

BEYOND PROFIT: A CALL FOR COMPANIES TO SUPPORT THE NEXT GENERATION

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<https://doi.org/10.34293/blp.9789395659611.ch006>*

Context of Csr in India

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India is usually considered as a connector between business and the social development. Despite the fact that the term CSR has acquired legal and structural impetus in the past twenty years, the history of corporate philanthropy dates back in India more than a century ago. One of the pioneers in giving back to society was industrial leaders such as Tatas, Birlas and Bajajs. Their charity usually was directed by their own principles or religious beliefs or even by their nationalistic beliefs. These were generous acts, but were not regulated in any real manner and were rather voluntary, rather than a strategic development planning. They concentrated on the charity constructions of schools, temples, hospitals and houses but they never had formal structures of accountability or sustainability.

The turning point was great with the introduction of the Companies Act, 2013 and India became the first nation in the world to require a legal requirement to spend on CSR. Under Section 135 of the Act, firms whose net worth is [?]500 crore and above or annual turnover is [?]1,000 crore and above or net profits is [?]5 crore and above in any one financial year are obliged to have a minimum percentage of two percent of the average of their net profit in the last three years expended on CSR activities. This rule also made the companies establish a special CSR committee in the Board, to develop and adopt CSR policies and to report their expenditure in a clear and auditable way. Most importantly, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs offered an elaborate list of activities that could be included in the list of permissible CSR activities including education and gender equality to environment sustainability, poverty reduction, health care, and rural development. This changed CSR in India to a voluntary activity to a compulsory governance initiative based on legal conformity yet having the prospect of passing on to be the potent motor of social equity.

The corporate world reacted differently to the CSR requirement in the years after its enactment. A lot of companies started releasing CSR reports, creating foundations arms, and forging relationships with NGOs. Only data given by the ministry of corporate affairs indicate that the CSR expenditure in India had crossed [?]25,000 crore in the first five years of implementation. Most companies focused on such aspects as:

- School infrastructure
- Skill training for youth

- Health check-up camps
- Sanitation drives

Social programs such as planting trees

Although these efforts have helped in the improvement of various communities, they have also revealed some trends that have challenged the thoroughness, inclusivity and future perspectives of CSR interventions.

On the bright side, there have been emergence of corporate foundations that have become the pioneers of rights based, community focused model of CSR. An example is that Tata Trusts have a history of systematic investments in education, tribal development and cancer care. Their efforts on water sanitation and in digital literacy remain an example. The Infosys foundation has played a significant role in enhancing access to libraries, hospitals and education facilities in Karnataka and other areas. The integrated model of HCL Foundation covers education, health, and environment in rural and underprivileged urban communities and employee volunteering is integrated into the design. The examples represent CSR in practice: long-term planning, quantifiable results, partnerships with the local communities, and meeting the developmental priorities.

These are however not the rule and are exceptions. The CSR expenditure experienced in India continues to have some severe flaws. Overconcentration of funds in the urban or Tier-1 areas is one issue that has remained. Innovations in urban areas such as smart classrooms, tie-ups with private schools and highly branded health awareness campaigns are popular at times as they provide exposure, publicity and fewer logistical problems. However, these initiatives often end up being ineffective to the most marginalized children and families, such as those in rural, tribal or under-policed areas. A high number of companies are choosing to make a one-time donation or conduct an event such as giving school kits to the communities or hold a few health camps instead of investing in capacity or resilience development programs over the long term. These short term attempts though not damaging, do not do much to counter structural inequities.

The other issue is the absence of the community involvement in the CSR design. In many cases, the CSR strategies are developed in boardrooms with little or no contributions of the people who are subject to the services. This results in overfunded initiatives that do not match the actual requirements like documentation efforts, legal assistance to children of under trial prisoners, or trauma recovery initiatives among retaliations of violence victims. Any CSR that does not address these underlying problems runs the risk of being cosmetic. To add on this, some companies have taken to CSR being a tick box exercise due to the compliance drive mindset. When no such measurement of impact exists accountability is lost and so is the prospect of real change.

