

Trends in India's Corporate Social Responsibility Spending: a Move Towards Sustainable Development

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Received: 09th March 2021

Revised: 30th April 2021

Accepted: 04th June 2021

Abstract: Sustainable development focuses on three dimensions – economic development, social welfare and environmental protection. To achieve sustainable development all the stakeholders viz governments, corporate and individuals need to come together. Sustainable development is a universal call and is also reflected in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which adopted the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in 2015.

The relationship between business and society has always been a question of debate since its inception and the responsibility of business towards society has evolved over a period. The existing term CSR is not just about the requirement of products and services for society.

Business needs to be sensitive towards the social issues, people, and environment. It has increasingly been recognized as an important agent in achieving sustainable development. CSR in India has been made mandatory by the Companies Act, 2013. The companies need to spend a stipulated part of revenue out the total profits on society activities comes in the ACT.

This paper attempts to provide a descriptive analysis of the expenditure on society in terms of CSR in our country after its birth under sec135 lies in the Companies Act, 2013 which became applicable from April, 2014. The analysis involves a study of (i) the thematic areas like education, health, sanitation, rural development etc. in which CSR funds are spent (ii) the geographical spread of CSR activities (iii) the gaps between prescribed and actual spending on CSR activities (iv) top spenders on CSR activities (v) Alignment of CSR spending with UNDP SDGs. This analysis helps in building a basic understanding of the quantity and quality of CSR spending in India from 2015 to 2018 highlighting the major trends and some interesting observations.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Corporate Social Responsibility, Environment, Social Development, Companies Act 2013

Introduction

Development would not in any sense be meaningful if it deprives our future generations of a healthy environment; leaves them with lesser resources to consume; is only beneficial to few at the cost of others;

and neglects mother-nature. Therefore, emerges the concept of sustainable development which emphasizes that the present development should not be at the cost of future. In other words, we should not harm the interests of our future generations for our economic gains. They should also be able to enjoy the same benefits that we do. It will be possible only when we consume the existing resources more responsibly and try to replenish them. Sustainable development thus focuses on three dimensions – economic development, social welfare, and environmental protection. To achieve sustainable development all the stakeholders viz governments, corporate and individuals need to come together. Sustainable development is a universal call and is also reflected in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which adopted the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in 2015. Policies and funding by UNDP are guided by these SDGs which aim at making this planet a more peaceful place to live.

The role of corporate sector or business which is one of the stakeholders in this journey of achieving sustainable development assumes greater importance because of its large size and direct interplay with environment and natural resources through its operations. However, the relationship between business and society has always been a question of debate since its inception and the responsibility of business towards society has been understood in different ways. Two schools of thought have emerged out of this debate. The first speaks about the discharge of social responsibility through the normal course of action wherein all the factors of production are paid their due through the market mechanism and profit maximization is ensured (Friedman, 1970; Drucker, 1981). According to this approach, every corporate has a business philosophy i.e., the vision of business. Based on that, the rules and policies of the business are defined which describe the role of business in society and the way it should be conducted thus defining the philosophy of business. This philosophy of business, according to the first approach does not have any mention of business ethics. Managers should solely think of maximizing the profits for shareholders and should conduct the business in such a way that the society is supplied with the desired goods and services and all the factors of production are fairly and adequately compensated. Any business doing so is discharging its social responsibility through its very conduct i.e., it is taking the factors of production from the society and paying it back. Other than this, there is no mention of business ethics and social responsibility. If some managers wish to go beyond this and spend on some philanthropic activities, they are doing so out of their own sweet will, rather than being bound to do so. It is regarded as the role of the state to look after social welfare.

Drucker (1981) gave a controversial statement by saying “There is neither a separate ethics of business nor is one needed”.

Hoffman and Moore (1982) gave a fitting reply to Drucker by emphasizing the role of business ethics and say that “philosophy of business” necessarily and clearly is concerned with the ethical foundations of business.

