

A Comparative Study of CSR Spending on Environmental Sustainability in India

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ABSTRACT

The present research examines the environmental sustainability contributions of the top ten companies in India engaged in CSR activities and focuses on the CSR spending patterns of these companies and the proportion of their CSR funds that are directed towards environmental sustainability. The paper finds significant variation among the top ten companies in terms of their CSR spending and contributions towards environmental sustainability. The paper highlights the commendable efforts of companies like Wipro Ltd, ITC Ltd, and Infosys Ltd, which have directed a significant portion of their CSR funds towards environmental sustainability. However, the paper also notes that certain companies, despite significant CSR spending, have not adequately contributed towards environmental sustainability. These companies include Tata Consultancy Services Ltd, Tata Sons Private Ltd, and Indian Oil Corporation Ltd. The findings emphasize the need for companies to prioritize environmental sustainability in their CSR activities, given the pressing environmental challenges facing the country.

Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); Environmental sustainability; CSR practicing; Top ten CSR-contributing companies of India.*

1.0 Introduction

In recent years, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained significant importance in the business world. Companies have come to realize the importance of integrating ethical, social, and environmental concerns into their operations and interactions with stakeholders. The core of CSR lies in acknowledging the impact a company has on society and the environment, beyond just the financial bottom line. A vital component of CSR is environmental sustainability, which involves the responsible use and management of natural resources to ensure their preservation and prevent damage over time. This includes reducing negative environmental impacts such as greenhouse gas emissions, water pollution, and deforestation, and promoting positive environmental outcomes such as the conservation of natural habitats and biodiversity.

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Environmental sustainability is an essential topic of research and discussion, as it holds significance for several reasons.

- It ensures that natural resources remain available for future generations.
- It can reduce the costs associated with environmental damage and pollution.
- It can enhance a company's reputation and brand image, leading to increased customer loyalty and sales.

Therefore, exploring the concept of environmental sustainability in the context of CSR is crucial for companies seeking to create long-term value and contribute to a sustainable future. To achieve environmental sustainability, companies can adopt various practices as part of their CSR strategy. These practices include reducing energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions through the use of renewable energy sources, improving energy efficiency, and implementing sustainable transportation practices. Additionally, companies can minimize waste by utilizing eco-friendly materials, reducing packaging, and implementing recycling programs. They can also conserve natural resources by implementing sustainable forestry practices, reducing water consumption, and promoting sustainable agriculture. Companies can promote biodiversity by protecting and restoring natural habitats and working with suppliers to ensure sustainable sourcing practices. This involves taking steps to preserve and restore ecosystems, protecting endangered species, and promoting biodiversity in areas where it has been impacted by human activity.

Adopting these practices is crucial for companies seeking to create a sustainable future and generate long-term value. By prioritizing environmental sustainability as part of their CSR strategy, companies can not only reduce their environmental impact but also enhance their reputation and brand image, leading to increased customer loyalty and sales. Therefore, it is essential to explore and understand the various actions that businesses can take to promote environmental sustainability within the context of CSR.

Considering CSR and environmental sustainability is essential for businesses operating in society. By integrating these principles into their operations and interactions with stakeholders, companies can reduce their negative impact on the environment and contribute to a more sustainable future. This not only benefits the environment but also enhances the company's reputation and brand image, leading to increased customer loyalty and sales. Therefore, exploring the various ways in which businesses can promote biodiversity and integrate CSR and environmental sustainability into their operations is crucial for creating a sustainable future.

2.0 Different Perspectives of CSR in India

In Indian context, CSR refers to the responsibility of companies towards society and the environment. CSR initiatives aim to positively impact society, the environment, and communities in which businesses operate, beyond the company's primary objectives of profit-making.

Business tycoons such as Jamshedji R Tata and G D Birla believed in giving back to society, which led to the concept of CSR in India being traced back to the pre independence era. CSR initiatives in India are diverse and cover a wide range of areas such as education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability, and more. Many Indian companies have implemented CSR initiatives in collaboration with local communities, NGOs, and government bodies to drive social and environmental impact.

The formal recognition of CSR practices in India came with the Companies Act, 2013, which made it mandatory for certain categories of companies to spend 2% of their net profits on CSR activities. Since then, CSR has become an integral part of the corporate strategy of many companies in India.

As per Section 135 of the Companies Act. 2013, “Corporate Social Responsibility means the responsibility of a company, for the impact of its activities on society and environment, in a transparent and ethical manner, that contributes to sustainable development of the communities in which it operates.

