Driving social impact through CSR and ESG: A practical roadmap for practitioners

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TOI SOCIAL IMPACT SUMMIT
LEADING CHANGE THROUGH CSR & ESG

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Foreword

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The world today is being reshaped by rapid change, complex challenges and rising expectations. In this context, the responsibility to drive social impact is no longer confined to governments alone, it rests with all stakeholders. How companies, governments, civil society and individuals integrate Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) principles and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) into action has become a defining test of our collective commitment to building sustainable and inclusive societies.

The *Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025,* with EY as Knowledge Partner, catalyzed vital conversations on issues that shape our collective future, environmental stewardship, gender equality, responsible technology and AI, and accessible healthcare, among others. It reaffirmed that the path forward in driving social impact must be rooted in collaboration, innovation and resilience.

This white paper builds on those dialogues, offering a practical roadmap for stakeholders across sectors. It highlights how businesses, policymakers and communities alike can align growth with long-term societal value. At a time of competing priorities, the need to reimagine strategies that bring together business excellence, social progress and community wellbeing has never been more urgent.

As India stands at a pivotal juncture in its socio-economic journey, the importance of both personal responsibility and collective effort becomes clear. Meaningful change is sparked by individual conviction, strengthened through shared vision and sustained by cooperation. I invite every reader to embrace this call to action, to reimagine their role as leaders, practitioners, or citizens in advancing social impact that benefits not only our communities and nation but also our planet.

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Executive summary

The **Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025,** presented by Malabar Gold & Diamonds with Knowledge Partner EY, PSU Partner Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), and Skill Partner Friends Union for Energizing Lives (FUEL), was held in Mumbai from 11 July to 12 July. The Summit provided a platform for dialogue and exchange for over 60 senior leaders from leading organizations, government, academia and civil society to reflect on India's evolving Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) landscape. It facilitated structured cross-sectoral dialogue on inclusive development, sustainability and impact governance. Through panel discussions, fireside chats, keynote addresses and interviews, it explored the imperative for ESG and CSR to move beyond mere compliance and emerge as powerful catalysts for systemic transformation.

All dialogue at the Summit reflected the necessity and importance of collaborative action. The potential of cooperation, joint efforts between enterprises, grassroots organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and the government to drive real impact and achieve sustainability targets was recognized. Such joint efforts allow for easier scaling of initiatives and support long-term impact. Collaboration in any form was recognized as crucial; this includes diversified and strategic business investments, collaborations through ESG initiatives, and building initiatives while leveraging government schemes and policies.

This document synthesizes the Summit's key insights, framing CSR and ESG not as disparate approaches but as complementary frameworks that, when strategically aligned, create a powerful engine for driving social impact. Ultimately, it emphasizes that the future of social impact depends on transparent, collaborative and proactive efforts, where CSR and ESG are not just compliance requirements but catalysts for transformational change, benefiting businesses and the broader society alike.

The ***objective*** of this whitepaper is to provide a comprehensive yet practical roadmap for corporate practitioners, policymakers and stakeholders to effectively harness the synergies between CSR and ESG frameworks to drive meaningful social impact. The following focus areas guide this effort:

(i) Current trends, challenges and regulatory developments shaping the CSR and ESG landscapes, particularly in India.

(ii) Actionable strategies across various themes of ESG and CSR initiatives to enhance positive social outcomes.

(iii) Understanding how businesses can transition CSR and ESG from compliance-driven activities to strategic priorities that deliver long-term societal and financial returns.

(iv) Collaboration across sectors to scale sustainable development efforts aligned with India's national goals and global commitments.

3 Summit overview

The Summit aimed at facilitating convergence across institutions, encouraging evidence-based learning, and promoting scalable models that align business strategies with social equity and environmental stewardship. Across the themes of ESG and CSR, specific focus areas included sustainable technology and AI, climate innovation, circular economy transitions, education reform, nutrition and food security, preventive healthcare and gender equality. The dialogue aimed at highlighting the shift of ESG and CSR thinking from short-term, output-based to long-term, SDG-aligned interventions that are measurable, community-anchored and purpose-driven.

Day -1 of the Social Impact Summit focused on ESG with themes of *Aatmanirbharta* (self-reliance), circular economy, technology and AI, climate innovation, youth engagement and corporate governance being key areas of discussion. The day commenced with an inaugural address by ***Shri Nitin Gadkari,*** Minister of Road Transport & Highways, who emphasized India's urgent need to integrate sustainability with growth. His focus on ESG and CSR priorities for national development laid the groundwork for the rest of the day's discussions. Following this, ***Mr. M P Ahammad,*** Chairman of Malabar Group, delivered a special address, which was then followed by ***Mr. Uday Kotak,*** Founder and Non-Executive Director, Kotak Mahindra

Group, who delivered the keynote. In his remarks, Mr. Kotak underscored the importance of an Aatmanirbhar Bharat and urged both businesses and policymakers to link economic self-reliance with social purpose and inclusive progress.

The idea of harnessing technology for inclusive development became a key theme of the day. This was exemplified during the Tech for Good Panel discussion moderated by ***Mr. Nitesh Mehrotra,*** Consulting Partner, Sustainability and Climate -EY India. As emerging technologies and AI tools were a central theme in all dialogue at the Summit, it was vital to recognize their contribution in creating an accessible and inclusive India.

This panel consisted of a group of professionals including ***Mr. B Thiagarajan*** - Blue Star Ltd., ***Ms. Abanti Sankaranarayanan,*** - Mahindra Group, ***Mr. Srinivasa Raghavan*** - Cummins, ***Dr. Poornima Dore*** - Dorian Scale, ***Ms. Nidhi Bhasin*** - Digital Green and ***Mr. Atul Satija*** - The/Nudge Institute. As highlighted in the discussion, owing to the new digital age, it is now possible to drive and monitor social impact till the last mile. From AI-powered insights to sector-specific recommendations, the discussion addressed how cutting-edge technologies are redefining ESG and CSR implementation at scale.

With rising volumes of plastic, e-waste and industrial waste, India faces a growing crisis. A fireside chat about utilizing waste as a resource explored business models, partnerships and technologies that successfully turn waste into economic opportunities. In a compelling conversation, ***Ms. Namita Devidayal*** - The Times of India engaged with ***Mr. SSV Ramakumar*** - AM Green, ***Mr. Pranshu Singhal*** - Karo Sambhav and ***Ms. Wilma Rodrigues*** - Saahas Zero Waste to highlight the critical role of strategic waste management in creating livelihoods, ensuring regulatory compliance and reducing environmental impact.

Climate change action was addressed through a dedicated panel titled "India's Climate Movement," moderated by ***Ms. Vaishnavi Chandrashekhar*** - The Times of India. Panelists such as ***Ms. Srestha Banerjee*** - iFOREST, ***Ms. Aarti Khosla*** - Climate Trends, ***Mr. Bipin Odhekar*** – Marico, ***Dr. Geetanjoy Sahu*** - TISS and ***Ms. Radha Goenka*** - RPG Foundation shared experiences and insights on how innovative technologies and collaborative approaches are driving real climate solutions in India.

The link between conscious consumer behavior and sustainability came into focus during a fireside chat on mindful consumption. In a discussion with ***Ms. Shilpashree Muniswamappa*** of Colgate-Palmolive India, ***Mr. Nitesh Mehrotra*** tied together earlier conversations on circular economy principles with the growing trend of younger consumers demanding sustainable products and practices. This discussion highlighted how businesses must respond with greater accountability to shifts in consumer awareness.

Building on this, a vibrant and enriching panel discussion with young changemakers and leaders in the environmental and social sphere underscored the importance of youth involvement and engagement in ESG and CSR initiatives to drive impactful initiatives with communities. The Voices of Change panel discussion was moderated by ***Ms. Deeti Shrotriya*** - EY, in conversation with ***Mr. Karnav Rastogi*** - Author, ***Ms. Prasiddhi Singh*** - Prasiddhi Forest Foundation, ***Ms. Amairah Anand*** - Project SAFI (Sustainable Aquatic Filtering Islands), ***Ms. Prachi Shevgaonkar*** - Cool The Globe, ***Mr. Saiansh Tapuriah*** - Developer and Innovator, EpiAlert, ***Ms. Rajlakshmi Patil*** - DY Patil Climate Action Lab (D-CAL) and ***Mr. Sarthak Shyam Saraf*** - DDeveloper and Innovator, Renewable Energy. Through their stories and innovations, the panel underscored how youth engagement is critical for building resilient and sustainable community-driven initiatives.

The day concluded with a reflective fireside chat on corporate governance. ***Ms. Aashish Kasad,*** National Leader - Chemicals and Agriculture sector, EY India spoke with ***Mr. Milind Sarwate*** - Increate and ***Mr. Narayan Shankar*** - Mahindra Group. Their discussion emphasized how leadership vision, organizational culture, and regulatory frameworks can work together to embed sustainability principles within core business operations. By drawing on real-world case studies, the panel demonstrated how companies can rethink corporate governance to better serve long-term environmental and social goals.

As a fitting close to the day, The ***Times of India ESG and CSR Honors*** recognized organizations that have shown exceptional leadership and innovation in the following ***ESG*** categories:

Climate innovator

(i) **PHOOL** repurposes temple floral and farm waste by upcycling it into sustainable, innovative products such as certified natural incense and animal-free leather.[1] They employ marginalized, at-risk women from vulnerable communities and provide them and their families with transformative socio-economic opportunities.

(ii) **Lohum,** a cleantech organization based in India, pioneers lithium-ion battery recycling and low-carbon refining to produce sustainable battery raw materials that reduce dependence on mining and accelerate the global energy transition.[2]

Technology and AI in sustainability

(i) **DigitalPaani,** a climate-tech organization that acts as a one-stop AI-powered operating system for water and wastewater treatment facilities.[3]

(ii) **SatSure,** a climate-tech organization that delivers agricultural intelligence through geospatial AI and satellite imagery to enable climate-resilient, inclusive rural finance.[4]

1. PHOOL, https://phool.co/
2. Lohum, https://lohum.com/
3. Digital Paani, https://www.digitalpaani.com/
4. SatSure, https://www.satsure.co/

Day -2 of the Summit focused on driving social impact and inclusion through ***CSR*** principles and initiatives.

The day commenced with an insightful keynote highlighting the need for purpose-driven action over prescription-mandated action. Focusing on the 2% mandate, ***Mr. Amitabh Kant,*** Former CEO of NITI Aayog, emphasized the need for a reorientation of CSR as a strategic tool for development rather than a statutory requirement. Mr. Kant's framing laid the foundation for sessions that examined how CSR can enable institutional alignment with national and global development priorities.

This was followed by a panel discussion on microlearning as an education strategy to drive **macro impact.** Moderated by Mr. Sourabh Anand, Head– EY Foundation India, with insights from ***Mr. Manmohan Singh*** - Kaivalya Education Foundation, ***Ms. Rema Mohan*** - NSE Foundation, ***Mr. Venkat Krishnan N*** - India Welfare Trust, ***Dr. Gayathri Vasudevan*** - Sambhav Foundation and ***Ms. Rucha Pande*** - Mantra4Change, the session explored how CSR can help scale microlearning models to bridge learning gaps in low-resource settings.

Nutrition was discussed as a structural determinant of well-being. A fireside chat on Zero Hunger and Nutrition, moderated by ***Ms. Nisha Poddar*** - The Times of India, brought together ***Mr. Upmanyu Patil*** - Swayam Shikshan Prayog, ***Mr. Sudarshan Suchi*** - Reliance Foundation, ***Dr. Rukmini Banerji*** - Pratham Education Foundation and ***Mr. Abdul Salam K.P*** - Malabar Gold & Diamonds. The session emphasized the urgency of shifting from caloric sufficiency to community-led nutrition security, including women-run farming models and backyard kitchen gardens. These were positioned as scalable, cost-effective approaches to achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2.

Discussions on empowerment and inclusion called for a deeper understanding of intersectionality in CSR design. In a panel discussion on *Empowerment: Beyond Tokenism – Building Inclusive Communities,* panelists ***Ms. Smarinita Shetty*** - India Development Review, ***Mr. Aman Bhaiya*** - SBI Foundation, ***Mr. Shashaank Awasthi*** - V-shesh, ***Mr. Vinay Ranjan*** - Coal India, ***Ms. Garima Dutt*** - YES Foundation and ***Mr. Sumit Tayal*** - Give discussed the operationalization of inclusion through participatory governance, gender-transformative strategies and data disaggregation.

The fireside session *#CancelPatriarchy: Advancing Financial Independence for Women and CSR,* moderated by ***Ms. Arti Dua*** Partner and EY India Talent Leader, featured ***Mr. Jayant Rastogi*** - Magic Bus Foundation and **Ms. Nayana Chowdhury** - Breakthrough Trust. The dialogue focused on dismantling patriarchal barriers that inhibit women's financial autonomy and leadership, and on CSR's role in promoting gender-inclusive economic participation.

The panel on *Rethinking CSR in Public Health* showcased speakers including ***Ms. Jaya Jairam*** - Mohan Foundation, ***Ms. Shalini Jatia*** - ImPaCCT Foundation, ***Dr. P. Raghu Ram*** - Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation, ***Dr. Bharat V. Shah*** - ZTCC & Narmada Kidney Foundation, ***Dr. Sultan A. Pradhan*** - CanCare Trust and ***Mr. Rameshwar P. Naik*** - CM Medical Cell. Together, they made the case for preventive healthcare, staff training, and the use of CSR funds to build inclusive, community-centered health models.

The education-focused session, *Education: An Enabler of Growth and Change* featured ***Mr. Kumar Anurag Pratap*** **-** Capgemini, ***Mr. Abdul Salam K.P*** - Malabar Gold and Diamonds, ***Mr. Ketan Deshpande*** - FUEL and ***Mr. D. Vijay Kumar*** - Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. The discussion centered on bridging the education-to-employment gap through vocational training, AI-driven learning, and collaborative models backed by CSR.

Day 2 concluded with organizations honored across four categories for delivering social impact through CSR:

Healthcare

(i) **Piramal Foundation's** initiatives such as the Aspirational Districts Collaborative and Anamaya, the tribal health collaborative, focus on creating scalable healthcare models. They work closely with government systems to strengthen frontline health delivery and foster community participation.[5,6]

5. Piramal Foundation, Aspirational Districts Collaborative, https://piramalfoundation.org/Content/media/Big-Bet-Aspirational-Districts-Collaborative.pdf
6. Piramal Foundation, https://piramalfoundation.org/

(ii) SEWA Rural, with over four decades of grassroots work in Jhagadia, runs a 200-bed hospital, vocational training centers and maternal-child health programs. Their model bridges medical access and social equity, particularly for tribal populations.[7]

Education

(i) BEST – Bajaj Engineering Skills Training by Bajaj Auto equips underprivileged youth with job-ready skills in areas such as manufacturing, electricals and two-wheeler servicing. Through industry-linked curricula and real-world exposure, the program boosts employability and workforce readiness. [8]

(ii) Quest Alliance blends technology with self-learning approaches to equip students with 21st-century skills, especially in STEM and life skills. Their programs reach over 500,000 learners across India through partnerships with schools, ITIs and CSRs.[9]

Empowerment

(i) Aajeevika Bureau provides identity documentation, legal support, skills training and social security to rural-to-urban migrant workers. Their initiatives promote dignity in labor, help reduce exploitation and enable long-term economic resilience for migrant families.[10]

(ii) Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL)'s flagship initiative – Project Shakti empowering over 2 lakh women through entrepreneurship training and financial inclusion. Aligning their mission of 'doing well by doing good', HUL targets underprivileged women in rural India and provides them with better livelihoods through financial empowerment and self-reliance.[11]

Gender equality

(i) CREA's programs focus on rights-based education, disability inclusion and bodily autonomy for marginalized women and girls. Their South Asian feminist leadership institutes have shaped the next generation of intersectional leaders across the region.[12]

(ii) Breakthrough Trust is known for powerful multimedia campaigns such as "Bell Bajao" and "Dakhal Do", Breakthrough also works on the ground in communities to prevent early marriage and gender-based violence. They work with schools, parents and local leaders to shift behaviors and norms.[13]

In addition to the fruitful discussions and honorees, a major outcome of the Summit was the launch of The Times of India ESG and CSR Council, a multi-stakeholder platform aimed at advancing impact governance and driving alignment between sustainability reporting, community engagement and policy frameworks. The Council is expected to serve as a national-level mechanism for building institutional accountability in the CSR and ESG space.