Murthy (2007) very aptly summarized the paradigm shift that has taken place and how corporate social responsibility, or simply corporate responsibility has evolved in its present meaning. The first shift is related to the philosophy of business. The business can no longer be viewed as having a transactional relationship with the society and cannot escape from its larger responsibility of contributing towards the society. The reduction in the function of the state, as well as the removal of the state from the social arena, has produced a vacuum in which social and environmental concerns go ignored or under-addressed. In such a situation, business must emerge as a filling and consider its greater societal role, which should be founded in 'business philosophy' via corporate ethics. The three entities – government, business, and society – have changed their responsibilities, relationships, and domains. The first conclusion is that firms must take social responsibility into account. This is suggestive of a paradigm change in corporate thinking. Businesses

can no longer afford to do so, according to the second conclusion of the paradigm change. A corporation must be socially accountable. It must be environmentally responsible. It must also be beneficial to its stockholders. Without such ethical behavior, the company may go out of business. The three aspects all stem from business ethics and are expressed in corporate responsibility, which is a three-dimensional bundle that includes (a) good governance, (b) corporate social responsibility ("CSR"), and (c) environmental accountability. Businesses have been pushed to recognize corporate responsibility in its totality, which entails combining all three aspects.

Thus, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is now well accepted, and it goes beyond the provision of goods and services to the society. Business needs to be sensitive towards the social issues, people and environment. CSR has been defined by different organizations in different ways.

1. Definitions of CSR

“CSR is about businesses and other organizations going beyond the legal obligations to manage the impact they have on the environment and society. This could include how organizations interact with their employees, suppliers, customers and the communities in which they operate, as well as the extent they attempt to protect the environment.”- *The Institute of Directors, UK, 2002*

“A responsible organization does three things: (1) it recognizes that its activities have a wider impact on the society in which it operates; (2) it takes account of the economic, social, environmental and human rights impact of its activities across the world; (3) it seeks to achieve benefits by working in partnership with other groups and organizations.”- *Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)*

“The principal function of a company is to create wealth, in producing goods and services demanded by the society, leaving thereby a profit for the owners and shareholders, while contributing to the well-being of the society, in particular through a continuous process of employment creation but the companies — can meanwhile contribute to the social and environmental objective, while integrating the social responsibility as a strategic investment in the heart of their commercial strategy, in their management tools and in their activities.” – *By The European Commission*

All the above definitions and views on CSR increasingly recognize the role of business in addressing the social environmental and developmental issues. In the light of this background, we can see CSR in Indian context.

2. CSR: Indian Context

In India, the CSR initiatives are not new although they were not called by the same name and were also not reported separately. Most of the big companies indulged in acts of philanthropy in the form of charity, donations etc. TATA, for example, is one company which has always thought of the welfare of its employees and community in general. But as is true for the rest of the world, in case of India also CSR started being increasingly recognized for the development purpose. There are two dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility:

1. An organization's ethical behavior toward its internal and external stakeholders.
2. A company's responsibilities to the environment and community in which it works.

The landmark in Indian CSR is the coming up of Mandatory CSR regime which is a part of Companies Act 2013 and became applicable from April 2014. The main highlights of this law are:

Trends in India's Corporate Social Responsibility Spending: a Move Towards Sustainable Development

Ministry of Corporate Affairs were advised by the Section 135 and Schedule VII of the Companies Act, as well as the particulars of the Companies (Corporate Social Responsibility Policy) Rules, 2014 (CSR Rules), on April 1, 2014.

Applicability: Section 135 of the Companies Act specifies the minimum requirements for a firm to be eligible for CSR:

- (a) Net value of Rs 500 crore or more;
- (b) Revenue of Rs 1000 crore or more; and
- (c) Net profit of Rs 5 crore or more.

Furthermore, according to the CSR Rules, CSR obligations apply not just to Indian enterprises, but also to international corporations' Indian branch and project offices.