CSR a concept has attracted attention from various perspectives in academic literature. Following are different perspectives on CSR, that highlighting their main features and contributions.

- **Economic Perspective:** This perspective views CSR as a way for companies to enhance their financial performance by creating shared value for stakeholders. Companies are expected to identify social and environmental issues that are relevant to their business operations and develop strategies to address them. According to this perspective, CSR initiatives can lead to cost savings, increased revenues, and improved reputation, which in turn can benefit shareholders (Porter & Kramer, 2006).
- **Ethical Perspective:** It emphasizes the moral obligation of companies to respect human rights, protect the environment, and promote social justice. CSR is seen as a way for companies to fulfil their responsibilities to society and contribute to the common good. Companies are expected to adopt ethical principles and values in their business practices, and to go beyond compliance with legal requirements (Crane, Palazzo, Spence, & Matten, 2019).
- **Stakeholder Perspective:** It recognizes the diverse interests and expectations of stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and the environment. CSR is seen as a way for companies to engage with stakeholders and respond to their concerns and needs. Companies are expected to involve stakeholders in decision making processes, and to balance their interests with those of shareholders (Freeman, 2010).
- **Strategic Perspective:** It views CSR as a way for companies to align their social and environmental objectives with their business strategy. CSR is seen as a source of competitive advantage, differentiation, and innovation. Companies are expected to integrate CSR into their core business processes, and to measure and communicate the impact of their initiatives (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

- **Institutional Perspective:** It highlights the role of external norms, expectations, and pressures in shaping CSR practices. CSR is seen as a way for companies to conform to social and environmental standards, and to gain legitimacy and reputation in the eyes of stakeholders. Companies are expected to respond to institutional pressures from governments, NGOs, and other actors, and to demonstrate their commitment to CSR through symbolic actions and communication strategies (Suchman, 1995).

Table-1 along with graphical presentation shows the percentage of CSR spending in different areas by Indian companies. The statement concludes that Education & Skill Development received the highest amount of CSR spending, followed by Rural Development Projects, Health Care, and Environmental Sustainability. Other areas, such as Eradicating Hunger & Poverty, Water & Sanitation, and Women Empowerment, received comparatively lower amounts of CSR spending. The statement also notes that some areas, including Animal Welfare, Armed Forces, Art & Culture, Training to Promote Sports, Prime Minister's National Relief Fund, and Other Central Government Funds, received relatively small amounts of CSR spending. Overall, the distribution of CSR spending in different areas provides insights into the priorities and values of the companies that contributed to these projects.

3.0 CSR and Environmental Sustainability

To use and manage natural resources in a responsible way to meet present needs without harming the ability of future generations to meet their own needs is refers to environmental sustainability. It involves to protect and preserve the environmental resources, including land, water, air, biodiversity, and ecosystems, for the benefit of both current and future generations.

One of the most widely accepted definitions of environmental sustainability comes from the Brundtland Commission's report, *Our Common Future*, which defines sustainability as "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), describes environmental sustainability as "The ability of natural systems to function effectively and efficiently, to remain diverse and resilient, and to meet human needs indefinitely."

In recent years, there has been a growing focus on environmental sustainability as a key area for CSR investment in India that indicates a growing recognition of the importance of environmental sustainability as a business issue and a societal challenge, and emphasizes the need for companies to take responsibility for their environmental impacts and contribute to a sustainable future.

The growing awareness and concern among stakeholders, including consumers, investors, and regulators, about the need for businesses to take responsibility for their environmental impacts is another important factor that has influenced CSR investment in environmental sustainability in India. This has led to increased pressure on companies to adopt sustainable business practices and invest in environmental sustainability initiatives.

4.0 Overview of CSR Contribution to Environmental Sustainability in India

There has been a growing focus on environmental sustainability as a key area for CSR investment in India.

- **The Companies Act, 2013:** The formal recognition of CSR practices in India came with the Companies Act, 2013, which made it mandatory for companies with a net worth of INR 500 crore or more, or a turnover of INR 1,000 crore or more, or a net profit of INR 5 crore or more to spend 2% of their net profits on CSR activities.
- **Environmental Laws and Regulations:** The emergence of environmental laws and regulations, such as the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 and the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, has led to the development of CSR initiatives focused on environmental sustainability.
- **Sustainability Reporting Frameworks:** The emergence of sustainability reporting frameworks, such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), has also played a role in shaping CSR investment in environmental sustainability in India. Many Indian companies have adopted these frameworks to report on their environmental performance and disclose their sustainability initiatives.
- **Growing Awareness and Concern:** The growing awareness and concern among stakeholders, including consumers, investors, and regulators, about the need for businesses to take responsibility for their environmental impacts has led to increased pressure on companies to adopt sustainable business practices and invest in environmental sustainability initiatives.