To become a real tool of social justice, CSR should not only expand its budgets and reports but also become a tool of compassion, courage, and community involvement. Charity should not be the point, it has to be empowerment. Although there are examples of Indian companies that have been able to take this vision in depth and with a sense of integrity, most of them keep failing the test by going after visibility instead of vulnerability, simplicity instead of sustainability. When we consider the examples of such models as the Batlagundu summer camp, we understand that the real CSR has to start where the margins are. It has to hear what is not being spoken. It has to decide to not only fix the things that are easy to fix, but also fix what is long neglected.

Invisible to Csr - The Struggles of Children From Vulnerable Communities

One of the most underrepresented and misunderstood groups in India are the Denotified Tribes (DNTs) such as the Kal Ottar, which was labeled criminals in the colonial period. The stigma goes back to the Criminal Tribes Act in 1871 that was passed by the British to tame the nomadic and tribal states. According to this law, whole communities were treated as criminal by birth that contributed to surveillance, forced settlement, and ingrained discrimination. The social damage is still apparent to the present because the Act was repealed in 1949 two years after India became independent.

Kal Ottar people, residing in Tamil Nadu and South India on the whole, still live under the stigma of this legacy. A lot of families are itinerant, or landless as they have to work in informal ways, such as woodcutting, street vendors, or manual labor. Their denotified status is misinterpreted frequently and they are regularly harassed which may include false allegations, excessive policing and limited access to government services. Their children are the ultimate recipients of this legacy not just in poverty but also the unceasing destruction of their dignity and chance.

Lack of documentation is one of the biggest obstacles that they encounter. Most Kal Ottar families are not able to obtain simple services ration cards, health covers, and admissions to school without Aadhar cards, community certificates or birth records. This has led to a silent crisis children that want to learn are usually refused to be admitted just because they fail to prove their identity. They do not have caste or income certificates and are thus left out of affirmative action programs and welfare programs meant to assist the marginalized communities.

The 117 children were in a rare and safe place during the summer camp in Batlagundu in April 2025, and many of them were members of the Kal Ottar community or had families that were victims of police violence. One of them was 11-year-old Muthu. He was exceedingly silent when he came. His father was arrested in a raid to sell liquor, beaten up, and died the following day by the police. Muthu had ceased to talk much, since then.

However, in the camp he began to open up and he started drawing, he relied on his drawings to remember the father and how they used to gather firewood together in the hills.

Rani, a 14-year-old child, had dropped out. Her teachers would tease her out of having no caste certificate. On one occasion, she said, Why should I go somewhere that does not want me at all? She was motivated at the camp and started thinking of returning to school. But the same issue still lingered she still had no papers to enroll.

Education is cut short in most instances due to financial constraint or absence of documentation, as well as, social stigma and parental influence to earn the family some income. Some girls had already left secondary school; others were too scared to be pushed to leave soon.

Most of the current CSR activities are based on primary education or infrastructure, but there is a huge disparity in provision of higher education, especially among teenage girls in marginalized societies or the rural areas. These students will be stuck in economic dependency and exclusion without specific intervention.

In a bid to overcome this, CSR strategies need to change to incorporate:

- Prolonged funding of the secondary and college education.
- Re-enrollment flexible dropout bridge programs.
- Hostel accommodation, uniform, learning materials, and online access.
- Help in getting identity and community certificates.

Career growth and mentorship based on future career goals.

With targeted investment in this field, one will contribute to the growth of inclusive future labor and strengthen the contribution of CSR to the promotion of fair developmental patterns. It is a strategic as well as a socially responsible action to support higher education among girls who are vulnerable.

Summer Camp as a Case Study

In April 2025, a radical eight day summer camp took place in theni district in Batlagundu, Tamil Nadu that provided a rare safe haven to 117 children of vulnerable backgrounds most of the Kal Ottar, a denotified tribal community and others of families affected by custodial deaths and police violence. It was arranged in collaboration with Itinerant People's Rights Organization (IPRO), People's Watch and Manonmani Trust as far as this was more than a normal camp. It developed into a healing environment, a rights based intervention, and an example of how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) could be reframed to suit children who are marginalized by state and corporate developmental policies on a regular basis.