CSR Committee and Policy: To be eligible, a company must spend at least 2% of its average net earnings over the previous 3 financial years on CSR initiatives. In addition, the qualified company will be required to form a Board of Directors committee (CSR Committee) consisting of three or more directors. The CSR Committee is responsible for developing a policy that identifies the actions to be done (CSR Policy), recommending the amount of spending to be made on the mentioned activities, and monitoring the company's CSR Policy. The Board will review the CSR Committee's recommendations and approve the company's CSR Policy.

The term CSR has been defined in the CSR Rules to include, but not be limited to:

- Projects or programmes relating to activities specified in the Schedule; or
- Projects or programmes relating to activities undertaken by the Board in accordance with CSR Committee recommendations as per the declared CSR policy, subject to the condition that such policy covers subjects enumerated in the Schedule.

This notion of CSR is significant because it allows businesses to participate in activities or programmes connected to the operations of the Schedule. Companies also gain flexibility by being able to select their preferred CSR engagements that are in accordance with the CSR policy.

Details of CSR activities: Eliminate extreme hunger and poverty, promote education, promote gender equality, empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, fight the human immunodeficiency virus, and acquire acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, Malaria and other illnesses, some of the activities the company can take to achieve its CSR commitment to improve sustainability, employment skills and social business to ensure environmental protection. Relief and funding for the benefit of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, other backward classes, minorities, and women, as well as such other items as may be required, are examples of actions that the corporation might engage in to meet its CSR duties.

Local Area: According to the Companies Act, local areas, and the locations where the firm works should be given priority. If they can report independently, a company may opt to partner with two or more firms to complete CSR activities. The CSR Committee will also develop a CSR policy that includes a list of projects and programs to be implemented and the projects and programs the company plans to implement during the implementation year with a focus on integrating social and environmental priorities and business models. and the process of generating cost of equity capital.

A company may also prepare an annual report on its CSR activities showing the average net profit for the most recent three fiscal years and the required CSR expenses, but if the company is unable to meet the minimum required expenses, the report. Report violations to the Commission to avoid penalties.

Literature Review

Anand (2005) examined CSR actions of Tata Group. Tata Motors had made significant contributions to societal and economic development in Jamshedpur, Pune, and Lucknow. The Gram Vikas Kendra, Shiksha Prasar Kendra, Jan Parivar Kanyan Sansthan, and other community development programmes are noteworthy, as are the economic development schemes under Tata Motors Grihini Udyog and Industrial Co-operatives.

Karnani (2007) highlighted the importance of doing good in business by doing well in society. Taking the example of “fair and lovely” fairness cream, he showed that it is doing good by generating profits, but it is not doing well. It is not doing well because it is creating a bias in favor of fair skin color. Thus, it is promoting color discrimination which is unethical.

Gulati (2009) emphasized the role of community pressure on industry to mitigate the occurrence of disasters. He highlighted the importance of reliable environmental information (including safety measures, pollution emissions etc.) to be available in the public domain so that the community can act on that information through exerting pressure on the industry. This will result in minimizing the disasters arising out of industrial negligence.

Smith (2010) highlighted the cases of corporate negligence from all over the world. These cases include Texaco in Ecuador; Shell in Nigeria; Union Carbide in India; Walmart in China where breaches of ethics and social responsibility were seen. He showed how greed has led to shattering of corporate responsibility which caused irreparable harm to society. Thus, there is a need for ethical considerations in conducting business.

Dutta et al. (2011) highlighted the importance of CSR in terms of Triple Bottom Line Reporting (TBLR). Nowadays, companies must report in terms of three areas vis financial, social, and environmental performance. These three dimensions highlight a better account of corporate performance. Global Reporting Initiatives (GRI) and Karma yoga are providing the guidelines and framework for TBLR, but we still see that in Indian scenario, it is at a pre-mature stage.

Nash (2012) presented a review of mandatory CSR in India. He highlighted both the positives and negatives of having a mandatory CSR regime in a country like India.

VanZile (2021) examined the mandatory CSR regulation. It heralds the start of a new era in the field of corporate social responsibility. According to him, the plan may represent a new form of solution to an increasingly serious international challenge of resolving social, developmental, and environmental concerns because of unique historical constraints.