With over 400 participants from a plethora of sectors, the Summit demonstrated the power of collective action. Supported by key organizations such as EY, HAL and FUEL, the event affirmed that CSR in India is entering a new era – one defined not by obligation, but by purpose, innovation and long-term impact. The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025 demonstrated that CSR and ESG principles, when applied with strategic intent and grounded in local realities, can drive structural shifts rather than temporary relief. It advanced the national conversation from fragmented compliance to collective impact, underscoring the evolving role of CSR and ESG as levers for institutional innovation, inclusive development and long-term systems change.

7. SEWA Rural, https://sewarural.org/about-us/
8. Bajaj Engineering Skills Training (BEST), https://www.bajajbeyond.co.in/our-companies/bajaj-auto-limited/initiatives/skill-development/bajaj-engineering-skills-training-best
9. Quest Alliance, "Annual Report 2023-2024", https://annual-report-2024.questalliance.net/
10. Ajeevika Bureau, Aajeevika – https://aajeevika.org/
11. HUL, Sustainability at HUL, Livelihoods Unilever https://www.hul.co.in/sustainability/livelihoods/
12. CREA - Home, https://creaworld.org/
13. Breakthrough Trust - Our work, https://inbreakthrough.org/our-work/

4 Context and background

Social impact initiatives in India have traditionally been spearheaded by NGOs, financed by corporates and recognized or incentivized by government bodies. For many decades, the contributions of these stakeholders to social impact were largely seen as separate and distinct. However, in recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on collaborative efforts, engaging all stakeholders - NGOs, corporates and the government. With increasing platforms for dialogue exchange, such as The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025, these forces are now initiating joint action to drive social progress with greater impact.

While ESG and CSR have become increasingly significant and omnipresent in the corporate landscape, along with 'sustainability,' they are often used as buzzwords. To leverage them to their full potential, it is essential to understand their evolution, current trends and future expectations. It is crucial to go beyond compliance and use these frameworks to create tangible impact across key themes such as gender equality, healthcare, climate action, technology and empowerment. By actively leveraging ESG and CSR principles, stakeholders can drive holistic and sustainable development across communities and regions in India.

4.1 Evolution of ESG and CSR in India

The profound impact of business supply chains, operational activities, and resource utilization on our economic, social and ecological systems has been extensively studied and documented. This underscores the critical need for responsible and sustainable corporate stewardship. Supporting this, research suggests that 91% of companies face strong investor pressure to accelerate sustainable business practices, while 78% also face pressure from activists.[14] While companies are working on compliance with sustainability-related regulations and adopting greener practices, these efforts are still in their nascent stages and are often siloed from core business strategies.

Indian SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) are increasingly prioritizing ESG, with 92% of SME leaders considering it a high priority. However, integration of ESG practices into core business strategies, rather than their separate adoption, is vital. Increasing participation in sustainability reporting and adherence to frameworks has led to ESG and CSR becoming influential strategies for companies to successfully initiate and drive social impact.

14. EY Europe, "The Future of Sustainability in Business: Why Success Depends on Integration," May 2025, https://www.ey.com/content/dam/ey-unified-site/ey-com/en-gl/insights/long-term-value/documents/ey-gl-the-future-of-sustainability-in-business-why-success-depends-on-integration-05-2025.pdfa.

While ideated in the mid-2000s, the concept and perception of ESG have changed drastically in the last five years. With growing investor interest, the introduction of new indices such as the S&P BSE (Standard & Poor's Bombay Stock Exchange) 100 ESG Index and the Nifty 100 ESG Index, and the rise of global and national ESG rating methodologies, ESG is now a priority for most corporate leadership. Although often critiqued, if integrated and implemented strategically, ESG can positively influence an organization's reputation, perception and performance.

Supporting this, the Sustainability by Design framework highlighted in the EY ESG megatrends report, 2021 reflects an approach where sustainability is integrated from the very inception of business models, products, processes and strategies, rather than being a stand-alone or after-the-fact add-on.[15] This three-layered framework aims to guide organizations in the design, development, implementation and communication of sustainability initiatives, as illustrated below:

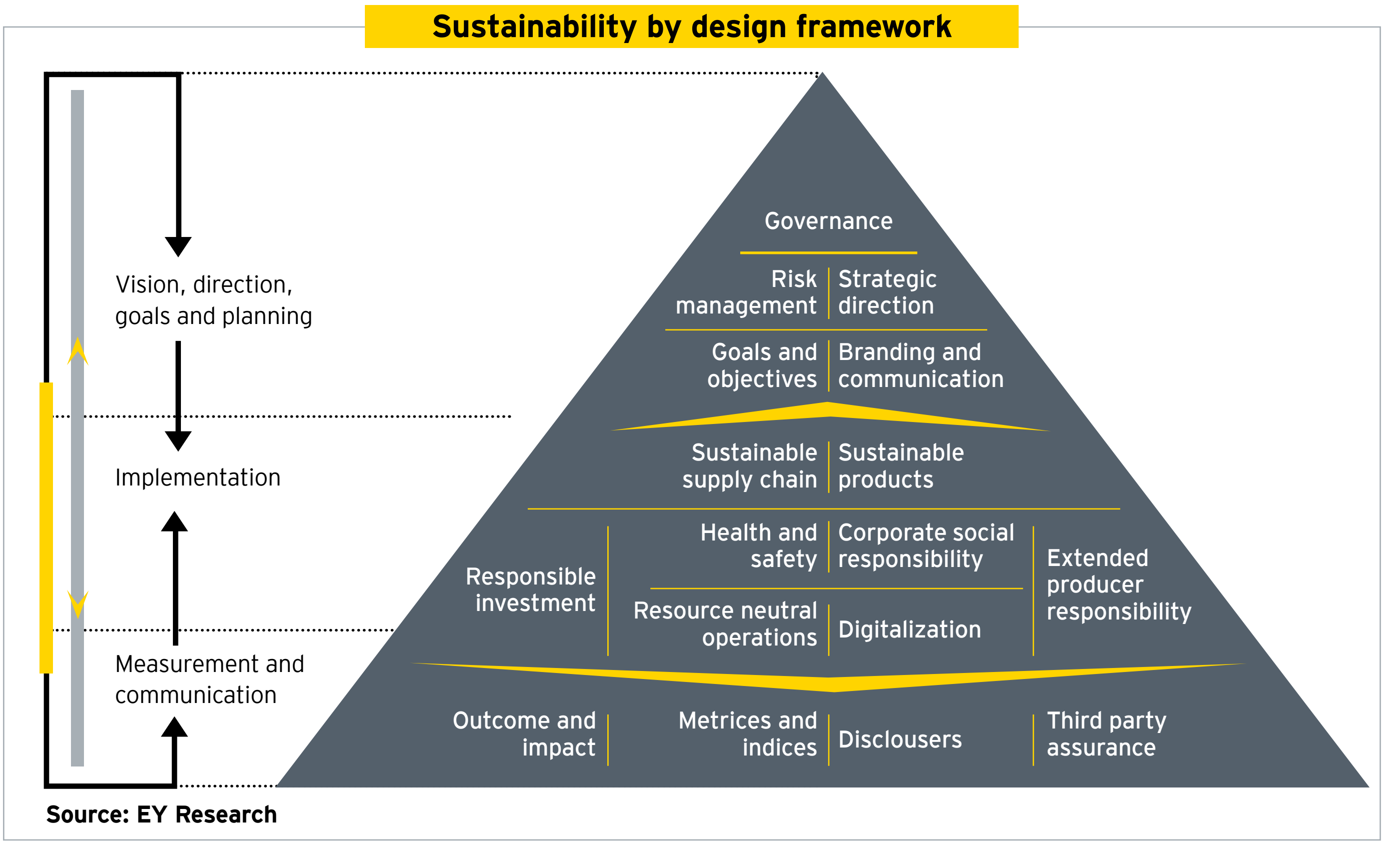


Figure 1, Source: IIC & EY Associates LLP, "ESG Megatrends and Opportunities Shaping Future," 2022

15. DBS, "92% of Indian SMEs Are Focused on Adopting ESG Measures: DBS and Bloomberg Media Studios Survey," Dbs.com, 2022, https://www.dbs.com/newsroom/92_percent_of_Indian_SMEs_are_focused_on_adopting_E SG_measures.

The Evolution of CSR in India

Pre-independence

Ethics and Philanthropy

CSR rooted in personal ethics

Industrialists supported education, heathcare and social welfare

Post-Independence

(1947-1990)

Voluntary contributions

State-led development

CSR remained informal and scattered

Liberalization era

(1991-2013)

Strategic CSR emerges

Economic reforms encouraged startegic CSR

2009: Voluntary CSR guidelines issued

Companies act, 2013

CSR made mandatory for qualifying companies
alignment with national priorities (Schedule VII)
Reporting requirement introduced

Source: Academia.edu, SlideShare, ULR

CSR is not just a duty - it's a legacy

Data Source: CSR in India: Evolution, Models and Impact -https://www.academia.edu/76211947/CSR_in_India_Evolution_Models_and_Impact

Through this framework, organizations may integrate ESG principles across their strategy, operations and value chains. At the heart of this integration lies corporate social responsibility (CSR). Much like ESG, CSR in India has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past century. What began as philanthropic acts by early industrialists has today evolved into a structured, regulated, and purpose-driven element of corporate governance.

India's journey stands out not only because it was the first country to legally mandate CSR but also because its evolution reflects the changing expectations of society, government and global standards. A milestone in this journey was the introduction of the CSR spending rule, under which the Government of India mandated all companies covered under Section 135(1) of the Companies Act, 2013 to allocate at least 2% of their average net profits from the preceding three years to CSR activities. This legal framework marked a global first and a defining step in formalizing corporate contributions to social development.

As highlighted in Mr. Kant's keynote address and in other discussions at the Summit, this mandate has generated mixed views. While it has institutionalized CSR spending, it is sometimes seen by businesses as a ceiling rather than a baseline, potentially limiting the depth of social impact.

India's evolving ESG and CSR journey demonstrates a clear shift, from voluntary giving to strategic responsibility and now to legally mandated, impact-focused engagement. Today, both ESG and CSR stand as critical pillars of responsible business, directly supporting the country's environmental, social and economic development goals.

4.2 Current trends and challenges in ESG and CSR adoption

4.2.1 ESG

Globally, ESG is advancing swiftly, with 2025 marking a period where stricter regulations, cutting-edge technologies, heightened social responsibility, and sustainability-focused investments are converging. Worldwide ESG investments are projected to total US$41 trillion by the end of 2025, alongside substantial growth in ESG-focused debt instruments and exchange-traded funds (ETFs).[16]

This indicates that ESG is no longer seen primarily as a matter of ethics or corporate responsibility but increasingly recognized as a key driver of financial performance and long-term impact creation. Supporting this, a 2022 study sampling 500+ investors across 19 countries indicated that for most investors, ESG investing plays a crucial role in their strategies.[17] Additionally, there was a notable increase in the percentage of investors considering ESG issues between 2021 and 2022.

16. S Bhanu Kumar, "Future of ESG in 2025: A Transformative Landscape," Avtarinc, March 28, 2025, https://www.avtarinc.com/future-of-esg-2025-trends-business-impact/.
17. Jessica Ground, "ESG Global Study 2022," The Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance, June 17, 2022, https://corpgov.law.harvard.edu/2022/06/17/esg-global-study-2022/.

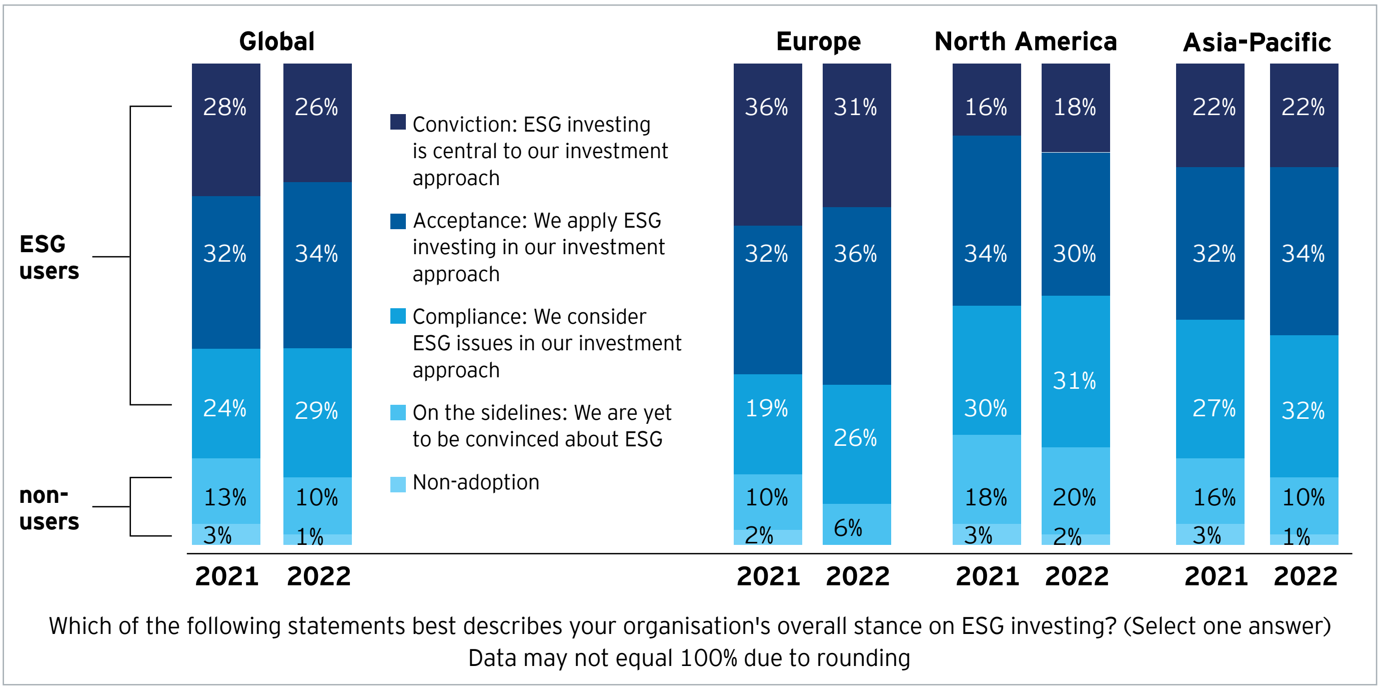


Figure 2, Source: Jessica Ground, "ESG Global Study 2022," The Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance, June 17, 2022, https://corpgov.law.harvard.edu/2022/06/17/esg-global-study-2022/.

In this context, national ESG funds in India currently hold growing Assets Under Management (AUM) of nearly INR10,946 crores, underscoring increasing investor commitment, market size, credibility and success.[18] With increasing capital flow, formalized mandates and forward-looking policies; India is at the forefront, emphasizing transparency, comprehensive value chain disclosures, and a commitment to inclusive and sustainable development.

Through the adoption of national commitments such as the Panchamrit goals, Viksit Bharat 2047, and the net-zero target by 2070, ESG has become deeply embedded in public policy, capital markets and corporate strategies. Currently, 46.3% of India's total energy capacity is derived from renewable energy.[19] The government's focus on green infrastructure, including fiscal pushes for renewables, EVs, hydrogen and circular economy initiatives, underscores the prioritization of sustainability at the highest level. Such national targets play a crucial role in promoting ESG practices by setting clear priorities and providing guidance for organizations.

A defining feature of India's ESG landscape is the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) framework, mandated under SEBI - Securities and Exchange Board of India (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The top 1,000 listed companies are required to publicly report ESG-related data under this framework, which covers nine principles. BRSR replaces the earlier Business Responsibility Reporting (BRR) and aims to standardize sustainability disclosures while driving greater accountability across the value chain. While mandatory for the top 1,000 companies, BRSR reporting remains voluntary for others and plays a significant role in building responsible brand reputations. The following analysis highlights key focus areas across the E, S and G domains, showing how ESG's role in business is evolving from meeting compliance requirements to becoming a fundamental driver of resilience, competitive advantage and social impact.

The following graph reflects ESG trends by comparing average data from 1,175 companies in 2024 and 474 companies in 2025 that disclosed their BRSR reports on the exchanges (NSE – National Stock Exchange Website) as of 26 July 2025.[20] This comparative analysis highlights emerging ESG KPI trends. For instance, there is a sharp increase in the percentage of workforce trained in health, safety and human rights, reflecting the growing importance of employee engagement, well-being and awareness.

