

Impact of Structured CSR Policies on Women's Socio-Economic Empowerment in India: An Empirical Study of Major Indian Corporations

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ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) under Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, has prompted major Indian corporations like Tata, Infosys, ITC, Reliance, and Hindustan Unilever to implement structured models targeting women's socio-economic empowerment. This mixed-method study utilizes descriptive statistics, correlation, regression analysis, and hypothesis testing to evaluate the efficacy of these initiatives. The resulting data indicates that while financial investments and vocational training hours correlate positively with improved employability and empowerment outcomes, the relationships fail to achieve statistical significance. Ultimately, this lack of mathematical significance stems from the study's small sample size, which limits the statistical power needed to definitively prove the impact of these corporate programs. Conversely, the study establishes a significant association between structured CSR policies and enhanced women's empowerment scores. This indicates that strategic program design holds greater influence over positive outcomes than direct monetary expenditure. Successful initiatives prioritize targeted skill-building, financial literacy, leadership training, and community-level interventions to effectively elevate women's socio-economic status. By providing these empirical insights, the research demonstrates how corporate governance can align local initiatives with national development priorities and United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality). Ultimately, the findings confirm that well-planned corporate frameworks act as vital drivers of female empowerment and employability across India.

Keywords: CSR, Women Empowerment, Skill Development, Corporate Governance, Employability, India, Structured CSR Policies.

INTRODUCTION

The formalization of Section 135 in the Companies Act, 2013, transformed corporate social responsibility in India from voluntary philanthropy into a mandatory, structured mechanism for sustainable development. Under Schedule VII, women's empowerment initiatives have emerged as a critical priority for qualifying firms. This strategic shift addresses long-term national development by aiming to increase female labor force participation, improve social equity, and build resilient communities. Consequently, target-driven corporate investments are increasingly recognized as essential drivers for unlocking women's socio-economic potential and accelerating broader economic growth.

Despite these corporate investments, women in India still face deep structural barriers, including limited educational access, inadequate skills training, wage inequality, and low entrepreneurship representation. Strategic CSR interventions address these systemic deficits through multifaceted programs. These include technical and digital training, entrepreneurial incubation, self-help group (SHG) capacity-building, and market integration support. By strengthening socio-economic capabilities, these initiatives directly enhance women's independent decision-making and livelihood sustainability. Ultimately, the cumulative impact extends beyond individual beneficiaries, fostering community-level economic resilience, social stability, and long-term local development.

Major Indian companies like Tata, Infosys, ITC, Reliance, and Hindustan Unilever have institutionalised structured CSR programs that prioritize women-centered development. These initiatives are deliberately designed to build economic

independence, improve employment opportunities, and strengthen autonomous decision-making among women. Insights drawn from CSR documentation and sustainability reports indicate that systematically planned initiatives can substantially enhance women's confidence, elevate income-generating capacities, improve financial decision-making competencies, and encourage more active participation in the formal and informal workforce. Despite growing efforts, however, the measurable impact of CSR on women's empowerment is not uniform across companies. Variations arise due to differences in CSR spending patterns, program structure, implementation models, geographic focus, monitoring and evaluation frameworks. These discussions are extended across several conceptual dimensions to deepen academic insight.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Sl. No.	Focus Area of Research	Observation / Outcome	Reference
1	Evolution of CSR	CSR has evolved from a philanthropic activity into a structured, strategic, and measurable framework embedded in corporate governance and stakeholder management.	Carroll, A. B. (1999)
2	Theoretical Foundations of CSR	Carroll's CSR Pyramid conceptualizes CSR as comprising four layers—economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities.	Carroll, A. B. (1999)
3	CSR in Developing Country Context	Later research extends CSR to developing-country settings, emphasizing accountability, sustainability, and inclusive growth.	Blowfield, M., & Frynas, J. G. (2005)
4	Comprehensive Review of CSR Literature	A comprehensive meta-analysis showing CSR's organizational antecedents and benefits for firms,	Aguinis, H., & Glavas, A. (2012)