Timane (2012) has identified certain interesting case studies from the Indian scenario wherein the CSR activities are highlighted. He emphasized the role of CSR in creating better value for the business and showed how philanthropy has been replaced by a formal CSR mechanism.

Deswal and Raghav (2013) described the various approaches to CSR and the CSR initiatives by top corporates in India. The CSR initiatives of TCS, Wipro, Infosys, TATA, ITC etc. are discussed by them.

Tyagi et al. (2013) discover the important aspects of CSR in India. They discovered five aspects that contribute to Indian enterprises' competitiveness, financial development, and stakeholder relationships when they engage in CSR. Transparency and disclosures, open communication, health, safety, and welfare, according to research, are not only required but also help organizations enhance their relationships and

foster healthy competition. Enterprises believe that receiving feedback, consulting with stakeholders, and engaging in communication with them improves their image, which may result in a win-win scenario for both stakeholders and firms. Furthermore, concentrating on the multi-dimensional design of CSR might help you become a more capable player.

Afsharipour and Rana (2014) conducted a comparative analysis of the new CSR regimes in China and India, as well as the key features of these evolving frameworks. They showed how CSR as a philanthropic activity has evolved into an essential CSR system.

Singh and Verma (2014) showed how in India, the CSR has undergone a paradigm shift from philanthropy to mandatory CSR. They highlighted the relevance of the CSR law that came up in 2013. It is relevant because the social and developmental issues in India are still unmet to a large extent and the state individually is not able to address these issues.

Patil (2014) examines CSR in the context of environmental protection. He highlights that to have sustainable development, there is a need to have more concrete measures for environmental protection through CSR. Since the business or corporates are causing deterioration in the environment through their commercial activities, it becomes more pertinent for them to pay more attention towards the environmental concerns.

3. Objectives

Now that CSR has been accepted to be one of the major tools to achieve sustainable development, we need to study it in detail. We wish to study the areas in which the CSR activities are taking place and the areas that are still lacking. We are also interested in knowing the geographical spread of the CSR activities in India. It would also be interesting to note whether the companies spend more or less than the prescribed CSR spending and the alignment of CSR objectives with the UNDP SDGs. So, we arrive at the following objectives:

- (i) To study the geographical spread of CSR activities.
- (ii) To study the areas in which CSR funds are spent.
- (iii) Alignment of CSR spending with UNDP SDGs.
- (iv) To study the gaps between required and actual spending on CSR activities.
- (v) To look at the top spenders on CSR activities.

4. Data and Source

The analysis is based on secondary data. Since CSR spending became mandatory from April, 2014, CSR reporting also became mandatory from 2014-15. So, the data is available from 2014-15 onwards and the same has been used to witness the trends in CSR spending. Two sources are used for data. First is the official data available from the website of Ministry of Corporate Affairs. Second is CSR Box which provides detailed data on CSR spending. Basic graphs and tables are used to study the CSR spending

4.1. Data Analysis: The data analysis is carried out in line with the objectives of this paper.

4.2. Geographical Spread of CSR Activities: Taking data from website of Ministry of Corporate Affairs (www.csr.gov.in), the geographical spread of CSR spending is analyzed. Complete data is available for three years- 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17. Based on these three years, the total CSR spending of all the states is calculated. The percentage share:

Table 1: Total CSR Spending from 2015 to 2017 (in crores)
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State	Total CSR spending (2015 to 2018)	Percentage of total
Maharashtra	5681.17	24.04
Andhra Pradesh	2386.21	10.1
Karnataka	2025.83	8.57
Gujarat	1652.46	6.99
Tamil Nadu	1625.87	6.88
Delhi	1195.19	5.06
Odisha	1183.04	5.01
Rajasthan	1112.58	4.71
Haryana	901.29	3.81
West Bengal	881.25	3.73
Uttar Pradesh	878.76	3.72
Madhya Pradesh	607.17	2.57
Telangana	577.23	2.44
Assam	571.12	2.42
Chhattisgarh	479.6	2.03
Kerala	329.65	1.4
Jharkhand	292.36	1.24
Uttarakhand	241.85	1.02
Bihar	239.75	1.01
Punjab	191.83	0.81
Jammu And Kashmir	187.78	0.79
Goa	92.59	0.39
Himachal Pradesh	79.69	0.34
Arunachal Pradesh	36.13	0.15
NEC/ Not mentioned	33.66	0.14
Chandigarh	28.19	0.12
Daman And Diu	24.81	0.1
Dadra And Nagar Haveli	21.55	0.09
Manipur	20.42	0.09
Meghalaya	16.69	0.07
Puducherry	15.84	0.07
Sikkim	7.94	0.03
Tripura	4.05	0.02
Nagaland	2.99	0.01
Mizoram	2.18	0.01
Andaman And Nicobar	1.67	0.01
Lakshadweep	0.3	0
Total	23630.69	

Source: www.csr.gov.in

of each state is computed to know its dominance in terms of CSR spending as shown in Table 1. The analysis has revealed certain interesting observations. Maharashtra occupies the top position in terms of

Trends in India's Corporate Social Responsibility Spending: a Move Towards Sustainable Development

CSR spending followed by Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. Maharashtra's CSR share is more than double that of Andhra Pradesh (the second). This trend clearly shows that the states that have a greater concentration of industries are getting more benefits from CSR spending as the companies give preference to local areas. The extreme northern and eastern states seem to be deprived of the benefits accruing from CSR spending. However, this is quite expected because the law provides for giving preference to local areas while spending CSR funds.

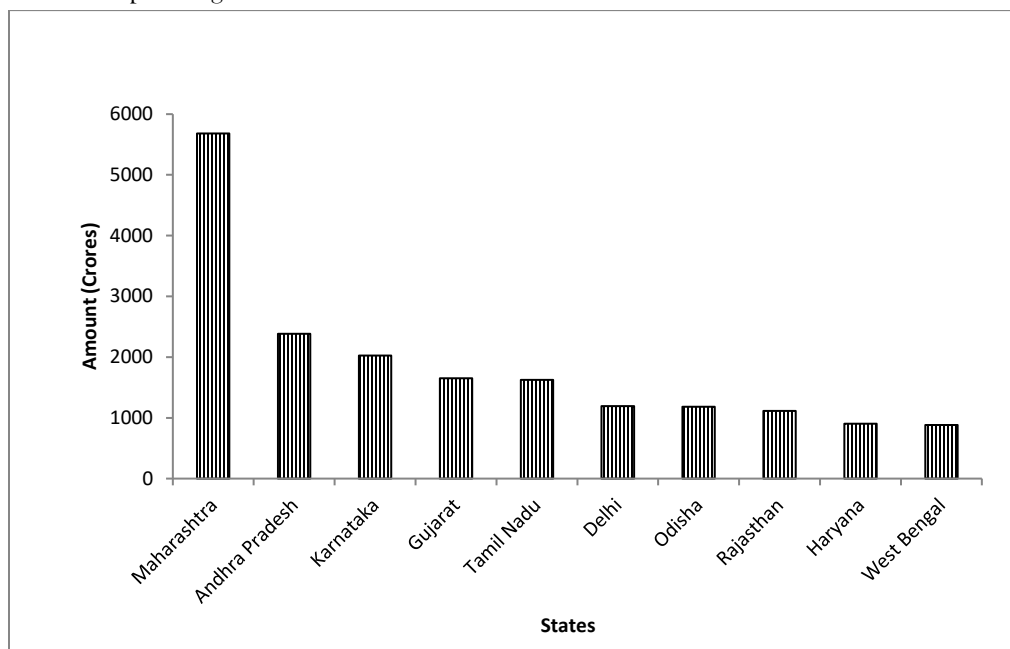


Figure 1: Top 10 States According to CSR Spending (2015-17)

The top ten states according to CSR spending are depicted in Figure 1. Although it is easier for the companies to spend CSR funds in local areas (as prescribed by Companies Act), it doesn't lead to the fulfillment of larger objective of balanced and inclusive growth.