18. IDFC FIRST Bank, "ESG Investing in India - a Complete Guide," idfcfirstbank (IDFC FIRST Bank, February 24, 2025), https://www.idfcfirstbank.com/finfirst-blogs/savings-account/esg-investing-in-india.
19. Santosh Kumar, Sarla Meena, and Saurabh Kalia, "Ministry of New and Renewable Energy," Pib.gov.in, 2024, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressNoteDetails.aspx?NoteId=153279&ModuleId=3.
20. NSE Website, 2025, https://www.nseindia.com/companies-listing/corporate-filings-bussiness-sustainabilitiy-reports

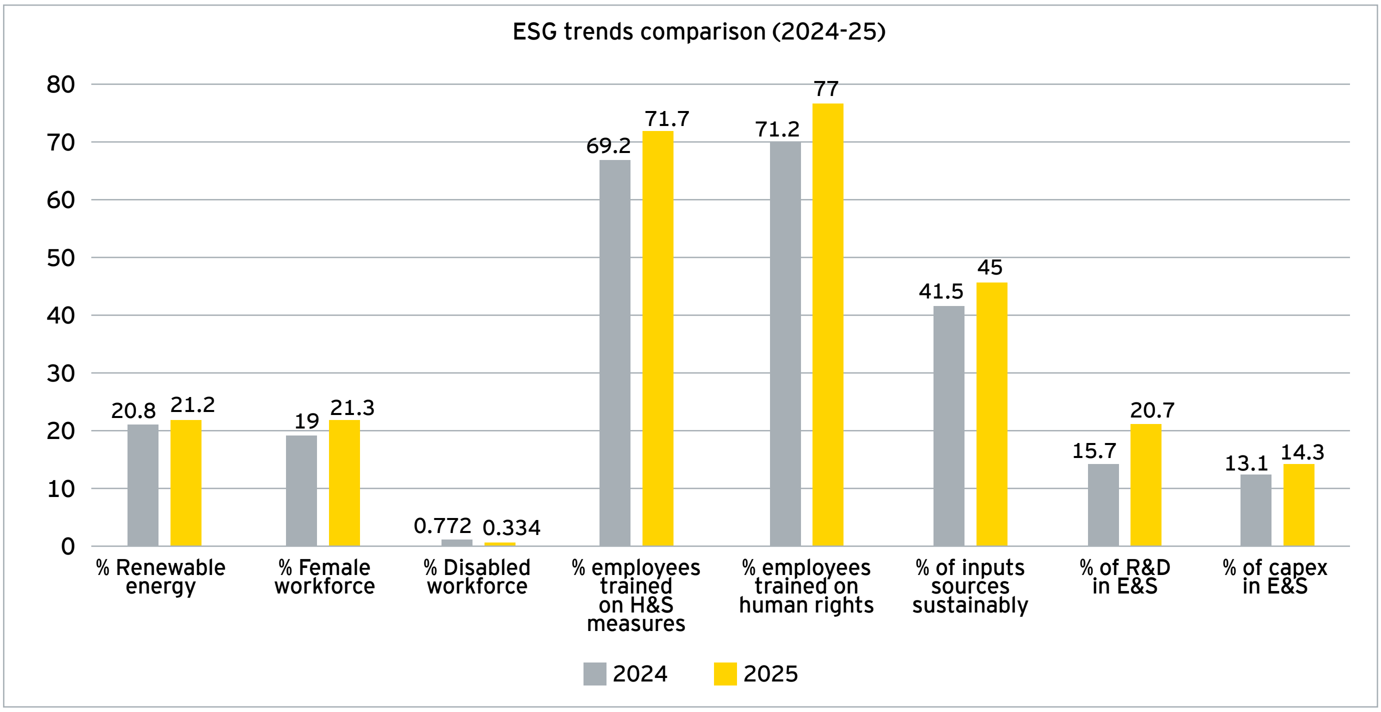


Figure 3, Source: EY analysis

The increase in renewable energy adoption in India reflects both corporate initiatives and supportive government policies. Incentives such as subsidies, combined with heightened awareness, have encouraged organizations and households alike to shift toward greener energy sources, especially solar and wind. Despite India's share of global Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions rising to 7.8% in 2025, the country maintained its position as the 10th-ranked nation in the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI).[21][22] This ranking is determined by a country's performance across four key categories: GHG emissions, renewable energy use, energy consumption and climate policy. Notably, the top three positions remain unassigned, as no country has met the highest benchmarks across all indicators.

As illustrated, women constitute 48% of India's population but represent only 21% of the total workforce, with their contribution to GDP at just 18%.[23] Such disparities have brought sharper focus on the "S" (Social) and "G" (Governance) dimensions of ESG in recent years. There is now heightened emphasis on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), labor standards, working conditions, living wages, ethical procurement, and other social aspects of the value chain, all aimed at building an inclusive, equitable India.

For the "G" dimension, although reporting mandates for corporates are increasing and ethical governance is becoming a standard expectation, barriers persist. Lack of proper data collection and collation leads to inconsistent reporting practices, obstructing transparent communication. While the BRSR framework represents a significant step forward, the lack of publicly available, verifiable data continues to hinder stakeholder evaluation. Moreover, enforcement of regulations remains uneven, increasing the risk of greenwashing.

Despite these challenges, India's ESG landscape presents significant opportunities for growth. With technology integration, data collection and reporting can be simplified. Digital tools and AI have emerged as powerful catalysts, transforming how companies accelerate and scale their sustainability efforts. A 2024 report revealed that 64% of Indian companies are actively deploying AI to enhance sustainability outcomes.[24] It also noted that countries disproportionately affected by climate change, such as India and Brazil, are leading in IT investments for sustainability, highlighting the uneven distribution not only of climate risks but also of the efforts to combat them.

21. World Population Review, "Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Country 2020," worldpopulationreview.com, 2025, https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/greenhouse-gas-emissions-by-country.
22. Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI), India, 2025 https://ccpi.org/country/ind/
23. Aditi Singh, "Women Contribute Only 18% to GDP despite 48% Share in Population: Study," The Economic Times (Economic Times, March 2024), https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/women-contribute-only-18-to-gdp-despite-48-share-in-population-study/articleshow/108147494.cms.
24. IBM, "The State of Sustainability Readiness Report 2024," 2024, https://www.ibm.com/think/reports/sustainability-readiness.

Similarly, climate-tech investment in India has seen exponential growth. In the first half of FY 2025 (April-September 2024), climate-tech investments totaled about $564 million, reflecting 37% growth within six months (from $238 million in Q2 to $326 million in Q3).[25] This short-term surge has been fueled by rising government support and investor interest in climate-tech. The following graph provides a sector-wise analysis of India's climate-tech investment landscape.

*All amounts mentioned in US$ million

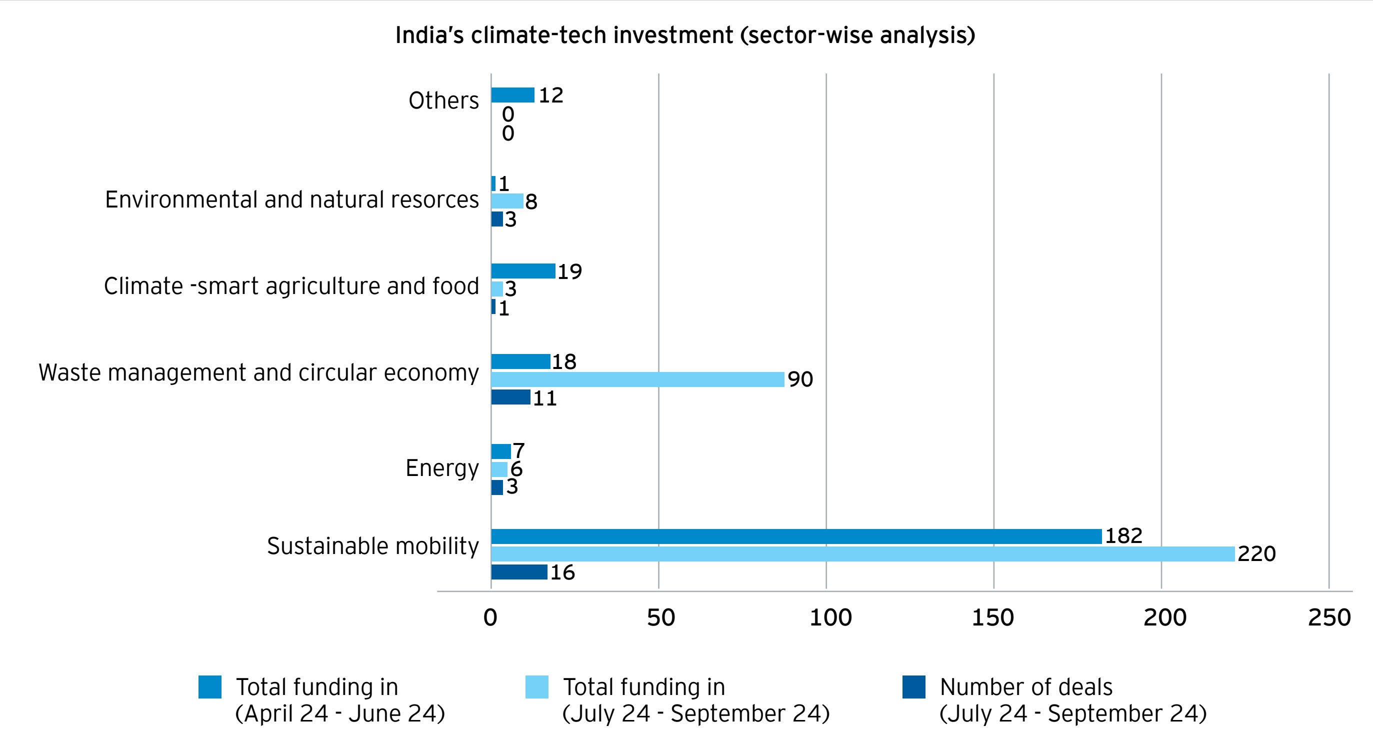


Figure 4, Data Source: Impact Investment Council (IIC), "IIC (Impact Investors Council) Newsletter," Iiic.in, 2025

As seen above, sustainable mobility has attracted the majority of climate-tech funding, followed by waste management and circular economy. Alongside these, technologies such as advanced renewable energy systems, real-time monitoring tools, carbon capture, blockchain, IoT, 5G and automation are also enabling sustainability. By optimizing resources, improving efficiency, and providing deeper insights through continuous data collection and analysis, these tools are revolutionizing supply chains, ensuring transparency, traceability and accountability. This, in turn, supports ethical sourcing, fair trade and responsible production.

To summarize, India's transition is clear. Businesses are not merely "catching up" but are early adopters of next-generation ESG frameworks, positioning themselves as leaders in both domestic and global sustainability conversations. This is reflected in growing investor confidence and the mainstreaming of ESG into financial analysis, policy agendas and corporate leadership priorities.

25. Impact Investment Council (IIC), "IIC (Impact Investors Council) Newsletter," Iiic.in, 2025, https://iiic.in/newsletter/india-climate-bulletin/issue-9/invest-snapshot.html.

4.2.2 CSR

Numerous companies around the world now recognize CSR as a business imperative rather than just a charitable endeavor. They understand that responsible and sustainable practices can provide long-term profitability and competitiveness. Companies that integrate CSR into their strategies are often better positioned to attract investors, customers and top talent.[26]

CSR in India is evolving from a compliance-driven mandate under the Companies Act, 2013 to a strategic instrument for inclusive development, with increasing emphasis on aligning corporate initiatives with national priorities such as the Sustainable Development Goals and public-private partnerships.[27] As we reflect on a decade since the CSR mandate came into effect, it's clear that the role of CSR has expanded significantly. Corporates are increasingly adopting a problem-first approach, going beyond the transactional nature of funding programs to create a more enduring impact.[28]

One of the most notable trends shaping this evolution is the digital transformation of CSR. Technology enables companies to design, monitor and scale their initiatives more efficiently. Digital platforms are being leveraged to improve transparency, enable real-time tracking, and foster greater stakeholder engagement. Social media, in particular, has emerged as a powerful tool to raise awareness, drive participation and humanize corporate initiatives. Additionally, data analytics plays a growing role in helping organizations evaluate the effectiveness of their programs and make data-driven decisions that strengthen social impact.

Environmental sustainability is another central theme in the current CSR landscape. With increasing awareness of climate change and natural resource depletion, companies are embedding eco-conscious practices into their operations. Efforts such as reducing energy consumption, adopting waste management systems, and working toward carbon neutrality are becoming commonplace. These initiatives not only mitigate environmental risk but also enhance brand reputation and reduce long-term operational costs. Many businesses are now aligning their CSR goals with the United Nations SDGs, particularly those related to climate action and responsible consumption.

At the same time, there is growing pressure on organizations to measure the outcomes of their CSR efforts. The focus is shifting towards robust social impact measurement using clear metrics and evaluation frameworks. This emphasis helps companies better represent their profiles, build stakeholder trust and refine their CSR strategies based on measurable results.[29]

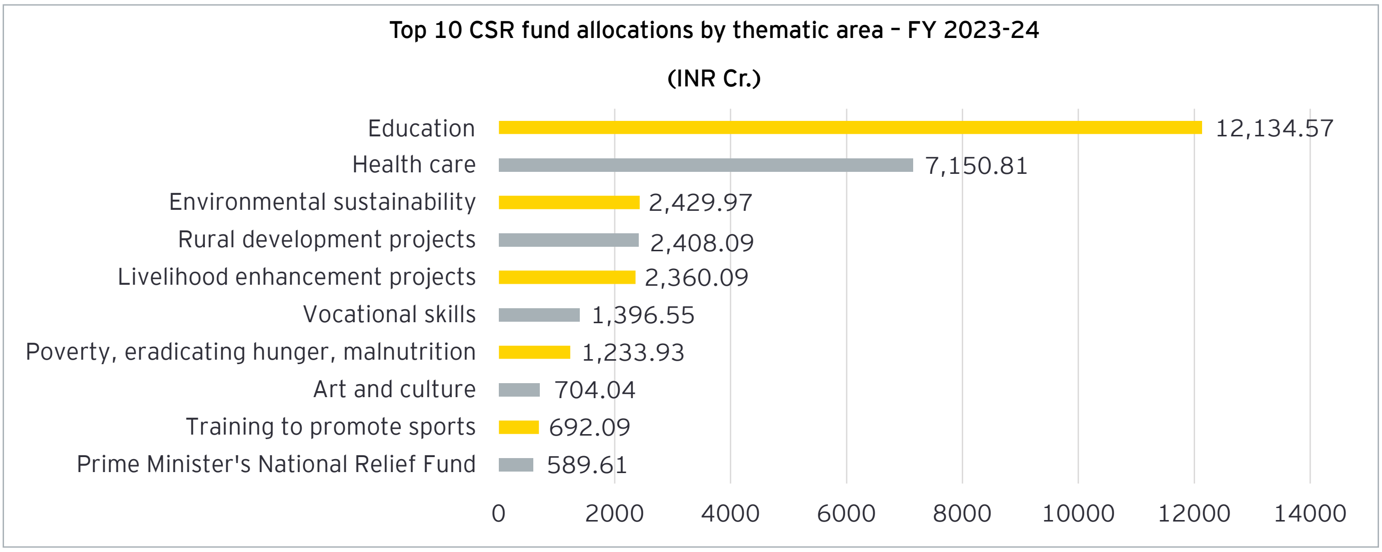


Figure 5, Data Source: National CSR Portal,
Ministry of Corporate Affairs - https://www.csr.gov.in/content/csr/global/master/home/home.html

26. Legal Service India, Corporate Social Responsibilities: Global And Indian Perspective
27. National CSR Portal, Home
28. SATTVA, CSR: a catalyst for systemic change, CSR: A Catalyst for Systemic Change - Sattva Consulting
29. CSRCONNECT, "CSR in India – sector-wise allocation, trends & challenges 2025" https://csrconnect.org/csr-india/csr-in-india-trends-allocation-and-challenges-2025/

The chart shows that a significant portion of CSR funds in India is directed toward education (35%) and healthcare (30%). This reflects a clear alignment with national development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being).

According to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs and NITI Aayog, CSR is increasingly seen as a strategic tool to support inclusive growth, moving beyond compliance to actively complement government efforts in areas like rural development, environmental sustainability and social equity.