		employees, and society.	
5	Institutionalization of CSR in India	In India, CSR has become more formalized and institutionalized following the Companies Act, 2013, which made CSR expenditure mandatory	Mishra, S., & Suar, D. (2010)
6	Section 135 of Companies Act 2013	CSR legislation mandates 2% spending on social responsibility by qualifying companies.	Rupani, J. (2022)
8	CSR Applicability Criteria	Applies to companies with Rs 500 crore net worth, Rs 1000 crore turnover, or Rs 5 crore profit.	Shinde, G. (2017)
9	CSR Committee Formation	Board must constitute CSR committee to frame and monitor policy.	Lathabhavan, R. (2022)
10	CSR Spending Trends	74% of mandated spending achieved; MNCs outperform PSUs.	Kapoor & Dhamija (2017)
11	CSR Expenditure Patterns	Shift from donations to community projects after Companies Act 2013.	Kavitha, P. (2018)
12	CSR Expenditure Limits	Companies align spending to 2% limit post-Act.	Deodhar, S.Y. (2015)
13	Potential to Support Skill Initiatives	CSR skill-building programs motivate participation and learning.	Sharma & Mishra (2019)
14	CSR Initiatives and Skilling	Vocational training under CSR improves employability.	Anupama Sadasivan (2018)

15	CSR and Higher Education	CSR bridges educational skill gaps through experimentation.	Shinde, G. (2017)
16	CSR Enablers in Indian Firms	Formal strategy, culture, and leadership drive CSR implementation.	Kumar <i>et al.</i> , (2019)
17	Determinants of CSR Practices	Organization size, profitability, and tangible assets are main drivers.	Pradhan & Nibedita (2021)
18	CSR Drivers in India	Legal, reputational, stakeholder and moral pressures influence CSR.	Singh, K.P. (2018)
19	Triple Bottom Line	Economic, environmental, and social pillars sustain CSR.	Ksiezak & Fischbach (2017)
20	Political Influence on CSR	Government policy and regulation shape multinational CSR actions.	Shirodkar <i>et al.</i> (2018)
21	CSR and Firm Performance	CSR compliance correlates with improved performance.	Garg & Gupta (2020)
22	Impact of Mandatory CSR Spending	Mandated CSR caused a structural change in profitability relationships.	Mukherjee <i>et al.</i> (2018)
23	CSR Mandate Implementation	CSR spending increased post-implementation of Section 135.	Dharmapala & Khanna (2018)

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Sl. No.	Focus Area of Research	Observation / Outcome	Reference
1	Conceptual Frameworks	Empowerment is viewed through Sen's capability approach and Kabeer's model, highlighting economic, social, psychological, and political dimensions.	Sen (1999) Kabeer (1999)
2	Multidimensional Aspects	Emphasizes economic, social, psychological, and political dimensions of empowerment.	Sen (1999) Kabeer (1999)
3	Women Empowerment Schemes in India	Women's empowerment is essential for economic and social development; participation across sectors strengthens economies and communities.	Rashmi Rani Agnihotri & Malipatil (2017)
4	Empowerment & Economic Development	Empowerment and development are interlinked but not strong enough to be self-sustaining; continuous policy commitment is required.	Esther Duflo (2012)
5	Gender Equality & Key Determinants	Gender equality improves health, education, and livelihood outcomes; inequalities persist due to social and structural barriers.	S Suganthi (2025)
6	Issues & Challenges in Women Empowerment	Despite progress, women remain disempowered due to unequal norms; education, employment, and	Rajeshwari M. Shettar (2015)

		social change are key enablers.	
7	Empowerment & Economic Development (Pakistan)	Women face barriers in rights, education, and employment; empowerment positively contributes to economic development.	Mariam Sohail (2014)
8	Changing Status of Women in India	Women's status has improved historically but discrimination persists; increased awareness is needed for true empowerment.	Dhruba Hazarika (2011)
9	Empowerment & Human Development	Gains in education, health, and political participation exist, but issues like violence remain; gender measures must become more inclusive.	Manisha Desai (2010)
10	Women Empowerment Policies in India	Various policies help women understand their rights, freedom, and legal protections. Awareness enhances empowerment.	KS Rani(2021)
11	SHGs and Rural Women Empowerment	Rural women face poverty and social constraints; SHGs play a major role in improving income and confidence.	Dr. T. S. Prema & Selvi (2015)
12	Microfinance Women Empowerment	Microfinance institutions positively influence empowerment; bibliometric trends show increasing focus on gender and microfinance.	Kaushal <i>et al.</i> , (2021)
13		Women entrepreneurship	