KPMG's report states that over 2,500 companies in India spent INR 15,000 crore on CSR activities in the financial year 2018-19, making India one of the leading countries in the world in terms of CSR spending. NASSCOM Foundation's study found that 60% of Indian companies invested in education-related initiatives as part of their CSR activities, and the healthcare sector was another important area of investment, with 40% of companies focusing on healthcare-related initiatives.

According to Nielsen, 73% of Indian consumers are willing to pay more for sustainable products, reflecting a growing demand for sustainable business practices. Several Indian companies have set ambitious goals to promote environmental sustainability. For instance, Tata Steel aims to reduce its carbon emissions by 50% by 2030, and Infosys has committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2040. Indian companies are also investing in renewable energy and adopting circular economy practices as part of their CSR initiatives.

5.0 Literature Review

The concept of CSR has gained significant attention in recent years as a way for businesses to integrate ethical, social, and environmental concerns into their operations and interactions with stakeholders. This literature review aims to examine different perspectives

on the implications of CSR, including the drivers and barriers to its implementation and the effectiveness of mandatory CSR expenditure.

Sarkar & Sarkar, (2015) conducted an analysis of the implications of mandatory CSR expenditure under the Companies Act 2013 in India. They found that the new legislation skilfully balances the interests of firms, their members, and stakeholders with the potential economic implications of required CSR. However, they also pointed out that the success of these new regulations will depend on addressing implementation challenges.

In a similar vein, (Mukherjee & Bird, 2016) explored CSR drivers and barriers, including the attitudes of Indian firms towards CSR and the effects of mandatory CSR expenditure. They found that age, scale, and ownership affect CSR spending attitudes in organizations. They also discovered that making CSR expenditure compulsory did not increase expenditures for many companies, as they avoided it, and their expenditures declined with the vast number for which it was not compulsory.

Venugopal & Krishnan, (2018) conducted a study to understand the employees' and beneficiaries' perspectives on the primary issues that the Bank should prioritize in its CSR efforts. They discovered that differently-abled workers' employment was deemed to be the most crucial issue by employees, while beneficiaries ranked the promotion of education, the welfare of children, and female employment as the most significant topics.

Prasad, Mishra, & Bapat, (2019) examines the relationship between CSR and environmental sustainability in India, using energy intensity as an indicator of sustainability. The authors find a positive association between CSR activities and lower energy intensity, suggesting that firms with strong CSR practices tend to be more environmentally sustainable. Overall, the study provides insights into the potential of CSR to drive sustainable business practices in emerging economies.

Sardana, Gupta, Kumar, & Terziovski, (2020) explores the relationship between CSR sustainability practices and firm performance in an emerging economy. The authors find that firms with strong sustainability practices tend to perform better in terms of financial and non-financial indicators. They argue that sustainability practices can enhance a firm's reputation, attract customers, and improve operational efficiency. Overall, the study highlights the importance of sustainability practices for firms operating in emerging economies, and suggests that these practices can lead to improved performance outcomes.

Arokiaraj, Ganeshkumar, & Paul, (2020) investigates the adoption of an innovative management system for environmental sustainability practices in the Indian auto-component manufacturing industry. The authors find that firms implementing this system have better environmental performance and resource efficiency. The study suggests that innovative management systems can drive sustainability practices in emerging economies.

Singhal, (2021) examines CSR initiatives and practices in the Indian metal and mining sector. The author finds that these firms engage in a range of CSR activities, including community development, environmental sustainability, and employee welfare. The study suggests that CSR is an important aspect of business operations for firms in this sector, and can help to build positive stakeholder relationships.

Dalwadi & Sharma, (2022) investigated people's opinions of CSR and their investment choices in CSR-focused organizations. They found that most respondents believe CSR enterprises are trustworthy, please their clients, and acquire consumer loyalty. The majority of respondents also believe that businesses' actions are directed towards environmental and social well-being and prefer the products and services of CSR organizations. However, while respondents view organizations that contribute to CSR as responsible, they are unwilling to pay extra for their products and services.