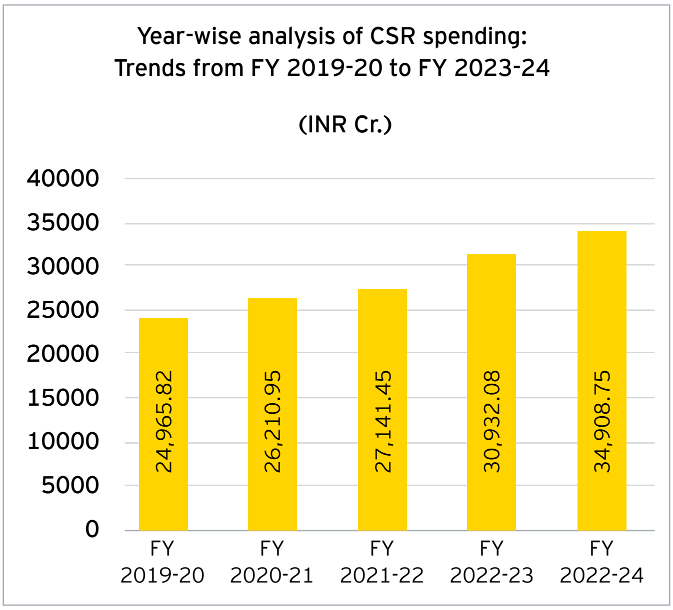


Figure 6, Data Source: National CSR Portal, Ministry of Corporate Affairs - https://www.csr.gov.in/content/csr/global/master/home/home.html

The chart shows a consistent rise in CSR expenditure over the past five years, indicating that CSR is becoming a mainstream component of corporate strategy. This growth reflects increasing corporate participation in nation-building efforts, aligned with priorities outlined in the Companies Act, 2013, and supported by platforms like the National CSR Portal. The trend also signals stronger engagement in areas such as education, healthcare and rural development, reinforcing CSR's role in complementing government-led social and economic initiatives.

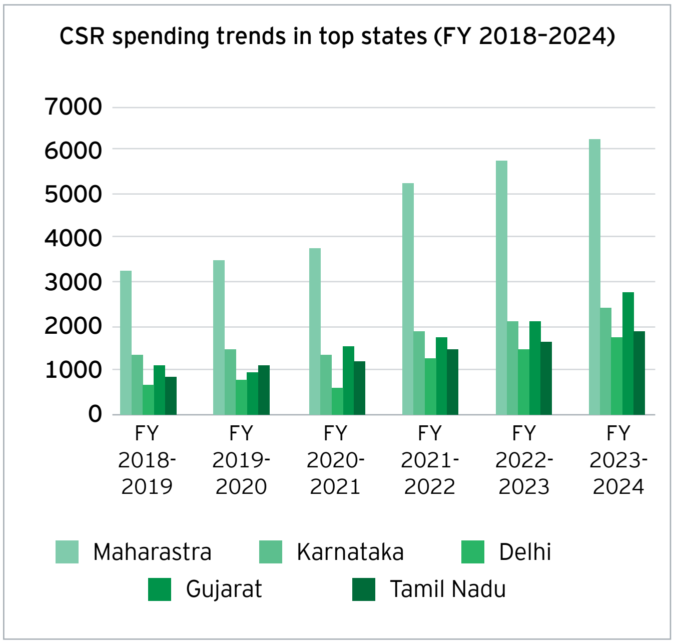


Figure 7, Data Source: National CSR Portal, Ministry of Corporate Affairs - https://www.csr.gov.in/content/csr/global/master/home/home.html

The chart shows a clear concentration of CSR spending in economically active states. Maharashtra's lead reflects its corporate density and diverse development needs, while Delhi's recent rise signals growing urban engagement. Karnataka's steady growth aligns with its expanding innovation and social impact ecosystem. Gujarat and Tamil Nadu[30,31] though stable, present opportunities for more targeted CSR outreach. The trend suggests that CSR allocations often follow corporate footprints, highlighting the potential for geographic rebalancing to support broader national development.

Sectors like agriculture and nutrition may benefit from increased CSR focus, given their importance to India's long-term development goals.[32]

30. Ministry of Corporate Affairs, RAJYA SABHA UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 2755, https://www.mca.gov.in/Ministry/pdf/ru2755_21032018.pdf
31. Ministry of Corporate Affairs, CSR Data & Summary
32. Dr. Chowdappa V A, Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science Volume 11 ~ Issue 12 (2023) pp: 145-149 | Page Research Paper "An Analysis of Challenges of CSR Activities in India" - https://www.questjournals.org/jrhss/papers/vol11-issue12/1112145149.pdf

5 Key themes and insights

At a time when India is navigating a delicate balance between progress and inclusion, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025 emerged as a much-needed confluence of experience, ambition and accountability. Bringing together business leaders, grassroots changemakers, development practitioners, philanthropists and policy voices - the Summit did not just spark conversations, it built bridges.

The sessions addressed a variety of themes within ESG and CSR; but beneath these diverse topics ran a common thread — the urgent need to move beyond symbolic action, towards systemic transformation. Whether the panel was discussing the role of technology in rural empowerment, the importance of inclusive hiring or investments into innovation for social impact - each conversation anchored itself in one powerful idea: change must be human-first.

The insights of each session aim to capture the spirit and substance of the dialogue exchanged at the Summit. They reflect not just what was said, but what resonated. They do not simply summarize the sessions; they distill their essence. Organized by the major discussion themes, they draw out the most compelling outcomes, recurring questions, and forward-looking takeaways that emerged over the course of the Summit.

5.1 Chief Guest's Address by Shri Nitin Gadkari, Minister of Road Transport & Highways, Government of India

The Summit commenced with an address by Shri Nitin Gadkari, Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Government of India. In his speech, he presented a comprehensive vision that combines technological innovation, alternative fuels, infrastructure development and supportive government policies to accelerate India's transition toward intelligent and sustainable transportation systems.

Shri Nitin Gadkari, Day - 1,
The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

Highlighting the government's commitment to building a sustainable future, he emphasized the need to integrate economic development with social and environmental objectives by saying:

"There are three important fields in social impact where we need to drive exceptional action/work - Ethics, economy and environment." [33]

He also cited efforts to empower marginalized and vulnerable communities, enabling them to build livelihoods that generate both social and environmental benefits. Touching on the key themes of the Summit, such as climate-tech innovation, renewable energy and the growth of electric and hybrid vehicles, he reaffirmed the government's steadfast support. He called for collaboration among all stakeholders to create meaningful and collective impact.

Additionally, he stressed the importance of repurposing waste and using alternative materials such as bamboo and recycled plastics in infrastructure projects, including road construction. Drawing on his extensive experience, he shared examples of how environmentally conscious initiatives can create real value and impact by building cleaner, healthier cities for all. On the broader themes of social impact, ethics, environment and ecology, he emphasized prioritizing India's domestic "Happy Human Index", a measure of well-being that balances socio-environmental factors. He also highlighted the crucial role of agri-technology and the need for integrated initiatives to address agricultural and rural challenges.

Concluding his address, Shri Gadkari set the tone for the Summit by underscoring the importance of recognizing leaders, changemakers and organizations driving social impact and transformation across the country.

5.2 Aatmanirbhar Bharat for a sustainable future

The vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat (a self-reliant India) has often been associated with manufacturing, exports and macroeconomic resilience. However, at The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025, this idea was recast through a more grounded, human lens. Self-reliance, as explored across sessions, was not only about reducing external dependency but also about enhancing dignity, agency and community capability. It came to represent a deeper call for transformation across education, healthcare, agriculture, gender and governance.

In his keynote address, Mr. Uday Kotak, Kotak Mahindra Group, reinforced this perspective, stating:

"Capital without conscience is a missed opportunity" [34]

Mr. Uday Kotak, Day – 1, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

While highlighting the need for purposeful CSR spending, he promoted India's mandatory 2% CSR rule as a global benchmark for sustainable corporate contributions and encouraged its worldwide adoption. Currently, Indian companies contribute approximately **INR34,908 crore** annually via CSR, and Mr. Kotak envisions this rising to **INR1 lakh crore** in the future.[35] He urged corporations to go beyond sole compliance with the 2% mandate encouraging impactful spending rather than just fulfilling requirements. True Aatmanirbharta, as panelists across discussions argued, does not emerge from one-off interventions or disconnected schemes. It is cultivated through long-term, community-owned models that integrate education, health, nutrition and livelihoods. Examples ranged from backyard kitchen gardens that enhance both income and dietary diversity, to schools that evolve into local hubs of awareness and empowerment.

Ultimately, Aatmanirbhar Bharat is not just a national mission; it is a village-by-village reality that must be co-created with patience, collaboration and purpose. When leveraged strategically, ESG and CSR can lay the foundation for a truly self-reliant, equitable and sustainable India.

33. Shri Nitin Gadkari, Minister of Road Transport & Highways, Government of India, Chief Guests Address, Day 1, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025
34. Mr. Uday Kotak, Founder & Non-Executive Director, Kotak Mahindra Group, Keynote Address, Day 1, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025
35. National CSR Portal, "Home," www.csr.gov.in, 2024, https://www.csr.gov.in/content/csr/global/master/home/home.html.

5.3 Leveraging technology and AI for environmental and social impact

In a world increasingly defined by digital disruption, the Summit urged a pause - not to resist technology, but to reflect on how we are using it, for whom and to what end. The theme of **"Technology for Good: Using Innovation to Solve Real-World Challenges"** was woven through various discussions, and its message was nuanced: technology can be a powerful equalizer, but only when designed with empathy and implemented with intent. As stated by Ms. Abanti Sankaranarayanan, Mahindra Group during the discussion:

"It is essential to see Aatmanirbharta (self-reliance) in every aspect of the value chain" [36]

Technology for Good: Using Innovation to Solve Real-World Challenges Panel discussion, Day - 1 The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

Undoubtedly, technology plays a crucial role in transforming lives and businesses today. Through increased accessibility, availability and connectivity, it is possible to drive real action and impact till the last mile. In fact, as of early 2025, India has made significant digital progress, with about 806 million internet users, corresponding to an internet penetration rate of 55.3% of its total population.[37] Recognizing this, the panel discussion highlighted the potential of technologies and AI for sustainability, as well as the challenges that may be faced in their implementation. For example, as noted during discussions, AI can be used to support underprivileged youth in preparing for interviews. AI tools can help overcome language and confidence barriers, enabling them to access job markets previously out of reach. In addition to such tools, the surrounding system – the mentors, the community engagement and the layered support– plays a crucial role in making such initiatives more inclusive and impactful.

Another example highlighted was that of digital volunteers who provided virtual learning support to students in remote areas. Such initiatives demonstrated that even simple platforms, when combined with structure and accountability, can amplify reach and impact. But there was also caution. Technology cannot be parachuted into underserved communities without understanding local needs, limitations and cultural contexts. Access to a smartphone does not mean access to opportunity. As Ms. Nayana Chowdhury from Breakthrough Trust pointed out during the Fireside chat on #Cancelpatriarchy on Day 2, gender norms often prevent girls from fully utilizing tech, even if they technically have the device.

"We often assume that giving someone a device is enough. But unless we address who controls the device, and what the norms around its use are, we are only reinforcing exclusion in a digital form," she explained. [38]

This raised important questions, such as: Are our tools multilingual? Are they compatible with low-bandwidth environments? Do they enable interactivity, or are they limited to passive consumption? Do they empower users or overwhelm them? The emphasis was not to shy away from innovation, but to anchor it thoughtfully. The call was to encourage technological applications and innovations to be co-designed with communities, for AI to enhance rather than replace human connection, and for inclusion to be embedded as a fundamental design principle rather than treated as an afterthought.

In addition, the panel discussion recognized the notable rise in climate-tech and start-ups across the country as a result of emerging technologies and increased innovation. India is the world's third-largest start-up ecosystem, with over 1.57 lakh DPIIT-recognized start-ups (2024).[39] Among them, climate-tech start-ups have seen considerable growth owing to rising investor interest, supportive government policies, and increasing technological innovation across the country. Honored in the category of Tech and AI for Sustainability, SatSure's Sage agri-intelligence platform and specifically its SatSource module combines satellite imagery, AI, and geospatial analytics to deliver real-time agricultural insights on scale. Designed to empower banks, insurers, agribusinesses and governments, SatSource enables optimized credit risk assessment, crop monitoring and climate risk mitigation, especially for smallholder farmers underserved by traditional systems. By enhancing transparency, traceability and precision in rural decision-making, SatSource helps close critical information gaps in agriculture and financial inclusion.[40]

36. Ms. Abanti Sankaranarayanan, EVP - Group Public Affairs, Mahindra Group, Panel discussion, Tech for Good: Using Innovation to Solve Real-World Challenges, Day 1, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025
37. Simon Kemp, "DataReportal – Global Digital Insights," DataReportal – Global Digital Insights, February 25, 2025, https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-india.
38. Ms. Nayana Chowdhury, CEO, Breakthrough Trust, Fireside chat, #Cancelpatriarchy: Advancing Financial Independence for Women, Day 2, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025
39. PIB Delhi, "India's Startup Revolution," Pib.gov.in, 2025, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2098452.
40. SatSure, https://www.satsure.co/

SatSure's Impact created in Numbers

Also honored under the same category, DigitalPaani is a climate-tech organization that acts as a one-stop AI-powered operating system for water and wastewater treatment facilities. It aims to enable water treatment plants to become energy-efficient, water-neutral and compliant through intelligent automation, while reducing operational costs, environmental impact and human error in real-time plant management. Climate change is projected to reduce India's GDP by 2.8% by mid-century,[41] while urban infrastructure demands could rise from 0.7% to nearly 6%[42] of GDP. Meanwhile, water scarcity alone may shave off up to 6% of India's economic output,[43] placing mounting pressure on already overstretched water resources. Using AI-powered systems, DigitalPaani reduces sewage discharge, increases water reuse and cuts energy and chemical waste in treatment plants. Its "Identify–Tell–Solve" platform digitizes wastewater operations via IoT sensors and machine learning, creating real-time digital twins to detect issues and automate corrective actions such as chemical dosing.[44]

Despite the growing presence of such organizations, Indian climate-tech start-ups face a variety of challenges today. As highlighted by Ms. Nidhi Bhasin, Digital Green, during the discussion, there is a lack of alignment between central and state initiatives and policies on critical sectors such as agriculture, which leads to various governance and procedural challenges. Focused on using innovation to solve real-world challenges, the discussion emphasized the importance of stakeholder dialogue and engagement to build clarity on initiatives and their impact. As highlighted by Dr. Poornima Dore - to encourage holistic development in marginalized regions in India, organizations should conduct impact assessments of proposed technological advancements. This will allow for risk identification, mitigation, and assessment of opportunities for building capacity and capabilities across populations.

Another challenge that was discussed was the lack of investment in innovation from the private sector. Innovation drives long-term impact and addresses other issues such as education, digital literacy and more. While education remains the largest and most favored sector for receiving funding, it is important to diversify a company's investment profile to drive holistic social development. The investments a company makes through ESG initiatives or CSR spending reflect its outlook, affect its reputation, and shape its perception in the market. This directly impacts brand image, confidence and consumer behavior. In fact, a 2020 Capgemini report indicated that 79% of consumers are changing their purchase preferences based on social responsibility, inclusiveness, or environmental impact. This is influenced by increasing consumer awareness and themes of mindful consumption.

As emphasized by Mr. Atul Satija, The/Nudge Institute, to drive real impact till the last mile:

"We need to be intentional about our actions" [45]

41. PTI, "Climate change could shave off 2.8% of India's GDP by 2050: World Bank," The Times of India, June 28, 2018, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/climate-change-could-shave-off-2-8-of-indias-gdp-by-2050-world-bank/articleshow/64783108.cms
42. PTI, "India needs $2.4 trillion urban infra investment by 2050: World Bank," The Economic Times, updated July 22, 2025, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/infrastructure/india-needs-2-4-trillion-urban-infra-investment-by-2050-world-bank/articleshow/122843074.cms
43. Veena Srinivasan, "Water is getting scarce in India, but not for everyone," India Development Review, August 16, 2019, https://idronline.org/water-is-getting-scarce-in-india-but-not-for-everyone/
44. Digital Paani, https://www.digitalpaani.com/
45. Mr.. Atul Satija, Founder & CEO, The/Nudge Institute, Panel discussion, Tech for Good: Using Innovation to Solve Real-World Challenges, Day 1, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

This shift in consumer behavior towards sustainability is mirrored by growing market trends in eco-friendly technologies, such as the rapid rise in electric vehicle (EV) adoption across India. EV sales in India demonstrated a robust year-on-year growth of approximately 25.4% in 2024, reflecting rising innovation and increasing demand for sustainable technologies.[46] Additionally, although there has been an 18% increase in EV sales in India the transport sector remains the second most polluting sector, contributing to 12.9% of national CO_2 emissions, as illustrated below.[47,48] This growth underscores India's accelerating transition towards e-mobility and the expanding adoption of eco-friendly transport, while raising significant concerns regarding the limited availability of critical raw materials, especially rare earth elements and metals needed for battery production.