4.3. Thematic Area wise CSR spending

Another interesting analysis is to look at the thematic areas on which the CSR funds are spent. Table 2 highlights these areas and the corresponding CSR spending during the three years- 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17 and Figure 2 shows a graphic depiction of the same. The categorization adopted is the same as provided by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs.

S.No.	Thematic Area	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
1	Clean Ganga Fund	5.47	32.65	24.23
2	Education, Differently Aabled, Livelihood	3188.09	4881.26	5123.83
3	Encouraging Sports	57.61	137.58	172.53
4	Environment, Animal Welfare, Conservation of Resources	853.99	963.22	1282.34
5	Gender Equality, Women Empowerment, Old Age Homes , Reducing Inequalities	189.92	337.44	434.75

6	Health, Eradicating Hunger, Poverty and Malnutrition, Safe Drinking Water, Sanitation	2525.92	4545	3397
7	Heritage Art and Culture	117.37	117.58	296.85
8	Other Sectors (Technology Incubator and Benefits to Armed Forces And Admin Overheads)	9.5	37.15	58.71
9	Prime Ministers National Relief Fund	228.18	213.7	150.7
10	Rural Development	1059.34	1369.52	1507.45
11	Slum Area Development	101.14	14.3	49.81
12	Swachh Bharat Kosh	113.86	324.72	165.09
13	Any Other Fund	277.09	326.88	412.38
14	NEC/ Not Mentioned	1338.39	1065.22	388.86

Source: www.csr.gov.in

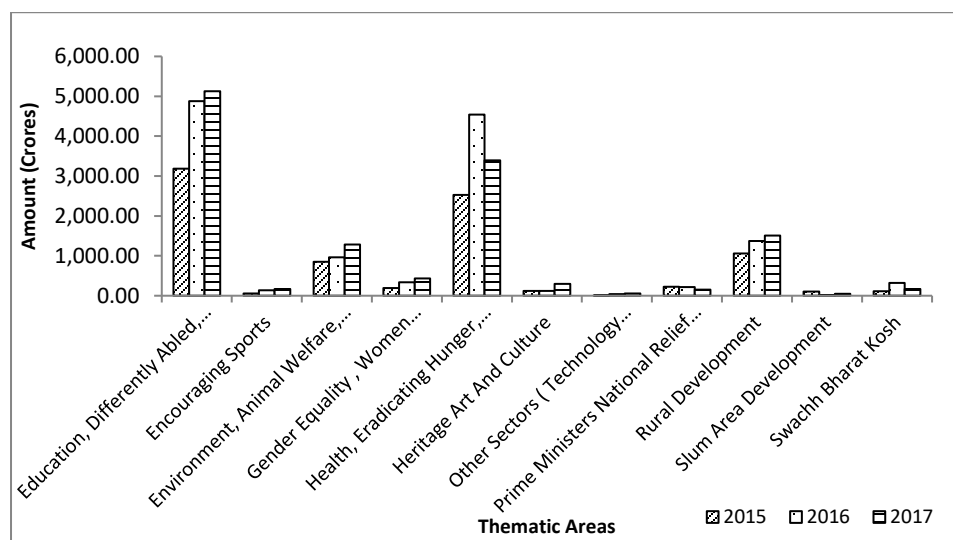


Figure 2: Thematic Area-wise CSR Spending (2015 to 2017)

The highest amount of CSR spending is seen on Education, Skills development, livelihood generation and providing opportunities to differently abled during all the three years. Health, reducing hunger, poverty, and malnutrition, as well as clean drinking water and sanitation, are the second and third theme areas in terms of total CSR spending throughout the three years. The third topic area is rural development, which is closely followed by the fourth thematic area, which includes environmental protection, animal care, and resource conservation. Gender equality, women's empowerment, and eliminating inequities are additional key subject areas that have garnered a smaller percentage of CSR monies but are on the rise.