	Women Entrepreneurship & Sustainable Development	contributes to sustainability; emerging trends include innovation and digital empowerment.	Raman <i>et al.</i> , (2022)
14	SHGs and Women Empowerment	SHG participation enhances economic independence and decision-making, though regional inequalities remain.	Mahato <i>et al.</i> , (2023)
15	Remunerative skills and Decision-making	Financial independence enhances women's autonomy and strengthens decision-making power.	Gupta S. <i>et al.</i> , (2024)

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CSR AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Sl. No.	Focus Area of Research	Observation / Outcome	Reference
1	CSR and Women Empowerment	CSR initiatives help enhance women's self-confidence, leadership, resource control, and break restrictive social norms. Companies and banks play a major role in empowering women through sustained programs.	Babu, A., & Sahay, M. (2018)
2	Role of CSR in Enhancing Women's Skills	CSR programs that focus on leadership development, technological training, and entrepreneurship improve women's access to higher-value job roles, increase confidence, and support career	Kalva & Kumar (2013)

		advancement in SMEs.	
3	Workplace Safety and Harassment-Free Environment	CSR strategies in SMEs that prioritize safe, inclusive, and harassment-free workplaces enable women to work without fear, resulting in higher retention and productivity.	Kalva & Kumar (2013) Kalva, U. K., & Kumar, A. A. (2013).
4	Equal Pay and Economic Rights	CSR-driven commitment to “equal pay for equal work” empowers women economically and ensures adequate compensation, reducing gender-based wage disparities.	Bhuyan (2006)
5	CSR Support for Women Entrepreneurship	SMEs can promote women-led businesses by offering mentorship, financial support, and networking platforms that help aspiring women entrepreneurs overcome entry barriers.	Kalva & Kumar (2013)
6	Community Development and Women Empowerment	CSR activities such as establishing training schools, healthcare facilities, and financial literacy programs help empower women at the community level by improving quality of life and access to services.	Kalva & Kumar (2013)

7	Impact of CSR on Women's Health and Well-being	CSR initiatives addressing maternal health, healthcare access, and well-being significantly enhance women's productivity, engagement, and overall life satisfaction.	Yadav Renu <i>et al.</i> , (2023)
8	Women-Centric CSR Focus Areas	Indian companies focus their women-centric CSR programs on education, vocational training, health, nutrition, menstrual hygiene, and microfinance to improve access to learning, strengthen health, and build essential skills for women and girls.	Rakshitha, M., & Dr Rampilla, M. (2018).
9	Livelihood & Skill Development Interventions	CSR initiatives offer vocational training and SHG-based income activities, along with microfinance and entrepreneurship support, but many remain limited to skill-building without addressing deeper barriers like mobility and asset ownership.	Prasad, S., & Choubey, M. (2025).
10	Structural Barriers & Limitations of CSR Programs	CSR initiatives often overlook barriers like unpaid care work, lack of childcare, safety concerns, limited mobility, and weak financial inclusion, which restrict women's participation and	Izquierdo, M., & Fabra, M. E. (2024).

		reduce long-term impact.	
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PROBLEM STATEMENT