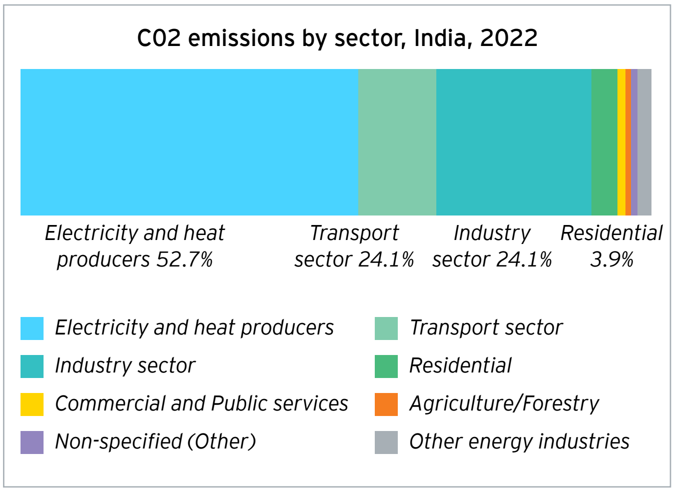


Figure 9, Source: IEA, "India - Countries & Regions," IEA, 2022, https://www.iea.org/countries/india/emissions.

As highlighted during the discussion, key components such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, and manganese are indispensable for manufacturing lithium-ion batteries; however, their worldwide reserves are scarce and geographically concentrated. This limitation presents challenges to the scalability and affordability of India's EV goals, necessitating innovative approaches such as enhanced recycling techniques, responsible mining, and the exploration of alternative battery technologies.

As India advances its climate agenda through cutting-edge innovation, overcoming the dependency on rare earth minerals and managing finite resources will be crucial for maintaining a durable and sustainable clean energy transition. This situation underscores the vital linkage between technological progress, prudent resource stewardship, and adherence to ESG frameworks in fostering a truly sustainable future.

In order to develop effective strategies, it is crucial to account for the diverse realities of communities across different regions; therefore, technologies and approaches must be adapted to the specific context of each community. Currently, a lack of awareness, limited access, and insufficient support mechanisms hinder people's ability to benefit from existing initiatives, resulting in suboptimal outcomes. To address these outcomes and drive real social impact, building inclusive interventions and technologies with the following indicators in mind is essential:

Recommendations:

1. Promote resource localization to reduce dependency and enhance sustainability
2. Encourage alignment with government policies and programs to facilitate streamlined implementation
3. Facilitate stakeholder dialogues to enhance coordination and collaboration among all relevant parties
4. Encourage Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) to leverage combined resources and knowledge
5. Incorporate capacity building initiatives to develop skilled manpower in line with India's scaled-up ambitions
6. Maintain proactive government support and incentives to sustain momentum
7. Conduct technology impact assessments to evaluate and mitigate potential risks effectively
8. Foster self-reliance across the entire value chain

46. EVReporter, "Analysis of India's CY 2024 EV Sales ‣ EVreporter," EVreporter, January 28, 2025, https://evreporter.com/analysis-of-indias-cy-2024-ev-sales/.
47. Ministry of Heavy Industries, "Ministry of Heavy Industries," Pib.gov.in, July 16, 2024, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressNoteDetails aspx?NoteId=151933&ModuleId=3.
48. IEA, "India - Countries & Regions," IEA, 2022, https://www.iea.org/countries/india/emissions.

5.4 Waste as a resource

India's accelerated urbanization and technological advancements have dramatically reshaped the country's waste landscape. The exponential growth in the use of electronic devices, coupled with industrial and consumer trends, has amplified the challenge of managing electronic waste (e-waste), an area of immediate concern. India currently generates over 1.751 million tons of e-waste annually, with hazardous substances such as lead, mercury, and cadmium threatening air, soil and water quality.[49] Regulatory measures, notably the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework, have been implemented to instill accountability among producers. However, practical enforcement remains challenging due to financing limitations and the complexities of waste aggregation and recovery. As Ms. Wilma Rodrigues, Founder & Chief Transformation Officer (CTO), Saahas Zero Waste pointedly remarked during the Waste as a Resource: Transforming Environmental Crises into Economic Opportunities Fireside chat:

"Almost every brand claims full compliance, yet the ground reality shows little visible impact" [50]

In fact, a recent news article revealed a major scandal in India's e-waste recycling sector. The investigation found that 75% of 41 government-approved e-waste recycling plants across four states either do not exist or operate as "ghost" facilities with little to no actual recycling activity. Despite this, these plants claim to recycle lakhs of metric tons of e-waste on paper and earn EPR credits worth over INR1,800 crore.[51] Such cases spotlight the gap between policy intent and tangible outcomes, revealing a need for robust strategies and participatory mechanisms that go beyond formal compliance.

Having said that, there are organizations dedicatedly and diligently working towards creating a waste-free future. The Summit drew attention to one such innovative organizational response by Lohum, honored under the category of 'Climate Innovator.' Lohum aims to address the consequences of widespread technology use through large-scale lithium-ion battery recycling, repurposing and low-carbon refining. With their current goal to save 4,000,000 MT of CO2e by 2026, Lohum's example highlights a broader movement in climate technology, where the focus is not only on remediation but also on market creation and job opportunities, contributing directly to India's emissions reduction targets and energy transition.[52]

49. Kiran Pandey, "India's E-Waste Surges by 73% in 5 Years," Down To Earth, December 17, 2024, https://www.downtoearth.org.in/waste/indias-e-waste-surges-by-73-in-5-years#google_vignette.
50. Ms. Wilma Rodrigues, Founder & Chief Transformation Officer (CTO), Saahas Zero Waste, Fireside chat, Waste as a Resource: Transforming Environmental Crises into Economic Opportunities, Day 1, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025
51. Shivnarayan Rajpurohit, "Exclusive: India's E-Waste Mirage, 'Crores in Corporate Fraud' amid Govt Lapses, Public Suffering," Newslaundry, July 30, 2025, https://www.newslaundry.com/2025/07/30/exclusive-indias-e-waste-mirage-crores-in-corporate-fraud-amid-govt-lapses-public-suffering.
52. Lohum, https://lohum.com/

Waste as a Resource: Transforming Environmental Crises into Economic Opportunities Fireside chat, Day 1, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

Beyond e-waste, the circular economy in India incorporates several major waste streams, such as bio-waste, construction debris and complex multi-layered packaging. India annually produces striking volumes of bio-waste including approximately 230 million metric tons of surplus agricultural biomass and 62 million metric tons of municipal solid waste.[53,54]
As highlighted during the discussion, the National Biofuel Mission (2018) has played a pivotal role by fostering low-carbon ethanol and compressed biogas production from agricultural residues, opening possibilities for replacing fossil fuels and enhancing India's chemical and material industries.[55] Dr. SSV Ramakumar outlined the magnitude of this opportunity, stating the potential of bio-resources:

"There is so much a bio result which need to be exploited... for the betterment of humankind" [56]

Urban India's fascination with organic farming was also discussed and, at times, gently critiqued. Speakers pointed out how the growing demand for "clean" food is rarely accompanied by a real understanding of what it takes to grow that food or who is excluded from that value chain. True mindfulness, they argued, means caring not just about ingredients but about the lives behind them.

Several Summit participants stressed the importance of locally rooted food systems: sourcing from within communities, investing in value chains that keep income local, and recognizing women as the primary food producers and nutrition gatekeepers in households. These are not radical ideas; they are practices that have sustained communities for generations and simply need support to scale.

In addition to this, efforts to formalize and empower the waste workforce were also emphasized. The current informal system is often exploitative, lacking adequate health and social protection for millions of workers. Organizations such as Saahas Zero Waste have demonstrated a scalable model by providing structured, fair-wage employment to over 400 people (with more than 300 from marginalized backgrounds) and achieving up to 90% recovery rates among their clients.[57] Yet challenges persist, especially in valorizing low-value plastics, improving working conditions, and updating outdated solid waste rules. As stated by Ms. Rodrigues:

"Unless we put in a formatted framework for aggregation... schemes would be only half implemented" [58]

Regulatory advances on plastics, especially multi-layered packaging, have pushed producers to include recycled content and set clear targets for reuse, spurring innovation in plastic recovery and alternate applications. As highlighted by Shri Nitin Gadkari, Minister of Road Transport & Highways, Government of India, in his address, the Road Transport Ministry's policies require recycled plastic in road construction, indicating India's pragmatic, system-wide approach. Collectively, such efforts illustrate that the circular economy is becoming embedded not only in policy but also in practice, albeit at varying scales and speeds.

The discussion revealed that the challenge of waste in India is deeply intertwined with questions of climate justice, equitable economic growth and inclusive governance. A core philosophical perspective provided by Ms. Namita Devidayal resonated with all:

"In nature there is no such thing as waste." [59]

Waste, in this narrative, was not just "garbage"; it was untapped value—a resource to be harvested, not hidden. Especially in rural and semi-urban areas, where land and natural resources are limited, waste management strategies can double up as livelihood generators and environmental safeguards. Embodying this principle, Phool - India's first biomaterial startup established in Kanpur was also honored in the category of Climate Innovator at the Summit. Phool

53. Harshita Negi et al., "Indian Scenario of Biomass Availability and Its Bioenergy-Conversion Potential," Energies 16, no. 15 (August 4, 2023): 5805–5, https://doi.org/10.3390/en16155805.
54. Pavithra K M, "Municipal Solid Waste Generated in India to Increase 7 Times next 30 Years," FACTLY, April 5, 2021, https://factly.in/review-municipal-solid-waste-generated-in-india-set-to-increase-7-times-in-the-next-30-years/.
55. National Biofuel Mission, 2018, https://www.pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1532265
56. Mr. SSV Ramakumar,, CTO & EVP, AM Green, Fireside chat, Waste as a Resource: Transforming Environmental Crises into Economic Opportunities, Day 1, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025
57. Saahas Zero Waste, https://saahaszerowaste.com/
58. Ms. Wilma Rodrigues, Founder & Chief Transformation Officer (CTO), Saahas Zero Waste, Fireside chat, Waste as a Resource: Transforming Environmental Crises into Economic Opportunities, Day 1, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025
59. Ms. Namita Devidayal, TOI, Fireside chat, Waste as a Resource: Transforming Environmental Crises into Economic Opportunities, Day 1, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

transforms temple floral waste into certified natural incense and Fleather, an animal-free vegan leather. It aims to eliminate floral waste pollution in Indian rivers, replace carbon-heavy materials with biodegradable alternatives, and generate dignified livelihood opportunities for marginalized women. Through its Flowercycling technology, Phool has upcycled over 42,000 tons of floral waste, prevented 110 metric tons of chemical pesticide runoff, and created 493 full-time jobs for at-risk women. It operates at the intersection of climate resilience and social equity, targeting overlooked segments such as temple waste management and Dalit women's employment.[60]

India's progress toward a waste-as-resource paradigm and a functioning circular economy is unmistakable but uneven. Innovations in technology, business models, and policy frameworks are driving impressive pilots and sectoral advances. Yet the pathway to scale and to real impact for both people and planet depends on stronger implementation, systematic inclusion of marginalized workers, effective financing, and the alignment of environmental and economic incentives. As articulated by Summit panelists: solid policies attract participation, small successes build conviction and unlock further financing. The ongoing journey requires sustained commitment to policy action, stakeholder collaboration, and a willingness to embrace both the challenges and opportunities of a truly circular future. This paradigm shift extends beyond industrial processes and governmental frameworks, profoundly influencing individual choices and market dynamics.

5.5 Climate innovation

As established, India's climate movement is at a pivotal juncture where innovation, sustainability, and inclusive growth must converge to address the profound environmental and social challenges facing the nation. Central to the dialogue at The Times of India Social Impact Summit was an understanding that sustainability requires a balanced approach - effectively managing risks, capitalizing on emerging opportunities, and meeting increasing stakeholder expectations in both corporate and community spheres.

As the sixth most climate-vulnerable country globally, India contends with the tangible human costs of climate change.[61] Approximately 5.4 million people have been displaced domestically due to climate-induced events such as floods, droughts and erratic weather patterns, undermining social and economic stability.[62] This underscores the urgency of climate action that is both impactful and equitable.

India's climate commitments reflect both ambition and pragmatism. The Panchamrit Strategy, announced at COP26 in 2021, lays down a comprehensive five-point roadmap guiding India's climate actions through 2030 and beyond. The key pillars include:

i. Achieving 500 GW of non-fossil energy capacity by 2030.

ii. Meeting 50% of energy requirements from renewable sources by 2030.

iii. Reducing total projected carbon emissions by 1 billion tons by 2030.

iv. Cutting the carbon intensity of the economy by 45% by 2030 (relative to 2005 levels).

v. Attaining net-zero carbon emissions by 2070.[63]

India's Climate Moment: Powering Growth Through Innovation Panel discussion, Day 1 – The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

These goals mark a transformative shift towards decarbonization aligned with sustainable development and social equity, critical for India's ESG and CSR agendas. The Climate Innovation Panel discussion shed light on several strategic pillars propelling India's climate movement:

1. Forests as climate assets:

Forests serve as essential carbon sinks, but their potential is frequently underutilized. Evidence shows that community-managed forests often outperform those managed solely by government agencies in achieving sustainable outcomes. Empowering local communities aligns environmental stewardship with social responsibility, a core CSR principle.

60. PHOOL, https://phool.co/

61. Rohini Krishnamurthy, "India among Top 10 Countries Most Affected by Extreme Weather Events, Economic Losses Amount to $180 Billion over Last Three Decades: Report," Down To Earth, February 13, 2025, https://www.downtoearth.org.in/climate-change/india-among-top-10-countries-most-affected-by-extreme-weather-events-economic-losses-amount-to-180-billion-over-last-three-decades-report.

62. Tanvi Deshpande, "Climate Change Effects a Major Concern for Indians, 14% Migrated due to Weather-Related Disasters," Scroll.in, June 22, 2024, https://scroll.in/article/1069564/climate-change-effects-a-major-concern-for-indians-14-migrated-due-to-weather-related-disasters.

63. Panchamrit Strategy, Government of India, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1795071

2. Integrating climate and development priorities:

Climate action competes with immediate social challenges such as poverty and education for public attention and resources. Therefore, policy frameworks must harmonize climate goals with broader socioeconomic development agendas to secure widespread support and equitable progress.

3. Urban forestry and livability:

Transforming vacant urban lands into green, forested spaces can generate considerable co-benefits - carbon sequestration, heat island mitigation and enhanced quality of life. Urban forestry exemplifies how innovation in city planning can address environmental challenges while advancing social welfare.

4. Building conviction through early action:

Sustained climate impact demands early, decisive interventions combined with effective communication to build conviction among corporates, policymakers and civil society. Carbon financing aimed at family forests and biomass sectors can unlock new investment flows, driving sustainable land management practices.

5. Innovative carbon financing models:

Emerging carbon finance mechanisms have strong potential to attract foreign investments, creating market incentives for low-carbon transitions. Such financial innovation not only supports emission reduction but also stimulates job creation and economic diversification, resonating with ESG goals of responsible growth.

5.6 Mindful consumption

With waste management strategies and practices leading India's journey to a circular economy, there is also a cultural shift toward mindful consumption. Recent market analyses corroborate this trend: approximately 60% of Indian consumers consciously prioritize products based on their sustainability credentials, with many showing a notable willingness to pay a premium (around 13% more) for environmentally friendly goods.[64] Consumer awareness and the demand for sustainability are compelling supply chains to prioritize recyclability and environmental stewardship in product design and manufacturing. This trend is set against the urgent backdrop of India's global climate status, ranked among the most climate-vulnerable nations, raising the stakes for balancing development with ecological responsibility.[65]

The Summit's fireside chat on *'Mindful consumption: Shifting Indian consumer preference towards sustainable products'* illuminated how consumer awareness, evolving behaviors, and brand responses intersect within the broader ESG and CSR ecosystem. During the discussion, Ms. Shilpashree Muniswamappa, Colgate Palmolive India Limited, framed mindful consumption as a dynamic relationship between informed, value-conscious consumers and brands that adapted to meet their evolving expectations. The dialogue underscored a paradigm shift: from traditional brand loyalty to a marketplace marked by heightened scrutiny, rapid switching, and an active quest for sustainability credentials.