The following theme categories show a strong upward trend:

- Education, Differently Abled, and Livelihood.
- Rural Development.
- Environment, Animal Welfare, and Resource Conservation.
- Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment, Senior Housing, and Inequalities Reduction.
- Promoting Sports.

4.4. Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (6.4)

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) approved 17 Sustainable Development Goals in 2015.

1. There is no poverty.
2. Hunger eradication
3. Health and happiness
4. High quality education
5. Gender Equality
6. Hygiene and clean water
7. Affordable and Clean Energy
8. Economic growth and decent work
9. Infrastructure, innovation, and industry
10. Inequality is declining
11. Sustainable Communities and Cities
12. Consume and create according to your conscience
13. Response to climate change
14. Earth Life
15. Peace, justice, and well-established institutions.

As we have seen the thematic area-wise CSR spending, it is evident that they are much in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. Although it is tough to measure the actual success of CSR spending in achieving the SDGs, it can be commented broadly that most of the areas on which CSR funds are spent figure amongst the list of Sustainable Development Goals. So, it can be marked as a good beginning towards sustainable development.

4.5. Gaps in Prescribed and Actual CSR Spending

Table 3 shows the gaps in prescribed and actual CSR spending and Figure 3 shows a graphical depiction of the same.

Year	No. of Companies*	Prescribed Spending	Actual Spending
2014-15	250	7040	5563
2015-16	250	7143	6578
2016-17	300	7626	6871
2017-18	359	9544	8876
Source: CSR Box (*All the companies are BSE listed or their subsidiaries; and the prescribed CSR spend is more than 1 crore)			

As shown in Table 3, there are gaps in prescribed and actual CSR spending wherein the prescribed spending is more than the actual spending. However, these values are based on the sample of those companies that are listed on Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) or their subsidiaries. Also, their mandatory prescribed CSR is more than 1 crore. But these results are representative enough as they cover more than half of the CSR spending.

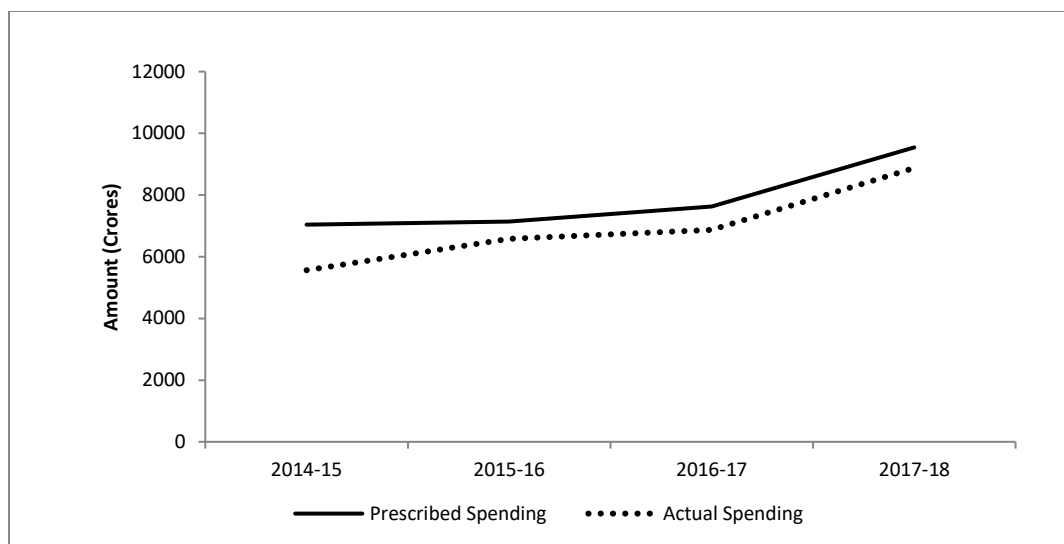


Figure 3: Gap Between Prescribed and Actual Spending

It should however be made clear that this does not in any way convey that all the companies spend less than the prescribed spending. There are companies which have spent more than the prescribed amount also, Tata Steel, Reliance, NTPC, to name a few.

