but it was also the perfect opportunity for larger organizations that have fared well throughout or even as a result of the pandemic (Like Amazon, Microsoft, Tesla), to flex their charitable muscle and show the world that they want to help those struggling. So what are larger organizations doing to help these smaller businesses? Well, the proliferation of CSR, combined with the unique challenges brought about by COVID-19, has resulted in the birth of a new type of CSR. Known as supply chain finance as a service, this function offers corporations and other large enterprises the opportunity to assist smaller businesses via invoice financing. While the financing does have to be paid back, when conducted through the right platforms, interest rates tend to be lower than banks, without the delays and bureaucratic barriers and without the predatory lending practices that are considered standard for many traditional finance institutions.

We're already seeing evidence of this, with a number of smaller businesses switching to alternative lenders over the course of the pandemic. Aside from helping reduce barriers to entry and building a community, especially with minority-founded businesses, the company has introduced a Receivables Financing Program. This initiative allows small businesses to have their unpaid invoices financed immediately so they can unblock cash flow bottlenecks, especially those supplying larger companies that often have payment terms of 60 or 120 days.

On the opposite side of the coin, CSR is also being reimagined when it comes to charitable donations. In the midst of a pandemic-induced economic downturn, donations to charities have become less frequent, despite more people requiring support than ever. For companies that thrived in 2020, revisiting their ESG program can be a new focus in 2021. Enterprises can use their bottom line for good. Big businesses will turn their lens away from vanity CSR projects and onto initiatives with actual impact, whether that be niche communities or developing nations. Through the help of larger companies, smaller local main street

businesses and mom-and-pop-stores are able to secure the financing they need to survive through to the end of the pandemic.

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