Ghosh, (2022) investigates sustainability and CSR practices in the context of Indian ethos. The author argues that CSR and sustainability are deeply embedded in Indian culture, and suggests that firms can leverage this ethos to drive sustainable business practices. The study highlights the importance of understanding local cultural contexts when implementing CSR and sustainability initiatives.

Maheshwari, Gupta, Bhayani, & Gaur, (2023) propose an analytical paradigm for environmental sustainability in the CSR of oil sector public sector undertakings (PSUs) in India. The authors argue that a comprehensive approach to CSR that incorporates environmental sustainability can lead to improved social and environmental outcomes, as well as enhanced financial performance. The study provides insights into the potential of CSR to drive sustainability in the oil sector in India.

While CSR is widely recognized as an important concept in business, there are different perspectives on its implementation and effectiveness. The studies reviewed here highlight the need for addressing implementation challenges, understanding the drivers and barriers of CSR, and prioritizing issues that stakeholders consider important in CSR efforts. These findings provide valuable insights for businesses seeking to integrate CSR into their operations and interactions with stakeholders.

6.0 Objectives of the Study

Following are prime objectives of this research study.

1. To provide an in-depth understanding of CSR and its significance in promoting environmental sustainability in the context of Indian companies.
2. To analyse the top ten companies in India that have made significant contributions towards environmental sustainability through their CSR initiatives.

7.0 Research Methodology

The main objective of this study is to examine the CSR initiatives of Indian companies towards environmental sustainability and identify the top ten companies that have made significant contributions in this area.

To achieve this objective, a purposive sampling method was used to select the top ten CSR-contributing companies in India. A descriptive research design was employed to analyse

the data obtained from secondary sources, namely the annual reports of the respective companies for the fiscal year 2020-21 and using the National CSR Portal.

This study's scope is limited to a specific time and place, and results may vary in other locations and times. The methods and tools employed in this study have certain limitations, which also affect the study's outcomes.

8.0 Findings

The findings of this study reveal the significance of CSR in promoting environmental sustainability among Indian companies. Out of the total CSR contribution of Rs. 21,408.75 crores made by these companies, 9.29% (Rs. 1991.18 crores) was dedicated towards environmental sustainability. This demonstrates a growing recognition among Indian companies of the importance of environmental sustainability and their role in achieving it. The top three companies contributing towards environmental sustainability were Infosys Ltd, ITC Ltd, and Wipro Ltd, with contributions of Rs. 42.05 crores, Rs. 43.73 crores, and Rs.39.09 crores, respectively.

These companies recognize the importance of environmental sustainability and have taken significant steps to incorporate it into their CSR initiatives. The study also revealed that NTPC Ltd contributed the highest amount towards environmental sustainability with a contribution of Rs. 33.41 crores, which represents 7.97% of its total CSR contribution. Other companies such as HDFC Bank Ltd and ONGC Ltd also made significant contributions towards environmental sustainability with contributions of Rs. 7.22 crores and Rs. 2.43 crores, respectively.

The study also highlights the need for more focus on eradicating hunger and poverty, education and skill development, and rural development, which received the highest contributions from CSR initiatives. These areas continue to be important for India's overall sustainable development goals and require continued attention and investment from companies. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that Indian companies are increasingly recognizing the importance of environmental sustainability and are taking concrete steps to incorporate it into their CSR initiatives. However, more work needs to be done to address pressing social and economic issues in India, and companies should continue to invest in these areas as well.

9.0 Data Analysis

The researchers analysed the CSR spending data of these companies and categorized the spending into different areas, including education, healthcare, environment, and other social causes. According to the data presented in Table-2 with graphical presentation, CSR practices in India have gained significant importance over the years, with companies recognizing their responsibility towards society and the environment. The study revealed that the top ten companies in India allocated a considerable amount of funds towards CSR,

ranging from ₹248.99 crores to ₹922crores. However, the study found that the contribution towards environmental sustainability was relatively low among most companies, with Wipro Ltd being an exception with a contribution of 15.70%. Other companies had significantly lower percentages, and some did not allocate any funds towards environmental sustainability despite having a significant CSR budget, such as Tata Consultancy Services Ltd, Tata Sons Private Ltd, and Indian Oil Corporation Ltd.