6.6 Top CSR Spenders

To have a view about the top spenders on CSR activities, Table 4 shows the names of the companies that have spent the highest funds on CSR projects from 2014-15 to 2017-18.

Table 4: Top CSR Spenders (2015 to 2018)

Company	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	Total
Reliance	761	651.57	659.2	745	2816.77
ONGC	495.23	419.06	525.9	503.42	1943.61
Infosys	240	202.3	289.4	313	1044.7
TCS	219	294	379.7	400	1292.7
ITC	214	247.5	276	291	1028.5
NTPC	205	491.8	277.8	242	1216.6
NMDC	189	210.09	174.18	169.37	742.64
Tata Steel	171	213.24	193.6	232	809.84
ICICI	156	172	182	170.3	680.3
Wipro	133	159.8	186.3	187	666.1
HDFC	118.55	120.72	305.4	375	919.67
Indian Oil Corporation	113.79	156.68	214	331	815.47
Power Finance Corporation	51.68	196.2	168.11	118.18	534.17

Source: CSR Box

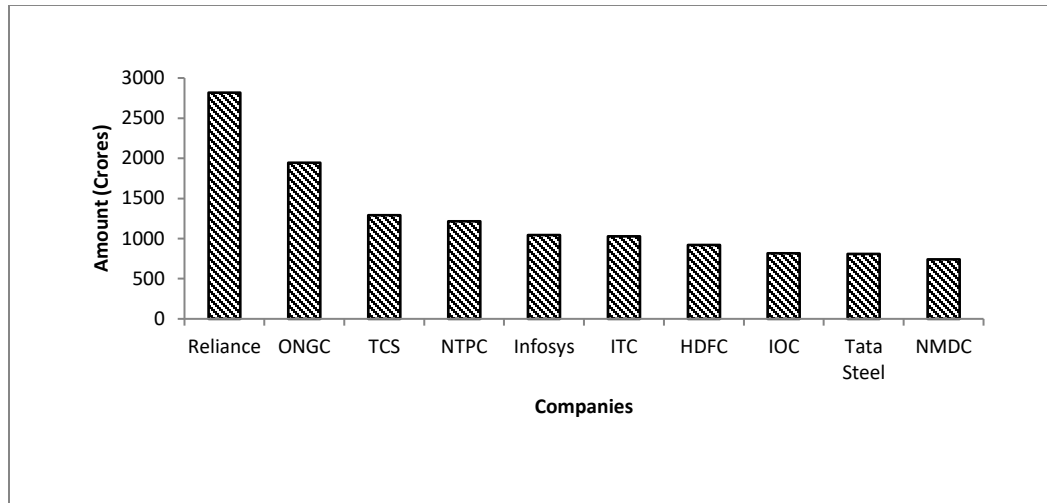


Figure 4: Top CSR Spenders (2015-18)

Figure 4 depicts the top 10 CSR spenders. Based on cumulative spending during the four years, Reliance is the top spender, followed by ONGC, Infosys, TCS and ITC.

5. Conclusion

As discussed at the very outset, this is an exploratory and descriptive study carried out to bring out certain basic facts and trends about CSR spending in India. The evolution of CSR has been discussed at length. India made CSR mandatory from April 2014. Based on the secondary data analysis, we have found out certain interesting facts and observations. The highest CSR spend is witnessed in the highly industrialized areas which leads to skewed development. Education and allied areas receive the maximum share out of the CSR spending followed by rural development and Health and sanitation. Most of the thematic CSR areas are in alignment with the UNDP SDGs. There is a gap in prescribed and actual CSR spending, but we haven't delved into the reasons. At the end, the top CSR spending companies are listed. An attempt has been made to develop an understanding about the emergence of CSR in India from mere philanthropy to a mandatory CSR regime. Although, no measurement of the impact of CSR has been made but the trends and figures show that CSR funds are spent on social and environmental issues. So, this is a welcome move in the direction of sustainable development.

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