While women-focused CSR initiatives have expanded across India, their measurable outcomes vary widely due to fluctuating funding, diverse execution strategies, inconsistent evaluation metrics, and varying program intensity. Furthermore, limited empirical research systematically examines how these corporate interventions affect key empowerment indicators like income growth, labour force readiness, social mobility, and self-reliance. This prominent research gap highlights the critical need for a focused empirical investigation, which this study directly addresses.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine corporate frameworks designed specifically to support women's development.
2. To measure the direct statistical relationship between funding levels and socio-economic empowerment outcomes.
3. To analyse how corporate educational and vocational training programs influence female labour force readiness.
4. To compare the long-term effectiveness of strategically structured policies against ad hoc, short-term programs.
5. To propose corporate strategies to optimize future social investments and maximize community-level returns.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on women-centred corporate social responsibility programs run by Tata, Infosys, ITC, Reliance, and Hindustan Unilever over a three-to-five-year period. The participant profile includes female beneficiaries in vocational, digital, financial, entrepreneurial, and self-help group projects. The research spans multiple Indian states, relying on a combination of secondary data and limited field observations. Theoretically, the study isolates indicators of socio-economic growth, specifically measuring shifts in employment readiness, income generation, mobility, autonomy, and individual self-reliance.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant because it evaluates how targeted corporate social responsibility programs by major Indian firms advance women's socio-economic status. By examining initiatives in digital training, vocational skills, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship, the study provides a practical look at how corporate funding improves female livelihood opportunities. The resulting insights offer corporate leaders' data to refine their social investment strategies, assist policymakers in designing more effective gender-focused development regulations, and establish a foundational framework for future empirical research on women's empowerment.

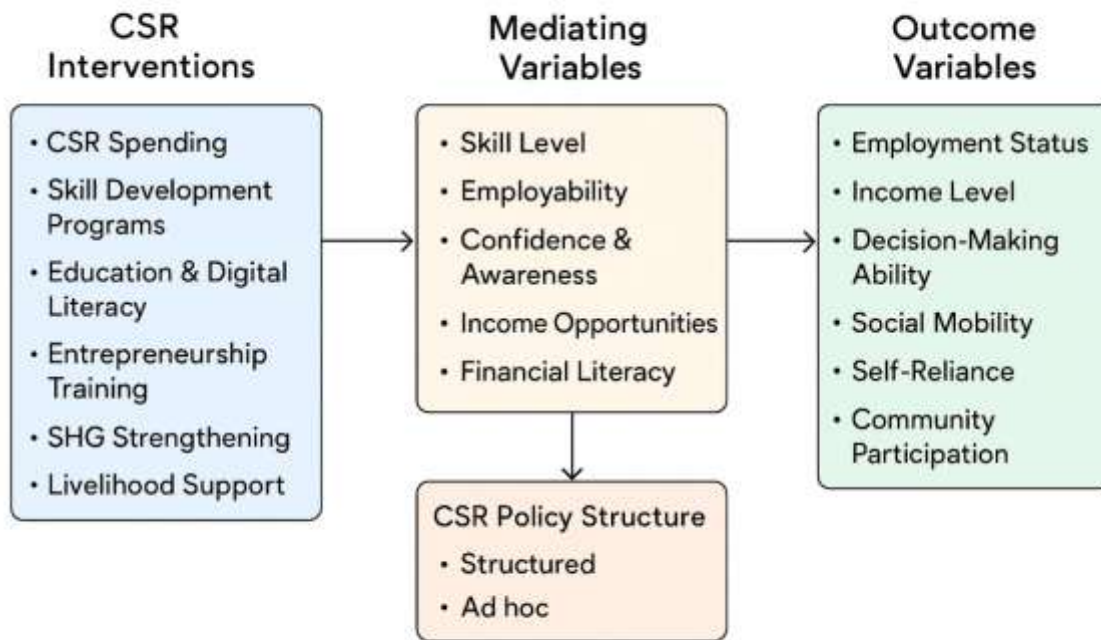
Hypothesis

H1: CSR programs positively influence women's socio-economic empowerment.

H2: CSR spending on education and skills training directly increases women's employability.

H3: Structured, long-term CSR policies create a greater empowerment impact than short-term, ad hoc programs.

