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Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development in India: Developing an Integrated CSR-SDG Impact Mapping Framework for Sustainability Governance

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ABSTRACT

The role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been changing from an initiative of goodwill to a legal obligation based on current business regulations. India became the first country to mandate CSR spending with Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013. This made a unique setup for firms to join in sustainable growth efforts. Even after huge investments in CSR, concerns remain regarding split reporting, weak measuring of impact, lack of linkage with SDG, and lack of linkage with ESG and BRSR systems. This study looks into what's wrong with India's current CSR rules and suggests the Integrated CSR-SDG Impact Mapping Framework (ICSIMF). This is intended to help enhance sustainability management. Researchers employ various approaches, such as law studies, a sustainability governance literature review, international sustainability guidelines, and selected NIFTY-100 companies' data. The research reveals that the existing rules on CSR spend more emphasis on spending and not on actual development and measuring results. Based on the Stakeholder theory, Legitimacy theory, Triple bottom line theory, and Shared value theory, we propose an Integrated Comprehensive Sustainable impact management Framework. This new method integrates CSR activities with SDG's, ESG and BRSR reporting that are all checked by AI and External reviews. It drives more than just Rule Following—it's Accountability for Results. Sustainability in India can be improved by having a clear and transparent process which creates trust and actual efforts towards sustainability, which are set in accordance with the national and global sustainability goals.

***Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility; Sustainability Governance; Sustainable Development Goals; Environmental, Social and Governance; Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting; Corporate Accountability India.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Corporations' responsibilities have shifted from simply seeking to maximize profits to also acting in the best interests of society and the environment and in pursuit of sustainable development. Increased awareness of climate change, environmental issues and social inequality has heightened demands on companies' behavior which have led to implementation of responsible governance practices that take multiple stakeholder interests into account (Bowen, 1953; Carroll, 1991; Freeman, 1984).Corporate Social Responsibility or CSR has thus become a full-fledged governance structure which covers ethical responsibility, stakeholder relations, environmental responsibility and creation of sustainable value. Carroll (1991), Freeman (1984), Elkington (1997) and Porter and Kramer (2011) have all contributed to the notion that there is a social and environmental responsibility as well as an economic one for the corporation.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were introduced in 2015 by the UN, which is placing a greater emphasis on businesses' role in advancing sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). The objectives advocated for the collaboration of civil society organizations, businesses and governments. In addition, the growing ESG regulations, sustainability reporting, and the principles of good investing now require companies to be more transparent and provide adequate evidence of their environmentally friendly activities (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019; Gillan et al., 2021).

The attitude of India towards CSR is rather unique. The nation was the first to make it law for certain companies to spend money on CSR activities via the Companies Act of 2013 (Mukherjee & Bird, 2016; Bhaduri & Selarka, 2016). Section 135 includes provisions that will allow companies there to give support to a number of causes,

such as health care, environmental protection and rural development. With this initiative, the corporations give much to society in a variety of projects that serve the public good.

Though these gains have been made, doubts persist regarding the effectiveness of India's CSR framework in bringing about sustainable transformation. Many CSR disclosures are more about spending money than on the benefits for the long term. This focus could result in companies merely checking boxes rather than implementing meaningful social changes, researchers say (Mukherjee & Bird, 2016; Jain & Jamali, 2018). Furthermore, there are no standardised methods of measuring impact, monitoring progress or linking work to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It's difficult to be transparent, and it's difficult to fairly compare results because of this lack. It's made even harder, however, by the fact that sustainability reporting is quite fractured. Although SEBI has come up with the concept of Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR), there are significant gaps. The connection between CSR reporting, the measurement of ESG and implementation of SDG is challenging (Eccles and Klimenko, 2019; KPMG, 2022). In the end, company's waste resources and it remains hard to determine their actual contributions.

With the increasing interdependency of CSR, ESG, SDGs, and sustainability reporting, there is a need to establish a more effective mechanism to link money spend to positive impact on society and the environment. This research proposes a new Integrated CSR-SDG Impact Mapping Framework (ICSIMF) which is a significant improvement. It blends CSR costs, SDG planning, ESG metrics, BRSR revealings, AI-powered analysis, and checks from outsiders into one responsible watchdog team. The work seeks to examine issues in the current Indian CSR guidelines and advocate for the new field of the 'blended governance'. It examines the intersections between these various areas, and brings ICSIMF into the mix for increased accountability for sustainability. The point here is that CSR should not simply be about abiding by rules but should be an integral part of advancing the national sustainability goals and supporting inclusive and environmentally sustainable growth.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The introduction of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) under Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, was a significant step in the field of corporate governance and sustainability in India. This has definitely spurred companies to invest in social initiatives but it remains unclear whether it's contributing to sustainable change (Mukherjee & Bird, 2016; Bhaduri & Selarka, 2016).

The first problem is that the companies are primarily spending as much as required on CSR without giving enough attention to the outcomes of the CSR initiatives (Jain & Jamali, 2018). It's primarily about demonstrating numbers rather than establishing projects. Now it becomes even more complicated as India does not have a unified system to deal with sustainability. There is not always harmony between different bits, such as CSR reporting and ESG disclosures, SDG commitments and BRSR requirements (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019; Gillan et al., 2021). It is difficult to assess the overall sustainability goals as the parts are not linked. To conclude, there are not clear ways to assess impacts or connect them with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This opacity makes it more difficult to have transparency and increases concerns about companies doing minimal work, which amounts to "greenwashing" (United Nations, 2015; KPMG, 2022).