Table 1: Contribution of CSR in Different Focus Areas

Focus Area of CSR Contribution		CSR Contribution	
		₹ in Crore	In Percentage (%)
A	Eradicating Hunger & Poverty	1306.24	6.10
B	Health Care	3357.02	15.67
C	Water & Sanitation	627.1	2.93
D	Education & Skill Development	5509.26	25.72
E	Women Empowerment	260.15	1.21
G	Environmental Sustainability	1991.18	9.29
H	Animal Welfare	55.82	0.26
I	Armed Forces	50.35	0.24
J	Art & Culture	1120.53	5.23
K	Training To Promote Sports	261.52	1.22
L	Prime Minister's National Relief Fund	839.14	3.92
M	Central Government Funds	1870.74	8.73
N	Rural Development	4173.2	19.48
Total		21422.25	100

Source : <https://www.csr.gov.in/content/csr/global/master/home/home.html>

These findings highlight the need for companies to prioritize environmental sustainability in their CSR activities, given the current environmental challenges faced by the country. Policymakers and company leaders can use these findings to create a more sustainable business ecosystem in India. By increasing their contribution towards

environmental sustainability, companies can not only contribute to a healthier environment but also benefit from positive public perception and brand reputation. The study's call for more attention to be paid to environmental sustainability in CSR practices is crucial, as it can have a significant impact on the overall sustainability of the Indian economy.

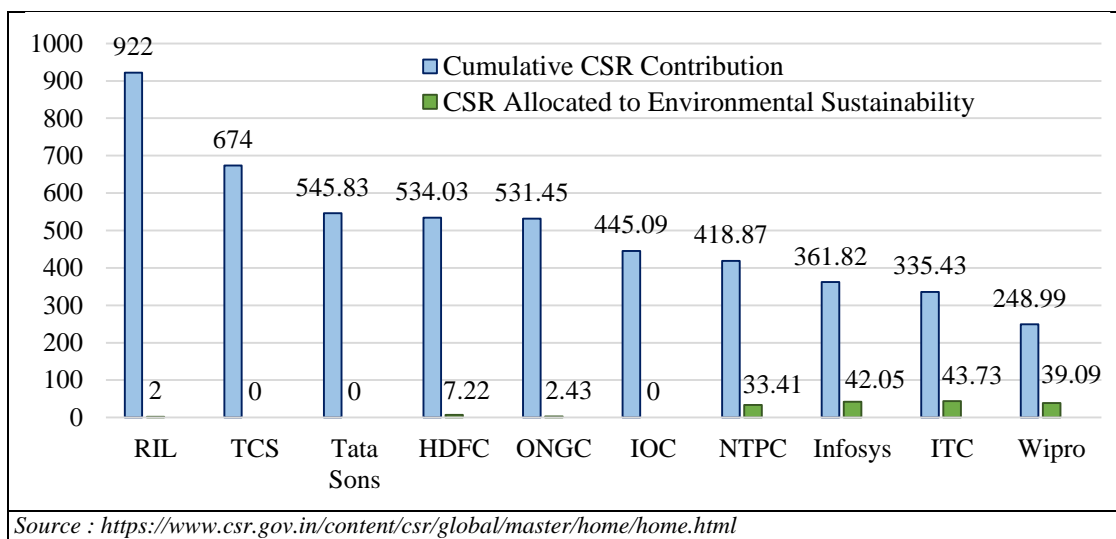
Companies need to collaborate with other stakeholders, such as NGOs and government agencies, to identify and implement sustainable solutions for environmental challenges in India. Overall, the study's findings highlight the need for companies to take a more holistic approach to CSR, focusing not only on social but also environmental sustainability. The study's results can serve as a guide for companies and policymakers in their efforts to create a more sustainable and equitable future for India.

Interpretation: The data shows the distribution of CSR spending by a company or companies in India across various focus areas. The highest percentage of spending was on education and skill development, accounting for 25.72% of the total CSR spending. This is followed by healthcare at 15.67% and rural development at 19.48%. Environmental sustainability received 9.29% of the total CSR spending, which is relatively low considering the current environmental challenges faced by the country. Similarly, women empowerment and animal welfare received very low percentages of CSR spending.

The data can be used by companies and policymakers to identify areas where CSR spending can be increased or decreased to align with the company's values and contribute to sustainable development in India. It highlights the need for companies to prioritize environmental sustainability and gender equality in their CSR practices, given the current challenges faced by the country in these areas. The data can also help in benchmarking and comparing the CSR spending of companies across different sectors and focus areas.