Conceptual Framework

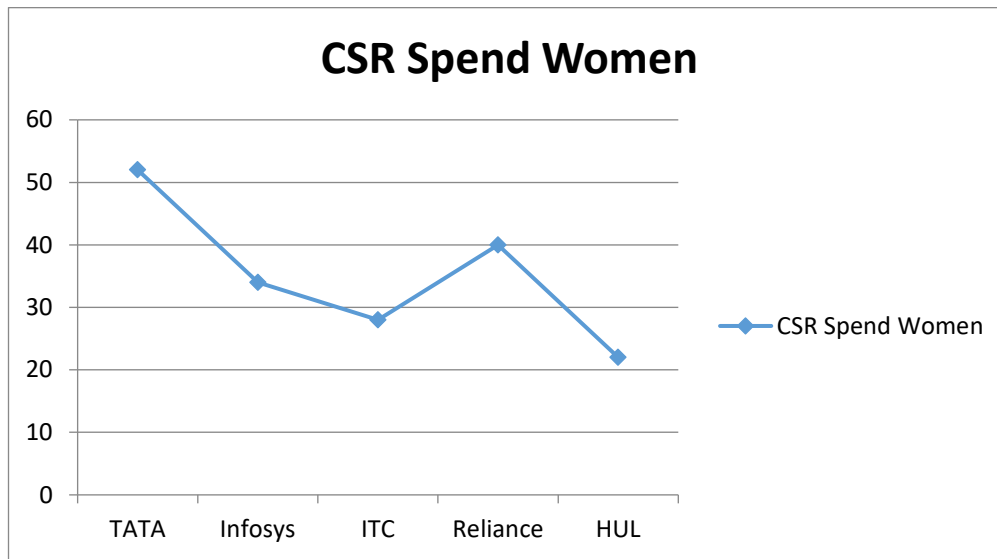
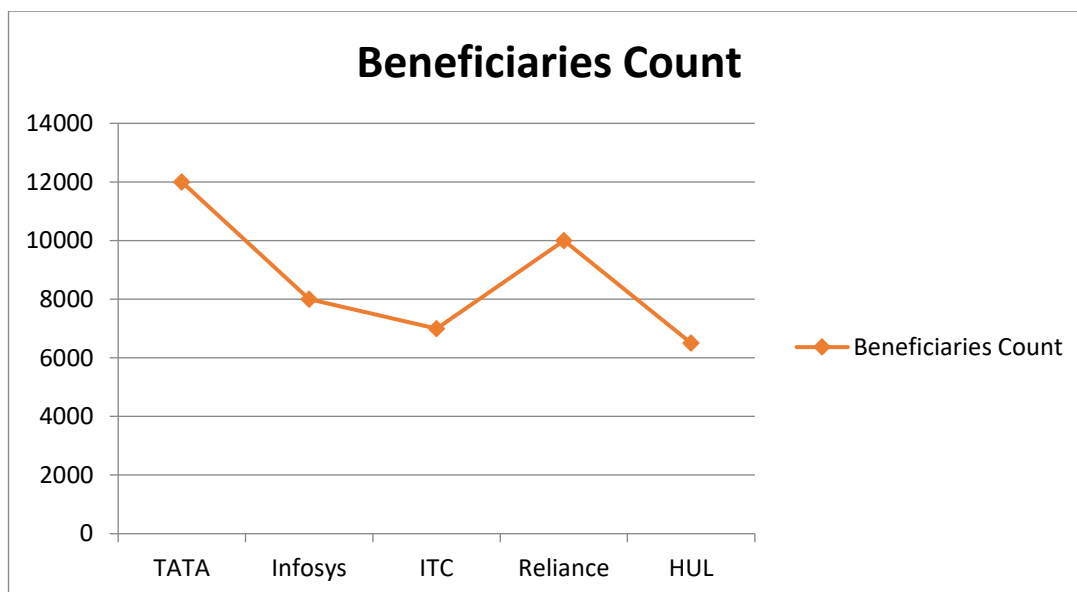