Despite the push for sustainable governance, we rarely discuss how AI could help measure and verify sustainability. This omission is a big problem in both policy and academia. There's no unified framework that links CSR spending, SDG alignment, ESG metrics, and BRSR disclosures with AI analysis. Because of this, linking them to real developmental outcomes is difficult. The study proposes the Integrated CSR-SDG Impact Mapping Framework (ICSIMF) to tackle this issue. It aims to improve accountability and shift India's CSR efforts from simply meeting spending goals to actually focusing on outcomes.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

Blending Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with sustainability reporting requirements is reshaping corporate operations in India, bringing both prospects and problems. Although Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013 made CSR obligatory, concerns linger about fragmented reporting and weak accountability for real sustainability outcomes. This study examines the effectiveness of India's CSR regulations and questions if a more cohesive, results-focused governance structure is needed.

3.1 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How effective is the current Indian CSR framework in creating measurable sustainability outcomes and accountability for development?
2. What are the significant structural constraints of the existing CSR reporting and governance regime as per Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013?
3. How can CSR, ESG, SDGs and BRSR reporting frameworks be connected to enhance sustainability governance?

4. How can AI-driven sustainability analytics help increase transparency, impact analysis and accountability?
5. What are the changes in policies and regulations needed to shift the focus of India's CSR from expenditure-based compliance to outcome-based governance?

3.2 Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to:

1. Discuss Legal and Institutional Regulations on CSR as enshrined in Section 135 of the Companies Act 2013.
2. Discuss the interplay between CSR, ESG, SDGs and BRSR in the overall sustainability governance framework.
3. Analyse existing frameworks for sustainability governance and corporate accountability on an international level.
4. Find out the important issues related to CSR reporting, impact assessment and disclosures related to sustainability in India.
5. Evaluate the possibilities of AI and digital technologies to enhance sustainability measurement, monitoring and reporting.
6. Create a holistic model of sustainability governance, namely the Integrated CSR–SDG Impact Mapping Framework (ICSIMF).
7. Propose policy changes to improve transparency, accountability, stakeholder participation and measurable developmental outcomes in the Indian CSR regime.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a hybrid methodology of legal analysis, policy comparison, and qualitative analysis of sustainability reports. It delves into the effectiveness of India's CSR regulations and examines the intersections among CSR, ESG, SDGs, BRSR, and AI. As the topic is more related with norms and policies, researcher will stick to qualitative method. They examine legal principles, sustainability reporting and corporate practices. The team recommends the Integrated CSR-SDG Impact Mapping Framework (ICSIMF) for enhancing Sustainability Management in India.

The major sources of data used in this study are secondary data from law, rules, court cases, and other organizational reports. This information is sourced from various sources, including the Companies Act 2013, Companies (Corporate Social Responsibility Policy) Rules 2014, and the BRSR framework by SEBI. Other important sources are Ministry of Corporate Affairs guidelines, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) docs, and rulings related to sustainability and environmental protection. Apart from that, the essay focuses on peer-reviewed journal articles, books and the sustainability reports of the top 100 companies in the NIFTY index. It is also sourced from works of organisations such as the United Nations, OECD, GRI and KPMG. In terms of its structure, the study zeroes in on legal and regulatory aspects of CSR in India. It focuses on Section 135 of the Companies Act 2013 and any rules that are attached. To complete the picture, it also adopts a comparative approach by looking at models adopted in the EU, the UK and South Africa, such as the standards enshrined in the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directives, a stakeholder approach and the Global Reporting Initiative. That helps the researchers identify which approaches are successful and could be applied in India as well.

For the sake of empirical support to the study, this research was conducted by qualitatively analyzing the sustainability disclosures of selected NIFTY-100 companies by using thematic analysis. This study looked at their sustainability reports, ESG reports, BRSRs, annual reports, and CSR disclosures to spot patterns and trends in corporate governance. The analysis focused on five key themes using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach: CSR spending, CSR reporting, linkage to SDGs, impact measurement and responsibility and stakeholder engagement and transparency. Instead of comparing the companies using stats, the aim was to find what they had in common both the positives and the negatives as well as any gaps in their sustainability reporting methods.The Integrated CSR-SDG Impact Mapping Framework (ICSIMF) is the result of my legal research, comparison, thematic assessments and literature review. This framework was developed via theories such as Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), Legitimacy Theory (Suchman, 1995), Triple Bottom Line Theory (Elkington, 1997), and Shared Value Theory (Porter & Kramer, 2011). These perspectives align with a model that truly emphasizes the need to be responsive to stakeholders, mainstream sustainability in all actions, and credit for the development impact.

This study centres on the CSR governance framework in India particularly of companies incorporated under Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013 and other entities obliged to do CSR sustainability reporting. While it gives a thorough look at current governance mechanisms, using mostly secondary data and public disclosures, the info can differ greatly in quality. Furthermore, it is noted that the suggested ICSIMF is a theoretical one – it has not been tested through comprehensive quantitative testing. Nevertheless, it may provide a good policy-driven framework to enhance sustainability governance, accountability and impact assessment in India.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1 Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility Theory

The idea of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has changed a lot over the last seventy years. In 1953, Bowen began the CSR research, stating that companies have obligations beyond making profits that they should align with the values of society as well. In 1991 Carroll expanded on this with his Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility. It is subdivided into four responsibilities: economic, legal, ethical, and charity. This model continues to be of critical importance in CSR research today. The Stakeholder Theory entered the scene and really helped to enhance CSR thinking. In 1984, Freeman said that businesses have to pay attention to employees, customers and communities, in addition to shareholders. This was a broader perspective as to what it means to be accountable and it has had a big impact on the way we're looking after sustainability today. Elkington first introduced the Triple Bottom Line in 1997, suggesting that companies should be evaluated based on economic, social and environmental criteria. Then, in 2011, Porter and Kramer were introduced to the Shared Value Theory, which suggested that businesses could achieve both economic success and social good through incorporating social concerns into their strategies. In general, these ideas reflect a change in the orientation of the CSR from charity to strategic sustainability. Today, companies are increasingly required to create positive social, environmental and economic outcomes in areas, such as Carroll and Shabana identified in 2010.