Table 2: Expenditure on CSR and Contribution on Environmental Sustainability

Corporate Citizen in 2020-21	Cumulative CSR Contribution	CSR Allocated to Environmental Sustainability	
	₹	₹	%
RIL	922	2	0.22
TCS	674	0	0
Tata Sons	545.83	0	0
HDFC Bank	534.03	7.22	1.35
ONGC	531.45	2.43	0.46
IOC	445.09	0	0
NTPC	418.87	33.41	7.98
Infosys	361.82	42.05	11.62
ITC	335.43	43.73	13.04
Wipro	248.99	39.09	15.70



Interpretation: The table shows the total CSR contribution and the contribution towards environmental sustainability for the year 2020-21 by the top CSR contributing companies in India. The data highlights that the total CSR spending by the top companies in India ranges from Rs 248.99 crores to Rs 922 crores. The contribution towards environmental sustainability is relatively low among most companies, with some companies not allocating any CSR funds towards environmental sustainability.

Out of the companies listed, Wipro Ltd had the highest contribution towards environmental sustainability at 39.09%, followed by ITC Ltd at 43.73% and Infosys Ltd at 42.05%. It is worth noting that the companies with the highest contribution towards environmental sustainability also allocated a significant percentage of their CSR funds towards this focus area.

The data underscores the need for companies to prioritize environmental sustainability in their CSR activities to address the current environmental challenges faced by the country. The study's findings could inform policymakers and company leaders in their efforts to create a more sustainable business ecosystem in India. By increasing their contribution towards environmental sustainability, companies can not only contribute to a healthier environment but also benefit from positive public perception and brand reputation. The study's results call for more attention to be paid to environmental sustainability in CSR practices, which can have a significant impact on the overall sustainability of the Indian economy.

10.0 Implications

Following are some implications

- The study suggests that companies in India should prioritize environmental sustainability in their CSR activities to address the country's current environmental challenges.

- The top ten CSR-contributing companies in India show significant variation in CSR spending patterns and contribution towards environmental sustainability, highlighting the need for more consistency and uniformity in CSR practices.
- Increasing their contribution towards environmental sustainability presents an opportunity for companies to benefit from positive public perception and brand reputation, as per the study's findings.

11.0 Recommendations

Following are some suggestive recommendations for the policy makers and corporate to achieve sustainable goals in terms of profit, people and planet:

- Allocate sufficient resources towards environmental sustainability and prioritize it in CSR activities, as per the recommendation for company leaders.
- Policymakers should incentivize and encourage companies to focus on environmental sustainability in their CSR activities, as recommended.
- Disseminate the study's findings widely among the business community and policymakers to create greater awareness of the need for more sustainable business practices.
- Set benchmarks for other companies to follow in terms of environmental sustainability by leading through example, as recommended for the top CSR-contributing companies in India.
- Collaborate with other stakeholders, such as NGOs and government agencies, to identify and implement sustainable solutions for environmental challenges in India, as per the recommendation for companies.

12.0 Conclusion

The findings of the study highlight the importance of environmental sustainability in CSR practices in India. The variation in CSR spending patterns and contributions towards environmental sustainability among the top ten CSR-contributing companies in India reflects the need for greater transparency and accountability in CSR spending. To address this, companies need to take a more comprehensive approach to CSR that encompasses environmental sustainability as a key component. This involves integrating environmental sustainability into the company's overall strategy and decision-making processes, rather than treating it as a peripheral concern. Practical steps that companies can take include conducting a thorough assessment of their environmental impact, setting clear goals and targets for environmental sustainability, and allocating sufficient resources towards achieving these goals. This could include investments in renewable energy, reducing carbon emissions, conserving water, and promoting sustainable waste management practices. In addition to these internal measures, companies can collaborate with other stakeholders, including NGOs

and government agencies, to develop and implement sustainable solutions for environmental challenges in India. This not only benefits the environment but also creates opportunities for innovation, growth, and long-term sustainability. Policymakers can also play a vital role in encouraging and incentivizing companies to focus on environmental sustainability in their CSR practices. This could include introducing regulations and guidelines that require companies to report on their environmental impact and allocate a specific percentage of their CSR funds towards environmental sustainability. Overall, the study's findings highlight the need for companies to prioritize environmental sustainability in their CSR activities, as this can have a significant impact on the overall sustainability of the Indian economy. Practical steps such as setting clear goals and targets, investing in renewable energy, and collaborating with other stakeholders can help companies achieve this and create an eco-friendlier business ecosystem in India.

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