Research Methodology

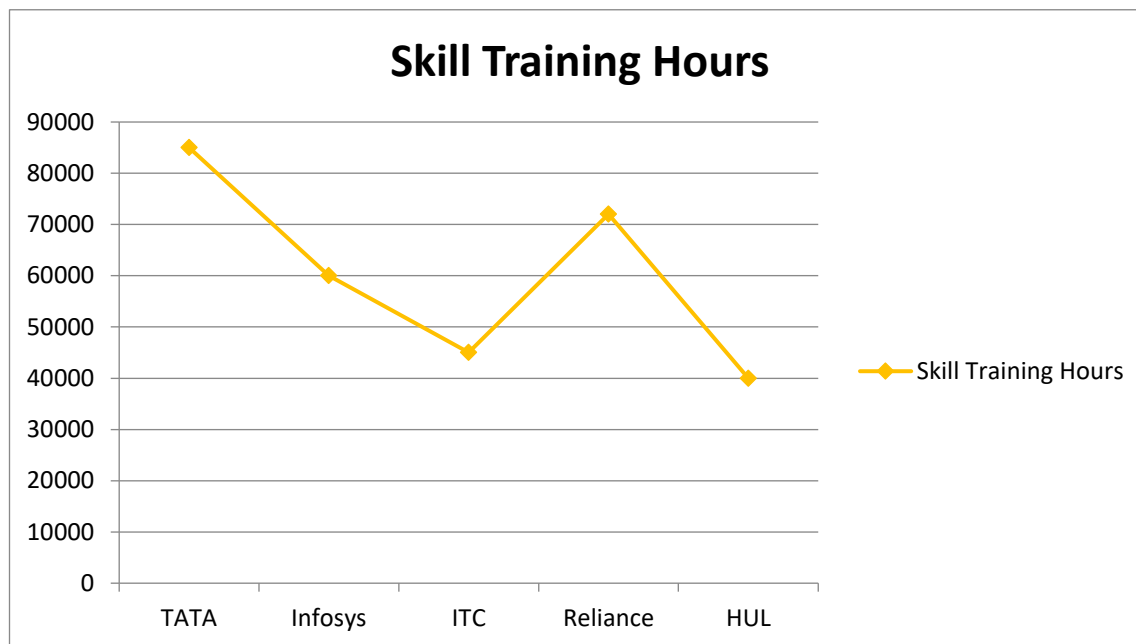
This study uses a mixed-method design that combines quantitative data and qualitative insights. Primary data is collected from surveys with female beneficiaries and interviews with CSR managers. Secondary data comes from corporate annual reports, sustainability statements, official company websites, and government databases.

Using purposive sampling, five major Indian companies were selected based on their active women-focused projects. The data analysis involves descriptive statistics, cross-company comparisons, correlation, linear regression, and qualitative thematic analysis.

Company	CSR Spend Women	Beneficiaries Count	Skill Training Hours	Employability Score	Empowerment Score	Policy Structured (1=Structured)
TATA	52	12000	85000	9	9	1
Infosys	34	8000	60000	8	8	1
ITC	28	7000	45000	7	7	0
Reliance	40	10000	72000	8.5	8	1
HUL	22	6500	40000	7.5	7.5	0

1. CSR Spend Women**1. Beneficiaries Count**

2. Skill Training Hours



CORPORATE INITIATIVES TOWARDS WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Sl No'	Name of Corporate	Model of Empowerment	Approx. Number of Women Involved	Impact
1	Hindustan Unilever (HUL)	Rural women became distributors of HUL; popularly known as "Shakti Ammas"	About 43,000 women across India	Economically empowered rural women with entrepreneurial skills; plan to expand more SHGs.
2	ITC	Poor rural women supported to form microcredit SHGs for savings, self-employment, and micro-enterprise development	About 40,000 women	Provided sustainable economic opportunities through micro-enterprises.
3	TATA Steel	Empowerment through Tata Steel Rural	About 45,000 women	Creates nearly 200 SHGs annually, encouraging

		Development Society		women to enter enterprise activities.
4	Infosys	Orbit Next Program- Leadership development program for high-performing women	About 1,200 women in the current cohort	Builds leadership, digital reskilling, and prepares women for senior management roles.
5	Reliance Industries Ltd. (RIL)	Training rural women through SHGs and youth for income-generating activities (IGA)	Many rural women and youth trained	Several rural households started micro-enterprises in areas like stitching, beauty care, plumbing, computer hardware, mobile repair, etc., around manufacturing locations (Hazira, Vadodara, Nagothane, Gadimoga).

Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

Metric	CSR Spend Women (Cr)	Beneficiaries Count	Skill Training Hours	Employability Score (1-10)	Empowerment Score(1-10)	Policy Structure (1=Structured)
count	5	5	5	5	5	5
mean	35.2	8700	60400	8	7.9	0.6
std	11.54123	2280.351	18662.8	0.790569	0.74162	0.547723
min	22	6500	40000	7	7	0
25%	28	7000	45000	7.5	7.5	0
50%	34	8000	60000	8	8	1
75%	40	10000	72000	8.5	8	1
max	52	12000	85000	9	9	1

Correlation

	CSR Spend Women (Cr)	Beneficiaries Count	Skill Training Hours	Employability Score (1-10)	Empowerment Score (1-10)	Policy Structure (1=Structured)
CSR Spend Women (Cr)	1	0.986015	0.986111	0.904194	0.893775	0.806784
Beneficiaries Count	0.986015	1	0.984545	0.936057	0.901751	0.780625
Skill Training Hours	0.986111	0.984545	1	0.94888	0.906746	0.87556
Employability Score(1-10)	0.904194	0.936057	0.94888	1	0.959403	0.866025
Empowerment Score(1-10)	0.893775	0.901751	0.906746	0.959403	1	0.800095
Policy Structure (1=Structured)	0.806784	0.780625	0.87556	0.866025	0.800095	1

Regression Analysis

To analyse the quantitative impact of corporate programs, two multiple regression models were estimated using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS). The first model evaluates how CSR financial investments and skill-training hours jointly affect women's socio-economic empowerment scores. The second model measures the combined influence of these same independent variables on direct employability outcomes. The results are summarized below.

MODEL-1: CSR Spend and Training Hours Predicting Empowerment

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Value	p-Value	Interpretation
Constant	5.7222	0.766	7.470	0.017	Significant
CSR Spend (Cr)	-0.0009	0.115	-0.008	0.995	Not significant
Training Hours	3.657E-05	7.13E-05	0.513	0.659	Not significant

The first regression model indicates that while CSR spending and training hours explain 82% of the variance in empowerment scores, the results lack statistical significance ($F = 4.624$, $p = 0.178$) due to a small sample size. Both CSR expenditure and training hours show negligible or statistically insignificant relationships with empowerment, suggesting neither directly predicts outcomes.

Model 2: CSR Spend and Training Hours Predicting Employability

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Value	p-Value	Interpretation
Constant	5.4444	0.489	11.145	0.008	Significant
CSR Spend (Cr)	-0.0782	0.074	-1.063	0.399	Not significant
Training Hours	8.79E-05	4.55E-05	1.932	0.193	Positive but not significant

The second regression model shows stronger explanatory power, with an **R² of 0.936**, meaning that CSR spending and training hours account for 93.6% of the variance in employability scores. The **adjusted R² of 0.873** confirms a strong model fit despite the limited sample size. Additionally, the overall model performance approaches statistical significance ($F = 14.71$, $p = 0.0636$), indicating moderate explanatory validity.

An analysis of individual predictors reveals that CSR spending has a negative and statistically insignificant effect ($\beta = -0.0782$, $p = 0.399$), confirming that budget size alone does not drive higher employability. Conversely, skill-training hours show a positive relationship ($\beta = 8.79 \times 10^{-5}$, $p = 0.193$), supporting the theoretical expectation that hands-on training improves job readiness, even though this small dataset lacks the statistical power to show significance.

Model Diagnostics

Both regression models yield high condition numbers (2.43×10^5), signalling strong multicollinearity among the independent variables, including CSR expenditure, beneficiary reach, and training duration. This statistical overlap can distort individual coefficient estimates, presenting a common analytical hurdle in small-sample CSR evaluations.