As remarked by Mr. Nitesh Mehrotra, Partner, EY, during the discussion, sustainability should be seen *"as a choice, not a race or rank,"* noting that Indian consumers are inherently value-driven, where "less is more" aligns closely with sustainable consumption principles. [66]

Mindful consumption: Shifting Indian consumer preference towards sustainable products, Fireside chat, Day 1, The Times of India Social Impact Summit

64. The Times of India, "60% in India Willing to Pay a Premium for Sustainability Products, Reveals Survey - The Times of India," The Times of India, June 6, 2022, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/60-in-india-willing-to-pay-a-premium-for-sustainability-products-reveals-survey/articleshow/92030126.cms.
65. World Population Review, "Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Country 2020," worldpopulationreview.com, 2025, https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/greenhouse-gas-emissions-by-country.
66. Mr.Nitesh Mehrotra, Partner, EY, Fireside chat, Mindful Consumption: Shifting Indian Consumer preference towards Sustainable products, Day 1, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 202

The generational divide in consumer behavior emerged as a defining theme. Unlike previous generations that exhibited strong brand loyalty, millennials and Gen Z consumers are discerning and experimental, delving deeply into product labels and actively opting for brands whose values and promises to resonate with them. Ms. Shilpashree Muniswamappa highlighted this shift:

"Today's generation reads labels carefully and seeks to make different purchasing decisions" [67]

While Indian labeling laws are among the most rigorous globally, enforced at both national and state levels, there are still gaps that need to be addressed. Larger brands face intense scrutiny and irregular inspections, reinforcing the imperative for transparency. With increased accessibility and availability of information through digital technologies, consumer mentality is evolving significantly. This new mentality presents both a challenge and an opportunity for legacy brands, especially those in the FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) sector, which must innovate and communicate effectively to win and retain their growing sustainability-conscious customers.

However, consumer behavior also reveals complexity; environmental considerations are often balanced against utility, price and brand preferences. For example, while some clothing brands use sustainable packaging and encourage consumers to pay more, uptake varies widely. Sustainability communication must resonate both personally and financially to drive impact.

An important caution from the conversation was the growing consumer vigilance against greenwashing, a practice where brands exaggerate or misrepresent sustainability claims. Several clothing brands have faced scrutiny for poor labor and disposal practices despite strong storytelling efforts. Reinforcing the need for transparent, science-driven communication combined with authentic action, the discussion highlighted that consumers detect greenwashing easily and ESG teams, rather than leadership, may increasingly face legal consequences.

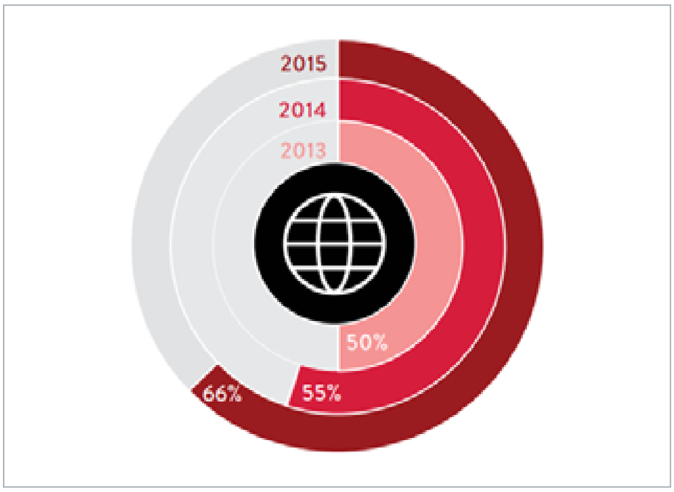


Figure 10, Source: Nielsen, "The Sustainability Imperative New Insights on Consumer Expectations," 2015, https://www.supplychain247.com/images/pdfs/nielsen_global-sustainability-report-oct-2015.pdf.

Survey data, as illustrated above, indicates a notable willingness among many to pay a premium for environmentally friendly goods along with increased consumer awareness.[68] This shift is not merely aspirational but increasingly reflected in market behaviors, although price sensitivity remains a key consideration, particularly during economic downturns. An action-implementation gap also exists. Several studies, such as this report, highlight a disparity where many consumers profess willingness to pay more for sustainable goods, yet actual purchasing behavior lags. While consumers want more eco-friendly products and are willing to pay more for them, the percentage of consumers actually purchasing them remains minimal.[69]

Consumers often link sustainability mainly to organic ingredients or how products are disposed of, while ESG practitioners consider a wider range of factors such as labor conditions, transparency in sourcing and the overall emissions impact. Additionally, during times of economic hardship, consumers focus on getting good value for their money, which leads brands to find ways to reduce costs without raising prices for customers, barring premium markets. Hence, pricing sustainability effectively requires navigating this complex consumer mindset, economic factors, and clear communication of the multifaceted nature of ESG to build consistent demand for sustainable products.

67. Ms. Shilpashree Muniswamappa,, Director - ESG & Communications, Colgate-Palmolive India Limited, Fireside chat, Mindful Consumption: Shifting Indian Consumer preference towards Sustainable products, Day 1, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025
68. The Times of India, "60% in India Willing to Pay a Premium for Sustainability Products, Reveals Survey - The Times of India," The Times of India, June 6, 2022, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/60-in-india-willing-to-pay-a-premium-for-sustainability-products-reveals-survey/articleshow/92030126.cms.
69. Nielsen, "The Sustainability Imperative New Insights on Consumer Expectations," 2015, https://www.supplychain247.com/images/pdfs/nielsen_global-sustainability-report-oct-2015.pdf.

Product pricing is significantly influenced by product design; as mindful design becomes more prevalent, pricing uncertainty tends to increase. As highlighted in the discussion, toothpaste tubes, a ubiquitous FMCG product with a considerable environmental footprint, are a significant contributor to plastic waste in India. Globally, approximately 5 billion toothpaste tubes are consumed and disposed of annually, generating substantial volumes of plastic waste.[70] Colgate has pioneered eco-design globally, transitioning most tubes in India to recyclable formats with open-source packaging designs to encourage industry-wide adoption. They have increased the visibility of green labels on tubes to aid consumer identification, contrasting with many competitors whose packaging remains unrecyclable. Yet, challenges persist in circularity, particularly due to the low economic value of toothpaste tubes for waste collectors and the use of aluminum layers hindering recycling technologies. As Ms. Shilpashree pointed out:

"The circularity challenge remains real as tubes have little value to recyclable collectors despite being recyclable technically" [71]

The Fireside Chat provided a nuanced exploration of the dynamic interplay between consumer expectations, brand responsibility, policy frameworks and market realities. Consumer behavior in India is evolving rapidly toward sustainability, propelled by increasing awareness and social consciousness, yet balanced by pragmatic concerns around value and trust. Brands are called upon to engage authentically, innovate boldly, and communicate transparently in order to cultivate genuine partnerships that foster mindful consumption.

This ongoing transition calls for coordinated efforts across the ESG and CSR landscape — from advancing product innovation and circular packaging design to delivering clear, science-based communication and complying with rigorous regulatory standards. While the path toward sustainable consumerism in India holds great promise, it necessitates sustained commitment from all stakeholders to transform growing awareness into consistent and meaningful impact.

5.7 Rethinking corporate governance for impact

To build Aatmanirbharta – one of the Summit's recurring themes, accountability through transparent reporting in the evolving landscape of ESG and CSR mandates is necessary. Guidance and frameworks such as BRSR, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), the 2% CSR rule and more have become cornerstones of today's corporate sustainability landscape. While regulatory compliance and performance metrics remain important, there is a growing imperative to adopt a purpose-driven approach – one that prioritizes long-term sustainable impact over short-term gains or mere box-ticking. As illustrated below, this requires shifting sustainability from compliance- and reporting-led to a value- and purpose-led agenda. All dialogue at the Summit pushed for a purpose-led agenda, aiming for a fundamental transformation in corporate governance and a renewed commitment from leadership at all levels.

70. Lilian Lancen, "Exploring the Recyclability of Plastic Toothpaste Tubes: What You Need to Know - Climate of Our Future," Climate Of Our Future, February 10, 2023, https://www.climateofourfuture.org/exploring-the-recyclability-of-plastic-toothpaste-tubes-what-you-need-to-know/.
71. Ms. Shilpashree Muniswamappa,, Director - ESG & Communications, Colgate-Palmolive India Limited, Fireside chat, Mindful Consumption: Shifting Indian Consumer preference towards Sustainable products, Day 1, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

Figure 11, Source: EY Research

In today's volatile world, newer risks continue to emerge and are omnipresent. By evaluating ESG factors through comprehensive risk assessments, organizations can proactively manage issues that might impact their performance and reputation. Conducting ESG risk assessments has become essential in today's corporate world, enabling companies to effectively mitigate potential risks while seizing emerging opportunities. From financial uncertainty to technological disruptions to environmental and climatic threats, ESG risks remain highly unpredictable. As Mr. Milind Sarwate highlighted during the Fireside chat on Rethinking Corporate Governance for Impact, the evolving nature of risks makes robust risk governance -prevention and mitigation, no longer optional. Effective boards, whether in corporate or non-profits, must proactively guide organizations in building resilience and focusing on sustainability. With increasing tools and agencies providing risk assessments to organizations, producing verifiable and auditable data has become a necessity. Digitization of data collection and collation makes this process easier. However, with the rapid increase in ESG disclosures and sustainability reporting, there is a growing risk of superficial reporting, referred to as "number washing," akin to greenwashing. Verifying the authenticity of reported data and impact requires vigilance and discernment. For leadership, this means championing transparency and ensuring that statistics reflect genuine progress, not just positive optics. For auditors while serving on audit or oversight committees, the role is also increasingly complex, carrying both honor and grave responsibility. As highlighted in the Fireside chat, auditors and leaders must possess the insight to ask critical questions, detect inconsistencies, and uphold the true spirit of governance beyond compliance.

Rethinking Corporate Governance for Impact, Fireside chat, Day – 1, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

Recognizing that no individual can possess comprehensive knowledge of every detail, Mr. Sarwate and Mr. Narayanan Shankar emphasized that Independent Directors (ID) must distinguish between what they know and what they ought to know (actual knowledge versus constructive knowledge), embrace digital tools to enhance their learning, and understand evolving processes to fulfill their fiduciary duties effectively. It is essential to break down and understand the "I" in "ID" and utilize Mr. Sarwate's two-D approach (diligence and documentation) to effectively balance roles, responsibilities and time.

Over the years, the concept of governance has evolved significantly. This evolution has been heavily driven by the increasing role of emerging technologies in the corporate governance landscape. From AI-driven risk models to the widespread adoption of e-voting, which democratizes corporate decision-making, there is now greater accessibility, reach and participation for all stakeholders. The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies into everyday business operations has made processes easier and more efficient. Rather than being an isolated addition, these technologies are now seamlessly integrated into standard business practices to enhance efficiency. Such advancements have also fundamentally transformed how organizations operate and engage with stakeholders. By enhancing transparency and efficiency, they set the stage for a deeper commitment to sustainable and responsible business practices.

5.8 Youth driving social impact

The Summit emphasized the power of dialogue and fostered a participatory approach in co-creating interventions. Importantly, it amplified the voices of youth—today's leaders and changemakers who brought invaluable insights and inspiration. The Voices of Change: Youth Driving Social Impact panel discussion underscored the vital need for collaboration across communities and generations, reinforcing core themes of empowerment, equality, education, climate innovation and the responsible use of technology, including artificial intelligence.

The Voices of Change: Youth Driving Social Impact Panel discussion, Day – 1, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

This panel of young changemakers and leaders set an example for youth across the country and the world that no action is ever too small to make a difference, and that age is no barrier to driving real social impact. India is home to the largest youth population in the world, with 371 million young people aged 15–29.[72] Among these, the panel represented a diverse group of the country's youth from innovators, developers, authors and founders.

The Summit also served as a platform for sharing stories of real social impact, from first-generation learners securing competitive jobs in urban centers to college students volunteering their time to tutor underprivileged children in nearby villages. The stories were inspiring because they felt real. Not perfect, not polished, but determined. What sets the youth apart was not just ambition, but the resilience to navigate systems not built for them and the courage to return, rebuild and uplift their communities in the process.

This reinforced the importance of intention in youth-oriented CSR and ESG action. It is not enough to offer skill development workshops or job portals. What young people need is holistic support: access to mentors, platforms for leadership and employers who value potential over polish. They need people who believe in their dreams, even when those dreams sound too big for their circumstances.

72. UNICEF, "Economic Opportunities for Young People," Unicef.org, 2024, https://www.unicef.org/india/economic-opportunities-young-people.

5.9 Rethinking CSR beyond the 2% mandate

More than a decade since the introduction of the 2% CSR mandate in India, there is a growing realization that compliance does not equal commitment. This distinction between spending on CSR and investing through CSR emerged as a recurring theme throughout the Summit. Conversations went far beyond fund allocation, urging a fundamental rethinking of what effective, impact-driven corporate responsibility truly looks like.

This mandate aided a collective investment of INR 34,908.75 crore by over 27,000 companies in FY 2023-24.[73] Yet, in a country as vast and complex as India, critics argued that a fixed percentage of profits alone cannot address the scale of developmental challenges. The mandate, while necessary to initiate momentum, often leads to a tick-box approach, where the pressure to comply can overshadow opportunities for deeper strategic impact and long-term value creation.

In his keynote session titled Purpose Over Prescription, Mr. Amitabh Kant, Former CEO of NITI Aayog, echoed these concerns. He urged India Inc. to shift from a "prescription-led" approach to a "purpose-led" strategy—one that moves beyond statutory obligation and is rooted in clear outcomes, sustained collaboration and systemic change. He stressed that CSR should not be confined to fragmented, short-term projects but must operate as a transformational force, with a strong focus on social equity, inclusion and sustainability.

Mr. Amitabh Kant, Keynote Address, Day - 2, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

Mr. Kant also emphasized the importance of geographic and sectoral balance, noting that India's eastern states remain underserved in terms of CSR investments. He advocated aligning CSR with blended finance models, linking corporate contributions with government and multilateral funding to amplify reach and impact. Such models, he noted, would offer companies a scalable path to participate in nation-building while ensuring accountability and innovation.

The Summit reinforced that purposeful CSR is not about doing more; it is about doing better. Companies must reimagine their role not just as funders, but as enablers of grassroots empowerment, institutional capacity-building and collaborative governance. In doing so, CSR can move from being a peripheral obligation to becoming a core pillar of responsible business—one that genuinely helps shape a more equitable and resilient India.

5.10 Bridging the learning gap

While innovation and technology—particularly advancements in AI—are critical drivers of sustainable development and corporate impact, their benefits can only be realized when they are inclusive and accessible. This requires intentional investment not only in technology itself but also in addressing foundational social challenges that technology cannot solve alone, such as unequal access to quality education and learning resources.

At the Summit, the conversation around education was not about syllabi or school infrastructure. It was a reckoning—a confrontation with how deeply unequal learning access remains in India, and how COVID-19 has only widened these divides.

Education: Microlearning, Macro Impact- Bridging the Learning Gap, Day-2, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

73. National CSR Portal, Ministry of Corporate Affairs - https://www.csr.gov.in/content/csr/global/master/home/home.html

The panel opened with a story from Mr. Manmohan Singh, who recalled studying under a tree while his wife attended an elite school in Delhi. It was a powerful reminder that the "learning gap" is not a policy abstraction, but a lived reality etched into the lives of millions of children whose futures are shaped by where they are born, the gender they are assigned, and the support they receive.

Several speakers highlighted that this gap is not only academic but also emotional, physical and systemic. Girls often drop out not because they lack ambition, but because they lack safe transport, supportive families, or accessible toilets. Children fall behind not because they are lazy, but because they are hungry, ill, or responsible for caregiving.

The discussion brought holistic perspectives to the forefront. Education is not confined to schools; it encompasses health, nutrition, parental involvement, teacher capacity and community accountability. Ms. Rucha Pande of *Mantra4Change* shared how even a morning assembly, if designed with intent and collaboration, can become a powerful lever for change.

Mr. Venkat Krishnan emphasized the need for adaptive learning models that support not only students but teachers as well. *"How can we expect teachers to individualize learning when we have not individualized their support?"* he asked.[74] There was also strong advocacy for peer learning models, community tutoring and volunteer networks, such as college students helping primary school kids.