Day-Wise Summary: Summer Camp 2025 (Batlagundu)

- Day 1: Introducing children, establishing relationships, and creating an inclusive and safe environment.
- Day 2: Art based lessons to promote emotions and creativity.
- Day 3: Workshops to promote child rights and entitlements.
- Day 4: Sharing circles that are trauma-informed in order to deal with fear, grief, and discrimination.
- Day 5: Confidence, communication, and peer support life skills.
- Day 6: Instructions on the declaration of identity and accessibility of welfare programs.
- Day 7: Culture day where music and dance will be practiced and self-expression activities will be performed.
- Day 8: Reflection, self-goal-setting and goodbye with increased motivation.

Observed Emotional and Behavioural Transformation

Nine-day shifts were noted by facilitators and volunteers. Children who came in anxious or withdrawn started to initiate talks, engage in plays and get peer friendships. Other boys, such as Gokul, whose brother was killed during juvenile detention told about his feelings of guilty and anger first. He later participated in a group story telling session and composed a poem on brotherhood.

The change in behavior was observed to be improved eye contact, more group participation, rediscovered curiosity, and less fear of the adults. Children started having aspirations I want to be a teacher, I will become a nurse, I will help my village. They might appear like minor steps however when dealing with a deep systemic trauma, then they are the reconstruction of self-worth.

This summer camp shows how CSR can go beyond branding activities and the temporary publicity and instead be long-term and justice-based investment in human potential. The camp did not offer presence, process, and possibility that it would fix broken systems.

Actionable Recommendations

In order to make sure that the CSR programs provide children at risk, particularly those in denotified communities and families affected by the custodial violence, the corporate strategies should be changed to the charity-based schemes to the rights-based, justice-based schemes. To start with, businesses ought to have a CSR model that is based on rights of children, equity, and dignity. It involves moving beyond compliance, collaborating with the grassroots organizations, and making sure that the CSR decision-making process involves specialists in the social justice or human rights.

Among the most pressing issues is the promotion of higher learning. The Batlagundu camp included many adolescent girls and boys who indicated that they wished to have a career in teaching, law, and healthcare but they did not have the financial and institutional support to continue their education. CSR initiatives should thus offer holistic scholarships, re-enrollment, bridge courses as well as safe residential facilities so that these girls do not abdicate forever.

One should mention CSR programs directly focused on the prevalent gaps in documentation that leave children out of education and the government welfare. A large number of participants did not have Aadhaar or a birth certificate and caste/community documents, which allowed them to attend school. Computer firms can finance mobile documentation camps, legal aid partnerships, and systemic outreach initiatives to assist such children to receive identity proofs required to join.

Another factor that is equally critical is the involvement of voices of the community in the planning and monitoring of CSR projects. There should be institutionalization of participatory planning and feedback loops that involve children, areas youth and grassroots leaders to make sure that they are relevant and owned. Lastly, CSR needs to embrace transparent accountability models which extend past quantifying activities. Companies should not assess their success in terms of the number of school kits passed out and/or buildings built but rather, measure their success by these results; dropout rate, re-enrollment rate and psycho-social well-being. CSR can be an effective tool of long-term change once companies engage in equity-based, measurable, and locally-led strategies that would transform the lives of the vulnerable children.

Conclusion

This paper emphasizes the severity of the problem related to the necessity of rethinking the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as the instrument of justice rather than enforcement. Based on the case study of the 2025 Batlagundu summer camp, it is revealed that vulnerable children, girls, in particular, in denotified tribes and families afflicted by custodial violence still experience profound systemic impediments to education and dignity. Although most CSR initiatives aim at visibility and urban influence, most of them fail to consider the most marginalized communities. The call to action is obvious: CSR need to change long-term, rights-based investments, which focus on the possibility to access documentation, re-enrollment in schools, emotional healing, and higher education in particular to adolescent girls. Businesses need to interact with grassroots organizations directly, create inclusive programs, and quantify success based on real life results and not expenditure. In case the corporate sector in India is indeed serious about creating a fairer society, it should start by being able to empower the most frequently neglected children.

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