5.2 CSR in the Indian Context

CSR in India has been influenced by philanthropic business practice, Gandhian philosophy and community values. Education, health, rural development, and community service were all areas where biggies have engaged in over the years such as Tata, Birla and Bajaj. It all turned upside down when the Companies Act was passed with section 135 becoming compulsory in 2013, not only is CSR not a matter of choice, but it is a legal requirement. Mukherjee and Bird (2016) highlight that this is true for some companies in India, but nowhere else. Studies show that having mandatory CSR rules has indeed brought more company cash to development work (Bhaduri & Selarka, 2016). However, scientists identify issues. Resources don't always flow where they are needed most, efforts may seem pushed, and those who are supposed to be contributing are often low contributors. Not to mention, it would be very difficult to assess the effectiveness of these projects, (Jain & Jamali, 2018). Legislation indeed increased the role of businesses in advancing social progress, but is it necessarily resulting in real change? That's still unclear. So, many believe that the true measure of CSR effectiveness lies more in the outcomes of CSR efforts in society, the environment, and management than in the amount of money that is invested.

5.3 CSR and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a significant undertaking for global sustainability, which was launched by the United Nations in 2015. Thanks to the cooperation of the governments, the companies and the volunteer organizations, these goals are connected to seventeen aims to combat poverty, injustice, environmental damage, climate change and sustainable development, and to achieve the goal of sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). Companies have also a significant part to play here. By investing in health care, women's rights, green energy, and community help, firms are working on many of these targets (Sachs et al., 2021). Due to this CSR programs have emerged as significant means for businesses to engage in improving development. But, there are some problems that arise even after more companies join. One is discovering what they actually do to help others. Sometimes, companies talk about the SDGs in their sustainability reports, but fail to take actions with clear evidence of progress, or fail to make any progress at all (Van Tulder et al., 2021). Without a standard method of measuring SDG success, it is difficult to determine whether companies are really achieving the goals, and to monitor them. There is now increased demand for CSR and SDGs to be intertwined in a manner that makes it clear we are making a difference.

5.4 ESG Governance and Sustainability Reporting

When it comes to evaluating the performance of companies in relation to sustainability, ESG frameworks are now a big deal. The reports provide an overview of environmental care, social responsibility and management practices to those whose decisions involve the generation of profit, such as investors and regulators (Gillan et al., 2021). There's been a lot more push for ESG info, as more folks are interested in investing responsibly. A number of investors consider sustainability performance as an important aspect of future success and stability of a company, as noted by Eccles and Klimenko (2019). ESG is not only becoming a desirable reporting document, but an essential component of good business practice. In India, SEBI rolled out the BRSR framework, beefing up what companies need to disclose about their sustainable operations. However, despite the improvements made, research shows that CSR reporting, ESG and sustainability reporting in other formats exist in isolation (KPMG, 2022). This means that it will be different rules and not as consistent from one to the next. It can make it more difficult to compare one company to another, and can make it less effective to use these reporting systems genuinely.

5.5 Greenwashing and Symbolic Compliance

Today, greenwashing is a serious concern amongst the fields of sustainability. Refers to a company's seeming to be more environmentally friendly or socially responsible than it really is (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). This may be accomplished by slick marketing, exaggerated statements, and cosmetic initiatives that are primarily intended for appearances' sake. There are some rules that require some social responsibility stuff, but there's a bigger problem of doing the surface level. Companies may choose obvious projects and develop nice stories rather than substantive work with concrete results. Since there aren't set ways to measure true impact, nor outsider checks, firms often skip what really matters. There should be more intensive methods of identifying greenwashing, more rigorous criteria for the truth in reporting, and more independent peer reviews by people with no vested interest in the outcome. This will allow people to trust companies' claims and will get companies to take action to make real changes.

5.6 Artificial Intelligence and Sustainability Governance

Scholarly work is diving into how AI can make sustainability governance and corporate accountability better. AI can handle tons of sustainability data, make ESG assessments, and help with SDG mapping, spot reporting glitches, and aid in making data-backed decisions (Vinuesa et al., 2020). It can help improve the ability to report, monitor and predict impacts accurately and transparently in sustainability. However, researchers warn for transparency, accountability, data quality, explainability and ethics when it comes to AI. Otherwise, AI is likely to exacerbate existing problems and introduce new ones. Today, it's a trend for responsible AI rules to maintain B2B communications honest and transparent.

6. RESEARCH GAP

The literature demonstrates substantial scholarly attention to CSR, ESG governance, sustainability reporting, SDGs, and corporate accountability. Existing studies have examined the evolution of CSR theory, the implementation of India's mandatory CSR regime, the rise of ESG investing, and the growing importance of sustainability disclosures. Emerging research has also begun exploring the role of artificial intelligence in sustainability governance. Despite these contributions, four important gaps remain. First, limited research has developed integrated governance frameworks capable of systematically linking CSR expenditure, ESG indicators, SDG alignment, and sustainability reporting mechanisms within a unified accountability structure. Second, CSR and ESG frameworks are often examined independently, with insufficient attention to their institutional convergence within the Indian regulatory context. Third, there is a lack of comprehensive models that connect CSR activities with measurable developmental outcomes through standardized impact indicators and SDG attribution mechanisms. Finally, the integration of AI-enabled sustainability analytics into CSR governance remains underexplored. The present study addresses these gaps by proposing the Integrated CSR–SDG Impact Mapping Framework (ICSIMF), a multidimensional governance model that integrates CSR reporting, ESG performance assessment, SDG mapping, BRSR disclosures, AI-enabled analytics, and independent impact evaluation mechanisms. In doing so, the study contributes to the emerging discourse on outcome-oriented sustainability governance and corporate accountability in India.

7. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theories used in this study are Stakeholder Theory, Legitimacy Theory, Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Theory and Shared Value Theory. They collaborate to enable us to understand the evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility in sustainability. These theories back up the Integrated CSR-SDG Impact Mapping Framework (ICSIMF) too. All of the frameworks and theories stress the importance of holding stakeholders to account, transparency, embedding sustainability and building value for the future.

7.1 Stakeholder Theory

Freeman (1984) developed Stakeholder Theory, which states that businesses have to take responsibility to various stakeholders, such as employees, customers, communities, governments, investors, and the environment, not just shareholders. The theory is about ensuring that companies think about more than just profit, and to consider the long term, by recognising everyone involved. Stakeholder Theory is the roadmap that Indian companies should follow in their CSR activities to contribute to society and safeguard the planet. This is a concept implemented in the ICSIMF framework. It combines SDG targets, ESG factors, and means to measure CSR project impacts on various stakeholders. This will ensure that these programs are helping the people they are for.

7.2 Legitimacy Theory

In Legitimacy Theory, the approval of the society is won by aligning with the common values and norms of the society (Suchman, 1995). To show this alignment and keep legit, firms use sustainability, CSR, and ESG reports. However, this emphasis on presenting may result in superficial approaches, such as ‘greenwashing'. The theory thus demonstrates that the reports on spending-focused CSR have their limitations and underscores the importance

of quantifying real effects. Introduce the ICSIMF framework, which advocates for fact-based reporting, external impact assessments and enhanced accountability in sustainability.

7.3 Triple Bottom Line Theory

According to Elkington's Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Theory (1997), I would say to consider success in business from three perspectives: the economic, the social, and the environmental. This broadened our assessment of company success to include things other than profits. Although the ICSIMF framework builds on TBL, it links CSR to ESG indicators and SDGs to help measure social, environmental, and economic impacts in a single sustainability system.

7.4 Shared Value Theory

The Shared Value Theory by Porter and Kramer argues that businesses can simultaneously earn profits and contribute to the society's well-being if they align their actions with the needs of society. They see corporate social responsibility as more than just charity it's about boosting innovation and competition for lasting success. India's investments in things such as health care, education and other areas aren't only smart for Indian citizens, they are also wise for biz! Plus, the ICSIMF model reinforces this, which is a long-term process of creating value and clear positive effects.

7.5 Theoretical Integration and Conceptual Foundation of ICSIMF

The ICSIMF framework is based on the four theories. Stakeholder Theory establishes corporate responsibility, Legitimacy Theory reinforces the need for openness and trust, Triple Bottom Line Theory encourages the inclusion of sustainability assessments and Shared Value Theory highlights the alignment of social and economic values. To build on this, the ICSIMF framework integrates CSR spending, SDG mapping, ESG reporting, BRSR reports, AI sustainability analysis, and unbiased assessment into a streamlined governance framework. It takes the firm past mere compliance with spending requirements to the point of actually managing for sustainability outcomes. Plus, it's adamant that CSR should be viewed as a means to enhance the development process, earn stakeholder trust, and demonstrate the company's positive contributions to society, the environment and the economy.

8. CONSTITUTIONAL AND JURISPRUDENTIAL FOUNDATIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

Sustainability governance in India is not merely a matter of laws and regulations; it's also a matter of constitution and court interpretation. The Indian judiciary has made environmental rights stronger and put more obligations on sustainability by creatively using constitutional rules. This has built a solid basis for things like CSR, ESG reporting, and green practices. In this context, the Indian move towards sustainability is considered as an extension of India's social justice, environmental protection and resource sustainability goals for future generations.

8.1 Constitutional Foundations of Sustainability Governance

Articles 21, 48A and 51A(g) of the Indian Constitution provide the basis for sustainability in governance. The concept of a healthy, pollution free environment has been incorporated in the Article 21 through the court interpretations (for example clean air and clean water). Under Article 48A, the state is obliged to protect and enhance the environment, maintain forests safe and to also protect wildlife. Moreover, under Article 51A(g) obligations rest on the shoulders of the citizen to 'defend and preserve the environment. These aims combine to form an integral part of the constitution relating to the care of the environment and sustainable growth. Given these rules, we are asking companies to contribute to the protection of the environment, to the improvement of social wellbeing and to the wise management of resources.

8.2 Judicial Development of Sustainability Principles

The Indian judiciary has truly made a huge contribution in introducing international environmental concepts to local legislation. They have recognised four principles in the context of some key cases: Sustainable development, the Precautionary Principle, the Polluter Pays Principle, and intergenerational equity. Sustainable development aims to strike a balance between environmental protection and economic growth. The Precautionary Principle is being proactive when environmental damages are possible. With the Polluter Pays Principle, companies that mess up the environment need to pay for fixing it. This helps keep businesses accountable. Intergenerational equity? It's about the present generation conserving resources for the future generations. In conclusion, these principles have had a profound impact on the development of environmental regulations, corporate responsibility, and sustainability management in India.

8.3 Landmark Judicial Decisions

Landmark judgments have really beefed up the constitutional basis for sustainability governance. The Supreme Court in Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v Union of India (1996) 5 SCC 647 officially declared sustainable development and some basic eco-principles such as Precautionary and Polluter Pays, as integral components of

the environmental law of India. In M.C. Mehta v. Union of India (AIR 1987 SC 1086), the Court expanded its environmental legal perspective towards focusing on ecology, people's well-being, and companies' duty of care. The same applies to Indian Council for Enviro-Legal Action v. Union of India (1996) 3 SCC 212, which drew attention to the Polluter Pays principle, which holds that industries must pay if they cause environmental damage. In all, the decisions established a firm judicial framework that linked environmental protection, sound development decisions, and corporate responsibility.