Panelists also advocated for peer-learning systems, community tutoring and volunteer networks, including college students mentoring primary school children. The panel agreed that schools should be seen not as endpoints but as ecosystems where health, gender equity and citizenship converge. A dropout, they noted, is not just a child leaving school, but a child lost to the system. And if we are serious about bridging this gap, schools must be nurtured not for a year or two, but for decades.

The session reframed the learning gap as a lived, intersectional injustice compounded by geography, gender, health and socio-economic barriers. While AI and digital innovation hold promise, their impact will remain limited unless CSR efforts address the structural barriers keeping millions of children out of meaningful learning cycles.

Going forward, industry-led CSR must prioritize **long-term, place-based investments** that integrate education with health, nutrition, family engagement and teacher support. Community-rooted models—such as peer learning, adaptive classrooms and volunteer tutoring networks—must be scaled, especially in underserved geographies. Companies that commit to multi-year, community-anchored partnerships will be best positioned to drive sustainable change. The future of CSR in education lies not in "fixing schools," but in nurturing **learning ecosystems**, driven by empathy, local ownership and continuity.

5.11 Feeding the Future: Sufficient, Safe, Nutritious Food for All

Few themes at the Summit resonated as deeply as nutrition. The numbers are staggering—around **200 million Indians are malnourished**—but behind those numbers.[75] lies a quiet injustice. Food insecurity in India is not just about scarcity; it is about access, agency and power. Who gets to eat what, when and how? And who gets to decide?

Fireside chat 1: Zero Hunger and Nutrition, Day-2, Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

Mr. Upmanyu Patil of Swayam Shikshan Prayog, speaking at the Feeding the Future – Sufficient, Safe, Nutritious Food for All panel, noted that despite food surpluses in some tribal belts, families continue to suffer from micronutrient deficiencies. The reasons are systemic: food is grown for markets, not for self-consumption; cash crops are incentivized over food crops; and women, who manage household nutrition, often have little control over land or income.

Yet, the Summit also presented powerful alternatives. Models where women farmers lease land with NGO support, cultivate diverse produce, and sell through community collection centers. Kitchen gardens that provide essential vitamins year-round. Street children who come for a meal—and stay to learn.

What made these examples compelling was their dignity-first approach. Nutrition was not delivered; it was co-created. Beneficiaries were not just fed; they were empowered.

74. Mr. Venkat Krishnan N, Principal Trustee, India Welfare Trust, Panel discussion, Education: Microlearning, Macro Impact- Bridging the Learning Gap, Day 2, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

75. EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) "CHILD MALNUTRITION IN INDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF STUNTING CHILDREN'S" - Peer Reviewed Journal Volume: 10, Issue: 9, September 2024 - 202409-01-018398

Mr. Abdul Salam of Malabar Gold shared how their "Hunger-Free World" program began with 1,000 meals and has now scaled to 60,000 across 20 states. Beyond the numbers, its strength lay in integrating learning modules, mobilizing volunteers and responding to local needs.

Speakers noted that CSR investment in nutrition remains limited, despite its clear link to health, education and productivity. Most funding still flows to education and infrastructure, leaving nutrition underprioritized. Yet, the potential for impact is immense. With the right policies, local sourcing, women-led value chains and community ownership, India could move from malnourishment to nourishment—within a generation.

As Mr. Sudarshan Suchi said:

"In 2047, we should only be seeing examples of malnutrition in museums and nowhere else. We must do whatever it takes between now and then" [76]

The session made it clear that solving nutrition challenges requires more than food distribution. It demands shifting control, building agency and restoring dignity. Food insecurity must be reframed not as a crisis of scarcity, but of access and systemic inequity.

The Summit showcased replicable models, women-led value chains, kitchen gardens and integrated nutrition-education programs, that place communities at the center. These approaches are rights-based, not charity-driven and co-created with those they serve.

The key outcome was unambiguous: nutrition remains significantly underfunded in CSR portfolios, even though it underpins every other development goal. Going forward, companies must embed nutrition as a cross-cutting priority, rather than a siloed intervention. Supporting women's leadership, local sourcing, and community-driven nutrition ecosystems is the way forward. A dignity-first, decentralized approach —rooted in care, control and choice— can help India move from food provision to food justice.

5.12 Building inclusive communities

Inclusion is a word that often appears in mission statements and CSR strategies. But as the Summit made abundantly clear, the inclusion that remains at the surface-level is not only ineffective; it can also be damaging. The panel *"Empowerment: Beyond Tokenism"* brought this tension to the forefront, challenging not only what is done in the name of inclusion but also *who* gets to define it.

Empowerment: Beyond Tokenism- Building Inclusive Communities, Day-2, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

Drawing on his experience at Coal India, Mr. Vinay Ranjan noted that inclusion often fails when it does not extend beyond infrastructure. Hiring people with disabilities (PwDs), for example, is not enough unless companies also create accessible systems that support and empower them. Without this, what is labeled as inclusion may in fact be another form of isolation.

Ms. Smarinita Shetty of *India Development Review (IDR)* expanded the lens, reminding the audience that inclusion is not limited to caste or tribe. It also encompasses gender, sexuality, disability, mental health and a range of other lived realities. Intersectionality, she emphasized, cannot remain jargon; it must be embraced as the only meaningful way forward.

Mr. Shashaank Awasthi of V-shesh challenged the audience to question why marginalized voices are often absent from the very spaces that claim to represent them. Why do CSR decisions so often exclude those they are meant to serve?

This vulnerability and directness sparked reflection across the panel. Mr. Aman Bhaiya of SBI Foundation shared a flood relief example where the most valuable information did not come from reports, but from sitting with women on their doorsteps—listening, adjusting and responding. The takeaway was simple yet profound: inclusion cannot happen without presence and presence demands effort.

76. Mr. Sudarshan Suchi, Chief Development Officer, Reliance Foundation, Fireside chat, Feeding the Future- Sufficient, Safe, Nutritious Food for All, Day 2, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

Ms. Garima Dutt added that true inclusion must be measured not by headcounts but by power dynamics: Who gets to speak? Who leads? Who benefits? And who is left waiting outside the room?

The panel acknowledged that inclusion is not easy. In fact, it is often deeply uncomfortable because it requires ceding control, listening more than speaking and challenging entrenched systems of privilege. But that discomfort, they argued, is exactly where meaningful change begins.

The session concluded that inclusion must go beyond surface representation and infrastructure. Genuine inclusion requires systemic transformation, ensuring that marginalized communities are not only present but empowered to lead, influence and shape outcomes. Power dynamics, not numbers, must guide how inclusion is measured. Going forward, CSR efforts must prioritize intersectional approaches, co-creation with affected communities, and a redefinition of inclusion as shared agency and structural access. Embedding lived experiences within program design, organizations can advance enduring models that consciously engage with discomfort to foster dignity and equity.

5.13 #CancelPatriarchy – Advancing financial independence for women

Inclusivity and gender equality are essential to building sustainable and successful businesses in today's world. While India has made progress on many economic indicators, deep structural challenges remain in translating those gains into equitable social, political and economic outcomes. With gender being central to both ESG and CSR, it is crucial to understand the factors sustaining gender segregation across industries—structural barriers as well as societal norms, stereotypes and entrenched patterns of inequality.

Fireside chat 2: #CancelPatriarchy: Advancing Financial Independence for Women and CSR, Day-2, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

Framed under the bold Times of India hashtag #CancelPatriarchy, this fireside chat pulled no punches. It wasn't simply about uplifting women; it was about dismantling the quiet, everyday structures that hold them back. #CancelPatriarchy is deliberately provocative—urging people to question the normalization of patriarchy and embrace introspection.

Moderator Ms. Arti Dua of EY India opened with a piercing question: While women have made significant strides, have the systems around them evolved accordingly? A brief silence followed—not from a lack of answers, but from a shared recognition of the complexity of the issue.

Mr. Jayant Rastogi of Magic Bus Foundation responded with clarity: patriarchy takes root early, when girls are conditioned to serve before they are encouraged to speak. He highlighted systemic issues: around 26% of women aged 19–24 were married before 18 and only 10–15% of leadership positions are held by women, despite near-parity in higher education.[77,78]

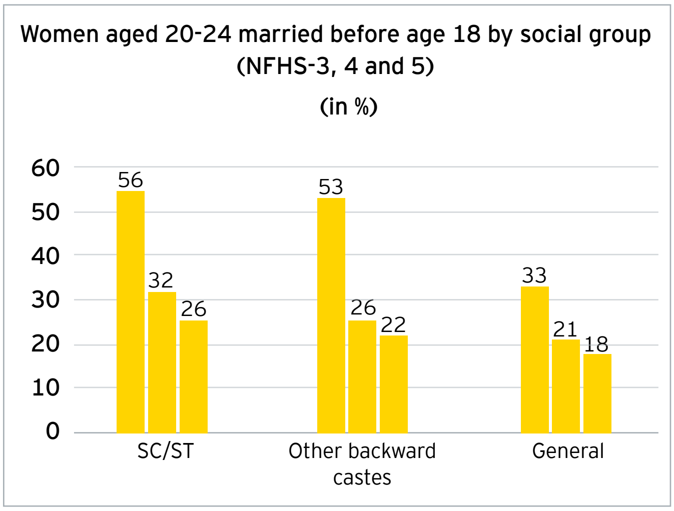


Figure 12, Source: UNFPA - "INDIA PROFILE – ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE," https://india.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/ending_child_marriage_india_profile.pdf

She highlighted that unpaid domestic work remains an invisible tax on women and girls. "Men's participation in domestic chores is among the lowest in the world. And so is the women's workforce participation. That is not a coincidence."

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2025, India ranks 131st out of 148 countries, with an overall gender parity score of 64.4%. Despite a marginal improvement (+0.3 points), India's relative position slipped three places compared to 2024, reflecting slower progress than other economies.[79] A woman who earns but does not decide how to use her money is still not free. Financial

77. UNFPA - "INDIA PROFILE – ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE", ending_child_marriage_india_profile.pdf
78. The Quantum Hub – "WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP IN CORPORATE INDIA"Women-in-Leadership_Linkedin_Final_p1-32_31May.pdf
79. World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2025- https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2025.pdf

independence is a cornerstone of women's empowerment and social transformation, enabling better health, education, and economic outcomes for families and communities.

Highlighting gender norms and responsibilities, Ms. Chowdhury also touched on the invisible tax placed on girls through household work. *"Men's participation in domestic chores is among the lowest in the world. And so is the women's workforce participation. That is not a coincidence."*[80]

Looking ahead, the panel addressed how AI and automation are reshaping the job market. The challenge is ensuring that women, especially those from underserved communities, are not left behind once again. Mr. Rastogi shared that Magic Bus trained over 35,000 youth in AI last year—60% of whom secured meaningful jobs. This year, the target is 200,000. Yet, as he noted, digital tools alone are not enough; systems must recognize girls as drivers, not dependents.

In conclusion, #CancelPatriarchy was framed as a battle against structural, societal and cultural barriers - the beliefs that a girl's dreams are negotiable, that her career is optional, or that her voice requires permission. When those beliefs are canceled, what remains is possibility.

The session emphasized that achieving gender equity requires dismantling both structural and cultural barriers that limit women's economic agency. Financial independence must be redefined as not only earning but also owning decision-making power. CSR initiatives must actively challenge gender norms, expand skilling opportunities in emerging sectors such as AI, and support women's leadership at every level. Going forward, organizations must invest in transformative, not tokenistic programs: those that redistribute resources, opportunities and responsibilities to build a truly gender-equal future.

5.14 Rethinking CSR in public health

Public health has long been a priority in India's development narrative, but at The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025, there was a powerful reframing: What if prevention, not treatment, became the core focus?

This shift was championed by some of the country's leading health professionals, from oncologists and nephrologists to nonprofit leaders. The "Rethinking CSR in Public Health – Preventive, Inclusive & Scalable" panel discussion was clear-eyed: treating diseases saves lives but preventing them saves futures—and costs.

Dr. Sultan A Pradhan of CanCare Trust made a compelling argument: unless we invest in prevention, awareness and lifestyle changes, morbidities will continue to rise, along with healthcare costs. Communities—not hospitals—are the true frontlines. He called for health initiatives that speak the language of everyday life and meet people where they are, before they fall sick.

Dr. P. Raghu Ram of the Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation emphasized the importance of early detection, particularly for women. He noted that when CSR funding is directed towards screenings, awareness camps and local clinics, the returns are exponential. A single screening camp, he said, could prevent months of suffering, loss of income and even death.

Ms. Jaya Jairam of the MOHAN Foundation, herself a kidney transplant recipient, shared a deeply personal story: her mother's donation of a kidney saved her life, transforming her into a lifelong advocate. She reminded the audience that nearly 500,000 patients are waiting for organ transplants in India, yet awareness remains dangerously low.

"Preventive healthcare is not just compassion—it's smart economics," she said [81]

Rethinking CSR in Public Health - Preventive, Inclusive & Scalable, Day-2, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

Ms. Shalini Jatia of the ImPaCCT Foundation shared how Tata Memorial Hospital treats over 6,000 children annually, free of cost, thanks to generous donors and long-term CSR partnerships. She advocated for trust-based giving that supports institutions engaged in consistent, impactful work.

80. Ms. Nayana Chowdhury, CEO, Breakthrough Trust, Fireside chat, #Cancelpatriarchy: Advancing Financial Independence for Women, Day 2, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025
81. Ms. Jaya Jairam, Project Director, MOHAN Foundation, Panel discussion, Rethinking CSR in Public Health - Preventive, Inclusive & Scalable, Day 2, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025

The discussion also applauded state-level innovations. Rameshwar Naik from the CM Medical Cell outlined how Maharashtra has created an online portal consolidating welfare schemes, alongside a single-window assistance system and a toll-free number. These administrative reforms, while technical in appearance, have real consequences: they reduce confusion, empower citizens and strengthen the safety net.

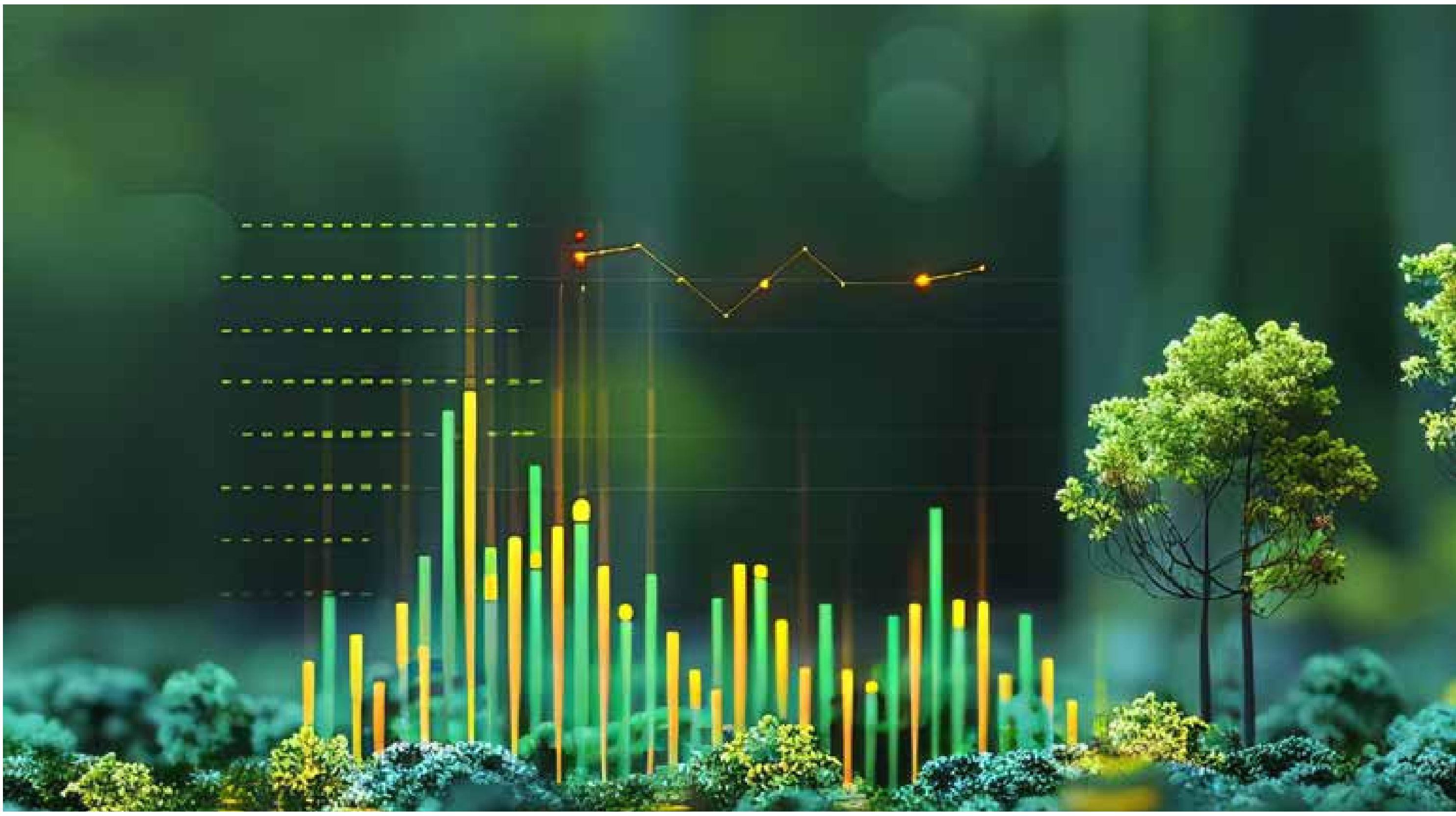
Perhaps what stood out most in this session was the humility. The panelists advocated for quality healthcare services provision rather than a sole increase in their quantity. This begins when CSR sees public health not just as a sector to fund, but as a mindset to adopt: one that values early action, empathy and equity.