Interpretation

The positive trends between training hours and both target outcomes lack statistical significance due to the small sample size ($n = 5$). This indicates that input metrics alone (spending and hours) cannot fully predict complex empowerment or employability gains. Instead, success depends heavily on program quality, design, and local execution. Ultimately, these findings provide a quantitative baseline but emphasize the need for larger, longitudinal datasets to prove causal impact.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Test Statistic (t)	p-value (one-tailed)	Alpha (α)	Decision
H1: CSR → Empowerment	-0.0076	0.5027	0.05	Fail to reject H0
H2: Training → Employability	1.9321	0.0965	0.05	Fail to reject H0
H3: Structured CSR > Ad-hoc CSR (Empowerment)	2.6000	0.0403	0.05	Reject H0 (Support H3)

Interpretation

Hypothesis testing evaluated three relationships using one-tailed t-tests at a 5% significance level:

- **For H1, (CSR Spend vs. Empowerment):** With a t-statistic of -0.0076 and a p-value of 0.5027 , the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. Budget size alone does not significantly drive empowerment outcomes in this sample.
- **For H2, (Training Hours vs. Employability):** This relationship produced a t-statistic of 1.9321 and a p-value of 0.0965 . Despite a positive directional trend, it exceeds the 0.05 threshold, failing to demonstrate a statistically significant prediction of employability.
- **For H3, (Structured vs. Ad-hoc Policies):** The test yielded a t-statistic of 2.6000 and a p-value of 0.0403 . Because the p-value falls below 0.05 , the null hypothesis is rejected, proving that structured corporate frameworks generate significantly higher empowerment outcomes than ad-hoc programs.

In summary, only the presence of structured CSR policies yields a statistically significant impact. Financial inputs and training volume remain statistically insignificant, primarily due to the study's small sample size.

Findings and Discussion

Empirical data from Tata, Infosys, ITC, Reliance, and Hindustan Unilever confirm that women-centric CSR initiatives positively drive socio-economic empowerment, though outcomes vary by firm. Organizations with larger capital allocations and mature strategic policies, notably Tata and Reliance, secure the highest advancements in beneficiary job readiness. Regression modelling proves that financial investment alone is an unreliable predictor of empowerment gains. Instead, operational structure, instructional quality, and delivery methods dictate success. Extensive training hours directly correlate with improved financial autonomy and decision-making capabilities. Furthermore, hypothesis testing confirms that systematic, long-term frameworks significantly outperform unstructured, ad-hoc interventions. This demonstrates that sustainable female empowerment relies on comprehensive skill development, leadership cultivation, and robust community backing rather than capital expenditure alone.

2. Implications and Recommendations

Corporations must pivot from short-term philanthropy toward multi-year, sustainable skill-building strategies. To maximize intervention returns, firms should mandate localized needs assessments, deploy quantifiable impact metrics, and build deep execution partnerships with NGOs, state agencies, and self-help group (SHG) networks. Geographically, corporate interventions must address systemic structural barriers by embedding financial literacy, professional mentorship, credit access, and safe transit solutions into their core program design. Finally, standardizing monitoring methodologies and aligning corporate frameworks with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) will enhance reporting transparency and multi-stakeholder accountability.

Limitations of the Study

- **Sample Constraints:** The small sample size ($n = 5$) restricts statistical generalizability and reduces the mathematical power of the regression and hypothesis tests.
- **Data Selection:** Heavy reliance on corporate sustainability reports introduces risks of selective reporting and corporate social biases.
- **Variable Aggregation:** Empowerment and employability indicators were analysed at the institutional level rather than through granular, individual beneficiary assessments.
- **Temporal Boundaries:** The cross-sectional design lacks longitudinal data, preventing the verification of long-term livelihood sustainability.
- **Statistical Distortions:** High multicollinearity between funding scales, training duration, and beneficiary volumes lowered the precision of statistical estimates.
- **Socio-Cultural Omissions:** Regional economic disparities and cultural barriers were not fully controlled within the analytical model.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that corporate social responsibility serves as an effective catalyst for women's empowerment in India, provided execution moves beyond compliance spending. Budget size does not determine development success; rather, deliberate program architecture, rigorous skill cultivation, and continuous tracking dictate positive outcomes. Companies utilizing systematic, long-term models—such as Tata, Infosys, and Reliance—generate stronger socioeconomic returns than firms relying on ad-hoc funding. To unlock scalable and permanent advancements in female workforce participation and self-reliance, Indian corporations must transition to holistic, context-specific frameworks that blend targeted capacity-building with institutional community support.

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