8.4 Relevance to Corporate Sustainability Governance@

The developments in the constitution and in the court illustrate that sustainability is not only about a regulatory issue, but a key constitutional objective connected with the protection of the environment, the fostering of social welfare and the fair development. These concepts provide the moral support for contemporary approaches to governance such as the CSR responsibilities, ESG reporting, sustainability statements and impact assessment systems. In this constitutional framework, CSR can be considered as a mechanism through which companies can contribute to the attainment of the objectives of sustainable development and to the public good more generally. The proposed Integrated CSR-SDG Impact Mapping Framework (ICSIMF) aligns with these constitutional values as it is concrete in terms of societal benefits, environmental accountability, stakeholder wellbeing and long-term sustainability outcomes. For this reason, constitutionally and legally, it is necessary for businesses to make a meaningful contribution to sustainable and inclusive growth, rather than simply abiding by the law.

9. CSR-ESG-SDG CONVERGENCE IN INDIA: TOWARDS INTEGRATED SUSTAINABILITY GOVERNANCE

Various sustainability governance models are becoming more intertwined, with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and sustainability governance models all being a part of the picture. While these frameworks were developed in different regulatory contexts, they share a goal of helping to guide responsible business practices, sustainable development and stakeholder responsibility. The convergence of mandatory CSR obligations, ESG governance, SDG commitments, and Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) rules in India has led to immense opportunities to improve sustainability governance. They are still not working together effectively, however, due to the lack of an integrated governance architecture.

9.1 Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted as a global blueprint to tackle social, economic and environmental challenges (United Nations, 2015). Corporations are important development partners because of their CSR programs which have connections with SDG countries, most of which are related to SDGs on education, health and sanitation, gender equality, environment protection and conservation, renewable energy, skills development and rural development. Despite this alignment with nature, CSR reporting in India still fails to have any systematic processes for connecting corporate activities with targets and measurable outcomes of each SDG. However, many organizations mention SDGs in their sustainability disclosures, but they don't show how they contribute to the SDG indicators, which results in less transparency and accountability (Sachs et al., 2021; Van Tulder et al., 2021).

9.2 Emergence of ESG Governance

ESG governance has ushered in a new era of corporate accountability by focusing on measurable environmental, social, and governance performance metrics. ESG frameworks differ from the traditional CSR reporting in that they emphasize sustainability performance and risk management, stakeholder engagement, and long-term value creation (Gillan et al., 2021). The increasing demand for responsible investment from investors has led to an accelerated roll out of ESG reporting globally. As a result, the disclosure of financial and non-financial performance related to sustainability has become a major expectation for corporations, and the information companies disclose should be transparent and verifiable (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019).

9.3 Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR)

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has come up with the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) framework in India for enhancing sustainability disclosures of listed companies. The BRSR is based on the National Guidelines on Responsible Business Conduct (NGRBC) and aims to increase transparency, comparability and accountability in corporate sustainability reporting. Although BRSR is a major step forward towards sustainability governance, CSR disclosure and BRSR reporting often run as two parallel systems which hinder the integration of sustainability information in reporting.

9.4 Governance Challenges and Fragmentation

While all these initiatives have similar goals, CSR, ESG, SDGs and BRSR remain largely disjointed. This fragmentation leads to disparate reporting, the same disclosures being repeated, lack of comparability, and insufficient developmental outcome measures. Moreover, the lack of common impact markers and

SDG/attribution mechanisms hinders stakeholders' capacity to evaluate the impact of corporate sustainability efforts. A lack of clarity on who reports to whom can also lead to symbolic compliance and disclosure, which can threaten the effectiveness and credibility of sustainability governance systems (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019).

9.5 Need for Integrated Sustainability Governance

The inching progress of CSR, ESG, SDGs and BRSR stresses the requirement for a single sustainability governance model. An integrated approach can help create transparency, increase consistency in reporting, increase accountability of stakeholders, enable SDG localization and evidence-based assessment of sustainability outcomes. Most significantly, such integration can redefine corporate responsibilities from compliance on spending, to impact on social, environmental and governance metrics. The efficacy of India's CSR regime is increasingly hinging on providing tangible development outcomes and not just meeting the statutory spending limit.

9.6 Conceptual Basis for the ICSIMF Framework

Governance issues outlined above show the need for a framework that will systematically link CSR spending to tangible sustainability benefits. CSR can be used to identify financial targets, SDGs to identify targets for development, ESG is a set of performance indicators and BRSR is a framework for reporting. But these mechanisms are not very effective because they don't have a single structure. The present study proposes the Integrated CSR-SDG Impact Mapping Framework (ICSIMF) that brings together CSR activities, alignment to SDGs, ESG indicators, BRSR disclosures, AI-based sustainability analytics, and independent impact assessment mechanisms in one accountability framework. The framework aims to usher in a paradigm shift from expenditure-based compliance to evidence-based sustainability governance through transparency, comparability, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-based measurement in India.

10. COMPARATIVE INTERNATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORKS

Increasingly, sustainability governance is being considered as an important aspect and the jurisdictions around the globe are introducing regulatory and reporting regimes to improve company accountability, transparency and sustainable development. While the frameworks vary in scope and implementation, their goal is to incorporate environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles into corporate decision making. The comparative analysis of selected international models helps in getting insights to improve the framework of CSR in India and guide the drafting of the Integrated CSR-SDG Impact Mapping Framework (ICSIMF).

10.1 European Union: Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)

The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) of the European Union is one of the most extensive reporting frameworks in the world on sustainability reporting (European Commission, 2022). One of the main concepts of CSRD is the notion of double materiality, which means that companies are required to report on the financial effects of sustainability issues as well as the effects of their actions on society and the environment. The framework also introduces external assurance of sustainability disclosures which increases the transparency, comparability and accountability of the information disclosed. While there is a need to strike a balance between costs of compliance and reporting complexity, the CSRD offers a meaningful template for sustainability reporting and outcome-based accountability.