This session advocated a fundamental shift in how CSR engages with public health, moving from treatment-oriented funding to prevention-focused, community-led approaches. Early detection, awareness and decentralized access emerged as high-impact strategies. The outcomes underscored the importance of long-term, trust-based CSR partnerships with healthcare institutions and state systems. Looking ahead, CSR in health must adopt a preventive mindset—investing in systems that empower communities, reduce future costs and promote behavioral change. Digital tools, grassroots awareness and scalable models will be key to maximizing reach and resilience.

5.15 Education as an Enabler of Growth

This high-impact session explored how CSR can go beyond ensuring access to education and actively shape aspiration, employability and systemic change. Moderated by Mr. Sourabh Anand, EY India, the discussion opened with Mr. Abdul Salam K.P, Vice Chairman, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, who spoke about their Hunger Free World program. Starting with one meal a day, it now serves 60,000 daily meals across 20 Indian states and 10,000 in Zambia. To tackle the link between hunger and school dropout, the initiative introduced informal classrooms at food distribution sites, helping children reach foundational levels before transitioning to formal schooling. Their holistic model also covers healthcare, water access and elderly care.

Education – an Enabler of Growth and Change, Day-2, The Times of India Social Impact Summit 2025



Mr. D. Vijay Kumar, AGM (HR) – MC at HAL, shared how the company's education efforts began in 1979 with a school for tribal communities in Odisha. Today, HAL supports 14 villages and funds vocational training in areas such as plastic engineering. He emphasized that long-term, intent-driven CSR in education can uplift entire communities by aligning learning with employment opportunities.

Mr. Kumar Anurag Pratap, India Head for CSR at Capgemini, pointed to the widening skills gap, with nearly 50% of graduates struggling to find jobs amid rising automation and AI. He stressed the urgent need for education systems to focus on emerging, employment-oriented skills rather than traditional, linear pathways.

Mr. Ketan Deshpande, Founder and Chairman of FUEL, highlighted that companies increasingly value first-generation learners for their ambition and resilience. He cited a shift in student preferences, noting that young people now evaluate employers based on their CSR values. FUEL supports underprivileged youth with free career counseling and certifications in high-demand technologies such as Java and AWS.

The discussion concluded with a strong call for skills-first hiring models and deeper collaboration between businesses, non-profits and academia. The panel agreed that CSR must be future-focused, enabling young people not just to access education, but to pursue aspirations and thrive in tomorrow's workforce.

The session highlighted that education, when tied to aspiration and employability, becomes a powerful tool for systemic change. It revealed a growing disconnect between formal education and workforce readiness, particularly in the context of AI and automation. CSR must now play a strategic role in bridging this gap by supporting skilling, career guidance and employer-aligned training for first-generation learners. Going forward, the emphasis must be on skills-first hiring, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and curriculum innovation that enables marginalized youth not only to participate, but to thrive in tomorrow's economy.

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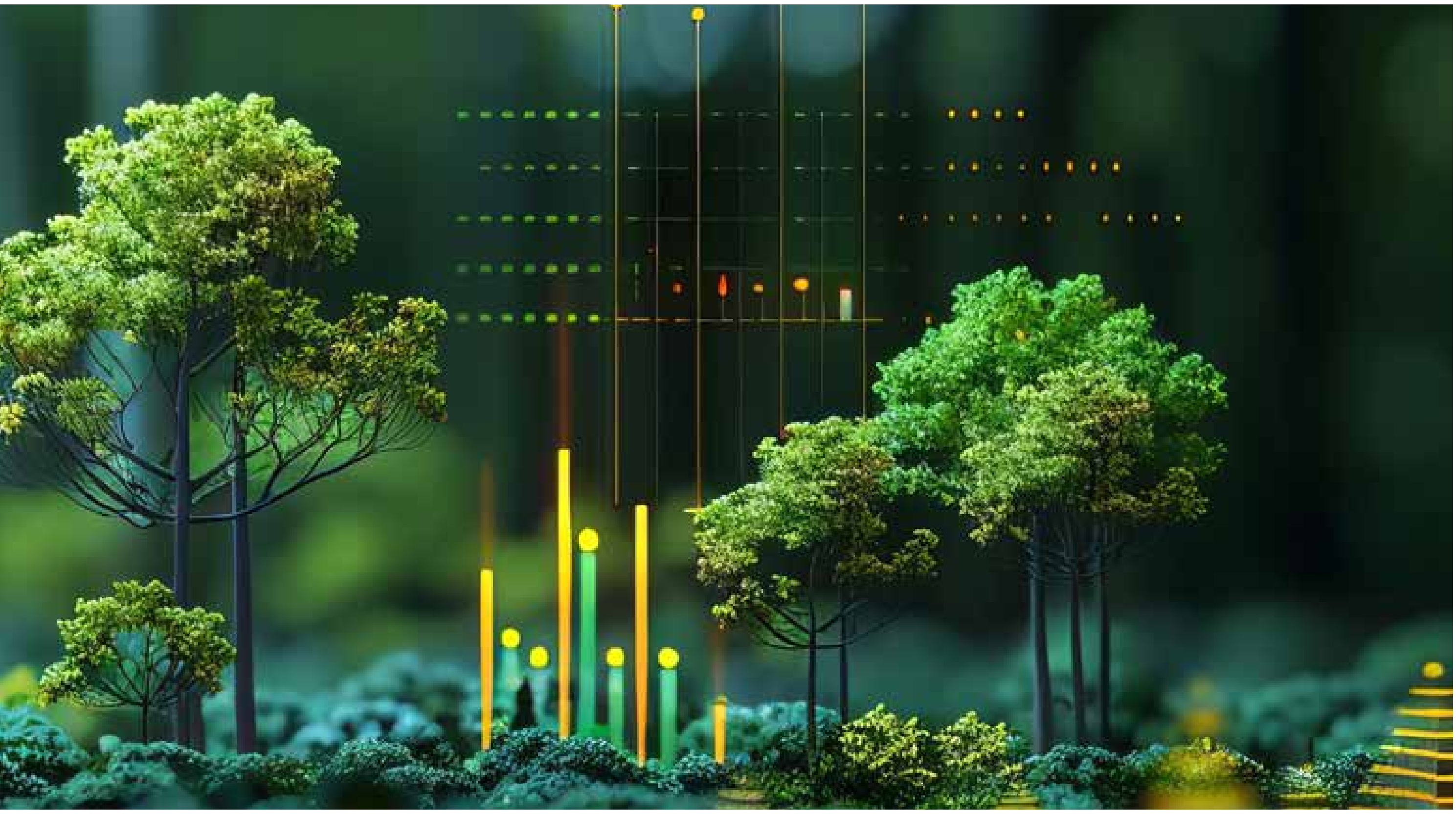

6 The way forward

6.1 The long-term vision for ESG/CSR impact

India currently stands at a transformative crossroads in advancing social impact through CSR and ESG frameworks. The landscape is evolving beyond mere compliance, moving toward strategic integration that drives sustained, inclusive growth and environmental stewardship. While significant progress has been made by governments, corporates, NGOs and civil society, the path ahead requires harmonized, collaborative action grounded in purpose and innovation.

From the Summit's wide-ranging dialogues, the following eight key insights emerged as guiding pillars for India's social impact journey:

Embracing a holistic and collaborative approach

True impact arises when businesses, civil society, government and communities engage in meaningful partnerships, leveraging diverse strengths and fostering inclusive practices. The Summit's emphasis on participatory dialogue, particularly with young changemakers highlighted the imperative to bridge generational and sectoral divides and co-create strategies that address complex challenges such as climate resilience, equality and digital inclusion.

Innovation as a catalyst for sustainable transformation

The dialogue made it increasingly clear that climate innovation in India cannot be imported. It must emerge from the soil, the seasons, and the lived wisdom of those who work closest to the land. Moreover, it must be seen not as an add-on, but as a foundation for every development initiative. Across sectors, from climate action and waste management to mindful consumption and technology adoption, innovation fuels progress. India's climate movement, powered by governmental initiatives, demonstrates how cutting-edge technologies coupled with policy ambition can scale sustainable practices. Similarly, sustainable product design, circular economy models and AI-driven ESG approaches represent new frontiers for impactful business and social interventions.

Centering equity, empowerment and inclusion

Sustainability is not only about environmental outcomes but also about social inclusivity and justice. The Summit underscored the need to embed equity in climate policies, corporate governance and community engagement. Empowering marginalized workers in waste management, promoting gender equity in leadership and amplifying the voices of vulnerable populations remain essential for a socially just transition aligned with CSR and ESG values.

Building trust through transparency and authenticity

Transparent reporting, rigorous impact measurement and genuine communication are foundational to overcoming greenwashing risks and building long-term stakeholder trust. ESG disclosures, supported by evolving regulatory frameworks, must go hand in hand with tangible social and environmental outcomes.

Addressing resource constraints and systemic challenges

Accelerating social impact requires confronting challenges such as resource scarcity, fragmented governance frameworks and gaps in awareness and access at the grassroots level. Holistic approaches that integrate local realities, government alignment, capacity building and innovative financing will be critical to sustaining momentum and scaling impact.

From compliance to purpose

Businesses today are no longer expected to merely contribute to social good; they are being called upon to do so with intent, integrity and innovation. The transition from compliance-led giving to purpose-driven engagement has become not just desirable but essential. To address the SDGs and tackle complex societal challenges, ESG and CSR must evolve into a strategic instrument, one that aligns business growth with societal well-being and helps build resilient, inclusive communities.

Impact beyond compliance

To accelerate this transformation, it will be vital to strengthen grassroots capacities, particularly through initiatives that support community-led governance, preventive healthcare and equitable skilling. These efforts are fundamental to bridging structural gaps and enabling sustainable development on a larger scale

Leverage blended finance models for deeper impact

Blended finance, which combines development capital with private investment, can unlock greater funding for sustainable ESG and CSR initiatives. India's blended finance market grew eightfold between 2010 and 2022 yet remains largely driven by international sources. Increasing domestic participation from corporates and foundations will be key to scaling local impact.[82]

82. ET Government,2024 - From corporate sharks to social champs: Evolution of CSR in blended finance for sustainable development, ETGovernment

In order to achieve meaningful and measurable social impact through these guiding principles, and to support the effective integration of ESG and CSR strategies, a phased approach is recommended as a practical roadmap for practitioners.

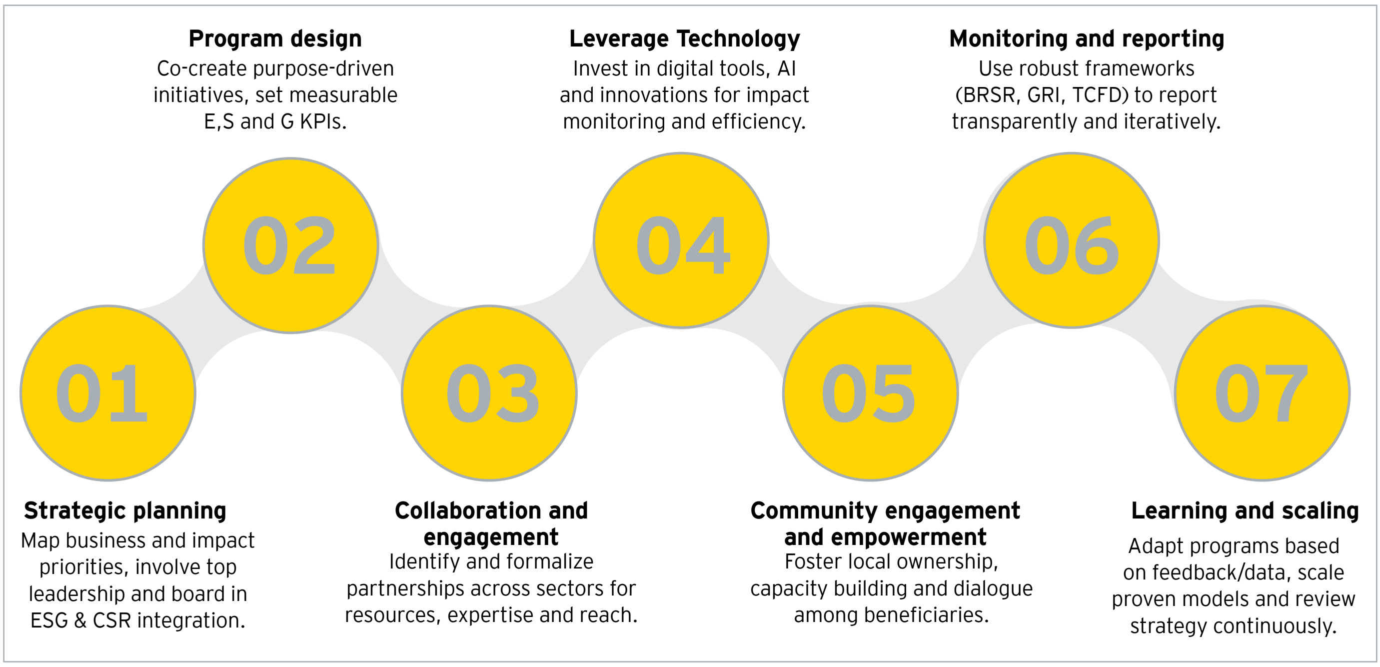

Figure 13, Source: EY Research

6.2 The Social Impact Council

To guide and provide strategic leadership in shaping future agendas, the Summit inaugurated and celebrated The Times of India ESG and CSR Council. This council is responsible for guiding the development of a CSR and Social Impact Charter shaped by the summit's key deliberations. It provides strategic direction on future themes, partnerships and priorities for the summit to cover themes of ongoing relevance and sectoral impact. Acting as a multi-stakeholder advisory body that promotes collaboration across sectors, the council consists of representatives from corporations, NGOs and academia to foster dialogue and drive scalable, inclusive change.

This group of experienced professionals plays a pivotal role in advancing sustainability and social impact by offering seasoned and tailored guidance on the creation of a Sustainability and Social Impact Charter.

The members of the council are:

1. Mr. Sumit Tayal - CEO, Give
2. Ms. Asha Rai – Senior Editor, The Times of India
3. Dr. Geetanjoy Sahu – Professor, TISS; Dean and Chairperson, School of Habitat Studies; Chairperson, Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability Studies; Centre for Excellence in CSR, TISS
4. Mr. Ravi Ruparel – Partner, Sustainability Consulting and Sustainability Digital Transformation, EY
5. Mr. Bipin Odhekar – Head – Sustainability, EHS and Operations Excellence, Marico

Looking ahead, the responsibility rests collectively with all stakeholders to nurture this evolving ecosystem. Corporates must embed ESG and CSR beyond checkboxes, foster systemic innovation and invest in communities. Governments need to sustain enabling policies and encourage collaboration. Civil society and technology innovators must continue to pioneer inclusive pathways aligned with India's dynamic socio-environmental context. Importantly, the leadership of youth and communities will remain indispensable in driving bold, integrated change.

In summary, India's social impact journey is infused with optimism and opportunity. The convergence of CSR and ESG with technology, governance and active stakeholder engagement creates fertile ground for transformative impact. Through sustained commitment to transparency, collaboration and equity, India can realize a future that balances prosperity with planetary well-being, making social impact not just an aspiration but a measurable reality.

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