10.2 United Kingdom: Stakeholder-Oriented Corporate Governance

The United Kingdom implements stakeholder governance via the Companies Act 2006, requiring directors to take into account the interests of employees, customers, suppliers, communities and the environment when advancing the business of their companies. Sustainability is becoming a more integral part of board-level decision making and disclosures relating to climate change are impacted by the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD). The UK model emphasizes the need to embed sustainability into the very heart of governance and enhancing the accountability of the board for value creation over the long-term.

10.3 South Africa: King IV Governance Framework

The South Africa's King IV Report on Corporate Governance is known for its focus on four key elements of corporate governance: ethical leadership, stakeholder inclusiveness, integrated thinking and sustainable value creation (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2016). The framework allows organizations to implement financial, social, environmental and governance elements across a governance framework. The emphasis on integrated reporting and long-term value creation brings valuable insights into tackling sustainability governance issues and reporting fragmentation.

10.4 Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standards

The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standards are the globally most successful sustainability reporting framework (Global Reporting Initiative, 2021). Its focus is on the inclusiveness of stakeholders, the definition of

materiality, transparency, and the use of standardized sustainability indicators, both on an economic, environmental and social basis. While voluntary in most jurisdictions, the GRI standards have already had a major impact on the level of sustainability disclosures and have assisted in the creation of SDG aligned reporting.

10.5 Comparative Evaluation

Comparative analysis shows that there are several commonalities between the international sustainability governance frameworks. One, all frameworks focus on transparency and better sustainability reporting. Second, it is considered that a key part of accountability is stakeholder engagement. Third, sustainability reporting is more and more activity-based, as opposed to outcome-based. Last but not least, the combination of reporting with integrated reporting and independent assurance systems is gaining traction as key parts of the sustainability governance system.

Table 1: Overview of Global Sustainability Governance Models

Framework	Primary Focus	Key Strength
EU CSRD	Sustainability disclosure and assurance	Double materiality and external verification
UK Governance Model	Stakeholder accountability	Board-level sustainability integration
King IV (South Africa)	Integrated governance	Integrated thinking and value creation
GRI Standards	Sustainability reporting	Standardized disclosure indicators

10.6 Lessons for India

The comparative review proposes a number of changes that are relevant to India in the context of sustainability governance. They range from better linkages between CSR spending and measurable impacts, independent assurance processes, making CSR issues part of board meeting agendas, harmonizing impact indicators, and linking CSR, ESG, SDG and BRSR reporting. These can enhance transparency, comparability, and confidence of stakeholders and minimize report fragmentation.

10.7 Implications for the ICSIMF Framework

The above-mentioned international frameworks offer important foundations for the proposed Integrated CSR-SDG Impact Mapping Framework (ICSIMF). ICSIMF is designed to incorporate the accountability of stakeholders, alignment with SDGs, ESG measures, BRSR disclosures, AI-powered sustainability analysis, and independent impact assessments into a single governance framework, using best practices from around the world. The framework aims to close the governance gaps in CSR and to shift the focus from compliance reporting to outcome-based sustainability governance in India by linking the CSR spending with measurable sustainability outcomes.

11. QUALITATIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SUSTAINABILITY DISCLOSURES OF SELECTED NIFTY-100 COMPANIES

This study employs thematic analysis of a qualitative nature to analyze the sustainability disclosures of the selected NIFTY-100 companies, to explore and describe their current sustainability reporting practices in India. The analysis is based on the communication of the CSR communications by the leading corporations, the ESG commitments, the alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the disclosure of Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR). The goal is to find recurring reporting patterns, governance strengths and accountability gaps that will help to inform the development of the proposed Integrated CSR-SDG Impact Mapping Framework (ICSIMF).

11.1 Data Sources and Analytical Framework

The analysis has been done based on the Annual Reports, Sustainability Reports, Integrated Reports, ESG Reports, BRSR disclosures and CSR disclosures of selected NIFTY-100 companies. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the disclosures under five themes: CSR reporting practices, SDG alignment, ESG integration, impact assessment mechanisms and stakeholder engagement. The aim was not to make a statistical comparison of companies but to find out the commonalities and governance challenges in India's sustainability reporting ecosystem.

11.2 Thematic Findings

Theme 1: Predominance of Expenditure-Based CSR Reporting

The research showed that the emphasis in the disclosure of CSR expense is still on monetary investment, project implementation and statutory compliance in most companies. Although specific data is available on money allocated and project activity, less emphasis is placed on determining longer term social, environmental or developmental impacts. This suggests that CSR reporting is still mostly the exercise of obligation and cost.

Theme 2: Growing SDG Alignment

The overwhelming majority of sustainability reports showed that CSR activities were becoming more aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Projects were often associated with SDGs in the field of education, healthcare, gender equality, environmental protection and community development. This was more often than not a descriptive alignment, however, and only slight evidence was found of any measurable contributions towards any specific SDG target or indicator.

Theme 3: Expansion of ESG Reporting Practices

The review also highlighted that ESG factors are increasingly being incorporated into corporate reporting. Companies are making increasing disclosure of information concerning their environmental performance, workforce diversity, governance structures, ethical practices and stakeholder engagement. The introduction of the BRSR framework by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has led to improved standardization of disclosures, with differences in the depth, methodology and selection of indicators in these reports.

Theme 4: Limited Impact Assessment Mechanisms

One of the key things that came out of the analysis is the extent to which there was no use of a standardized approach to measuring impacts. Many disclosures include activities, outputs and processes of implementation, but relatively few include proof of measurable developmental outcomes and/or long-term sustainability impacts. This constraint makes it hard to compare, and undermines the ability of stakeholders to assess the success of corporate sustainability efforts.

Theme 5: Stakeholder Engagement and Transparency

The disclosures also demonstrate an increasing focus on stakeholder engagement. The majority of companies reported having engaged with employees, investors, suppliers, the community and regulators within sustainability governance processes. However, the concept of stakeholder engagement was often depicted as a formality to follow rather than a tool connected with accountability results that can be measured or validated by third parties for impact assessment.

11.3 Governance Gaps Identified

Thematic analysis shines light on some big structural issues in India's sustainability reporting system. While disclosure practices have improved, reporting is still largely focused on expenses. The integration of CSR and ESG or SDG and BRSR is not that strong either. Oh, and, without standard impact indicators and solid outcome measurement, transparency and comparability is lost. Additionally, sustainability claims are not independently verified which allows symbolic compliance to seep in, undermining stakeholder's confidence in reported sustainability outcomes.

11.5 Implications for the ICSIMF Framework

The study supports the development of Integrated CSR-SDG Impact Mapping Framework. The analysis reveals repeat governance failures, which suggest the need for one unified model to link CSR investment to SDGs and ESG indicators. This is also in relation to BRSR reports and real development outcomes. The proposed framework is designed to further enhance the transparency, trust with stakeholders, and sustainability management practices of the Indian corporate landscape by promoting the adoption of integrated reporting and accountability based on evidence.

12. INTEGRATED CSR-SDG IMPACT MAPPING FRAMEWORK (ICSIMF): A MODEL FOR OUTCOME-ORIENTED SUSTAINABILITY GOVERNANCE

12.1 Conceptual Foundation of ICSIMF

The results of the doctrinal analysis, comparative assessment and thematic review on sustainability disclosures indicate that sustainability governance in India has several gaps, such as: sustainability reporting is fragmented; sustainability reporting is still not well integrated between CSR, ESG, SDG and BRSR; and the focus on impact assessment is limited. To overcome these problems, the study suggests Integrated CSR-SDG Impact Mapping Framework (ICSIMF) as holistic governance model that will enable transparency, accountability, comparability, and measurable sustainability outcomes. The framework is based on the theories of Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), Legitimacy Theory (Suchman, 1995), Triple Bottom Line Theory (Elkington, 1997) and Shared Value Theory (Porter & Kramer, 2011). All these views highlight the importance of stakeholder responsibility, social acceptance, sustainable value generation, and the embedding of economic, social and environmental aims. The framework also draws from experiences of international sustainability governance frameworks, such as integrated reporting, SDG-related accountability, independent assurance and outcome-oriented sustainability assessment.

12.2 Objectives of ICSIMF

The main purpose of the ICSIMF is to shift the focus of India's CSR from an expenditure-based compliance regime to an outcome-based CSR sustainability governance system. In particular, the framework aims at connecting the expenditure for CSR with the SDG outcomes, linking sustainability projects with ESG indicators and BRSR disclosures, increasing the accountability of the stakeholders, enhancing transparency and comparability, enabling evidence-based sustainability assessment and embedding AI-driven monitoring and evaluation systems.

12.3 Structural Components of ICSIMF

The ICSIMF is comprised of six interrelated components which form a complete sustainability accountability architecture.

(i) CSR Inputs- The framework begins with CSR inputs such as corporate investment, project selections, sector allocations, implementation teams, and the way the resources are managed. Although money is the first aspect of sustainable efforts, ICSIMF is more than just about expenditures to demonstrate true sustainable performance.

(ii) SDG Alignment Matrix is the second part which aligns CSR activities with relevant SDGs. For example, SDG 4, through educational programmes, are linked to SDG 3 (health programmes). SDG 6 is related to water conservation and SDG 7/13 are related to renewable energy. Women empowerment and rural development programmes align to SDG 5 and SDG 1 and 10. This matching supports the companies to support official national and international targets for progress.

(iii) ESG Performance Indicators- The third piece discusses about Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) aspects for measuring sustainability. For the environment it implies monitoring measures such as carbon emissions, energy efficiency and renewable energy usage, as well as water saving and waste management. Social fronts focus on the growth of communities, the well-being of workers and diversity and inclusiveness. In terms of governance, you have board control, ethics, being open, engaging with stakeholders and risk management. This expands the scope of the things we examine beyond simply funds invested.

(iv) BRSR Integration Layer – The fourth component integrates sustainability reporting with the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) framework of SEBI. This move boosts consistency and helps with regulatory compliance, enhancing how well companies disclose info and making comparisons easier between firms. The sustainability data is now more structured and accessible to stakeholders with BRSR integration.

(V) AI-Enabled Sustainability Analytics- ICSIMF is unique with the use of AI for sustainability analytics. This technology supports mapping, analysis of environmental, social and governance (ESG) data, forecasting sustainability, monitoring impacts, verifying disclosures and monitoring risks associated with SDGs. It makes reporting easier and bolsters evidence-based assessments. However, there are ethical guidelines and data standards that should be observed when using AI.

(vi) Independent Impact Assessment – The final piece is on measuring and verifying the impacts of sustainability. Independent impact assessments may include third party audits, academics and social/community audits. It's the biggest modification in the framework, since it moves its emphasis from spending money to enhancing social, environmental and governance stuff what counts.

12.4 Operational Framework

The operational logic of ICSIMF follows a sequential governance process:

CSR Inputs → SDG Alignment → ESG Measurement → BRSR Reporting → AI-Enabled Analytics → Independent Impact Assessment → Sustainability Outcomes

This integrated process enables sustainability performance to be assessed throughout the lifecycle of corporate interventions and ensures that accountability is linked to measurable developmental impact rather than financial expenditure alone.

12.5 Governance Significance of ICSIMF

ICSIMF is significant because it bridges the gaps in India's fragmented sustainability governance. Unlike current methods which see CSR, ESG, SDGs, and BRSR as separate requirements, ICSIMF unites them under one accountability system. This links financial investments to sustainability metrics and outcomes, encouraging data-driven decision-making and results-focused accountability. Corporations, regulators, investors, and society all stand to gain. Businesses will manage sustainability better and build trust with stakeholders. Regulators will monitor more effectively and improve policies. Investors will get accurate green info. Society? It benefits from better development and closer alignment with the SDGs. In sum, ICSIMF offers a solid model for boosting corporate responsibility and improving sustainability in India.

13. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND REGULATORY REFORMS

13.1 Strengthening Sustainability Governance in India

The results of this study suggest that the CSR paradigm in India is in need of a paradigm shift from a compliance approach to a sustainability governance approach. The following policy changes are suggested to facilitate the implementation of Integrated CSR-SDG Impact Mapping Framework (ICSIMF).

13.2 Standardized CSR Impact Assessment

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) should design a uniform and sector specific impact assessment framework for CSR looking at outcomes based measures and uniform reporting guidelines. This would make it easier to compare, to be transparent and to be held to account between organisations.

13.3 Mandatory SDG Mapping

It is necessary that CSR projects are directly aligned with SDGs, targets and indicators. SDG attribution would facilitate sustainability reporting and improve the ability to measure corporate contributions to the national development goals.

13.4 Integration of CSR, ESG, and BRSR Reporting

The integration of CSR, ESG and BRSR Reporting is being undertaken. More convergence of CSR disclosures, ESG indicators, and BRSR reporting should be promoted by having a common sustainability metric and reporting format. This would diminish the fragmentation of reporting and enhance disclosure quality.

13.5 Independent Assurance and Impact Verification

There should be greater scope for independent verification of sustainability disclosures, such as sustainability audits, social impact assessments, and additional third-party verification procedures, to increase credibility of the disclosures and minimise the likelihood of greenwashing.

13.6 Board-Level Sustainability Oversight

The organisation should form board level sustainability committees and mechanisms to oversee sustainability considerations within the corporate strategy, risk management and decision making processes.

13.7 Adoption of AI-Enabled Sustainability Analytics

Promote and encourage responsible application of AI to map SDGs, monitor ESG indicators, predict sustainability, verify sustainability disclosures, and assess impacts, with transparency and ethical protections in place.

13.8 Centralized Sustainability Data Repository

A national sustainability reporting portal to connect CSR, ESG, BRSR and impact assessment disclosures would enhance accessibility, benchmarking, regulatory monitoring and engagement with stakeholders.

13.9 Capacity Building and Awareness

There's a need for collaboration amongst government agencies, industry bodies, academic institutions, and professional groups to enhance the capacity building of sustainability governance, ESG reporting, impact assessment, and sustainability analytics using AI.

13.10 Roadmap for ICSIMF Implementation

The implementation of ICSIMF could be done in a step-by-step process as follows: First, establishing the sustainability metrics and mapping the SDGs; Second, integrating CSR, ESG and BSRR reports; Third, adopting digital and AI to monitor more closely; and Fourth, transitioning to outcome-based sustainability management. In the event that these modifications are successful, it would contribute to the improvement of the corporate responsibility, improve the measurement of sustainability and bring India's CSR regulations even with the international standards of green growth and equitable corporate monitoring.

14. CONCLUSION

The present study focussed on the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) towards sustainable development in India in the larger context of sustainability rules. The research demonstrated some interesting things using doctrinal analysis, comparing the various systems, studying the sustainability reports and theory. Although India's compulsory CSR plan since 2013 has brought lots of money for social and green projects, there are issues. It is stunted because reporting is not neat, there are no satisfactory results testing and too much emphasis is placed on the ticking of a few boxes regarding spending. The study concluded that there is need for better synergy between CSR, ESG and SDGs reporting and BRSR reporting. By checking out what the world does, it showed more places are caring about actual achievements, getting input from many sides, mixing up their reports, and tracking real results. Not to mention, when leading companies share their own CSR deeds, ESG scores, and SDG connections, they're still inclined to talk about actions, not results. So, even though things are better in India, reporting should

go beyond simply stating what was done and demonstrate progress. This way, everyone will have a better sense of the actual impact on development.

To address these challenges, the study came up with the Integrated CSR–SDG Impact Mapping Framework (ICSIMF), the main point of this research. It integrates CSR investment, alignment with SDGs, ESG metrics, BRSR disclosures, AI sustainability analysis with external impact assessments into a single accountability framework. The goal of ICSIMF is to achieve transparency, to facilitate comparisons, to increase stakeholder trust, and to guarantee long-term benefits for everyone, by associating business expenditures with measurable eco-outcomes. Also, it advances the present body of understanding by developing a joined up approach to sustainability management. Going forward means rejecting out-of-date perspectives on CSR as philanthropic or conformist.Going forward means rejecting out-of-date perspectives on CSR as philanthropic or conformist. Lastly, the study dishes out policy tips on assessing impacts, knitting sustainability reports, SDG mapping, gaining legit validation, and using new tech responsibly in governance matters. While the study is constrained by the secondary data it draws on, and its conceptual approach, it provides a starting point for further empirical studies on integrated sustainability governance models. In the future, further testing of ICSIMF in various sectors, development of specific impact indicators for these sectors, and the use of AI for sustainability assessments and reporting could be considered. In retrospect, the study believes that CSR in India has to be put on a developmental track by improving the accountability, transparency and measuring the developmental outcomes, instead of increasing only the spending target. The more companies are able to implement mechanisms that are integrated and result-oriented, such as ICSIMF, the more they will not only get compliance, but support sustainable and inclusive growth. This transition will be pivotal to link companies with the priorities and objectives of India and the UN SDGs.

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