

Lessons in Sustainability Through Tribal Entrepreneurship and CSR

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ABSTRACT

A crucial paradigm for development, inclusive growth places a strong emphasis on sustainability, equity, and the involvement of underserved populations in the process of economic advancement. Entrepreneurship is essential to releasing indigenous knowledge, resources, and cultural heritage for sustainable development in tribal societies. Together with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), tribal entrepreneurship addresses systemic injustices, creates jobs, and maintains ecological balance, making it a potent force for inclusive prosperity. With the use of CSR initiatives, this study investigates how tribal entrepreneurship promotes inclusive growth and advances long-term sustainability, social justice, and environmental preservation. Through an analysis of case studies and lessons learned from CSR programs, the report emphasizes how crucial skill development, market connections, financial inclusion, and capacity building are to the empowerment of indigenous communities. The results imply that sustainability is attained when corporate social responsibility (CSR) transcends philanthropy and synchronizes with community-driven entrepreneurship, guaranteeing that tribal communities are not merely recipients but rather active contributors to development. The lessons learned emphasize the necessity of

cooperative models in which local communities, governments, and enterprises jointly design routes to sustainable and equitable development.

Keywords: sustainable development, inclusive growth, CSR-driven, tribal entrepreneurship

INTRODUCTION

One of the main topics of discussion in modern development discourse is inclusive growth, which emphasizes both quick economic progress and the fair distribution of its advantages to all facets of society, especially the underprivileged. One of the most disadvantaged groups in India are tribal people, who are frequently left out of mainstream development because of socioeconomic, topographical, and cultural obstacles. Two important forces have emerged to close this gap: corporate social responsibility (CSR) and tribal entrepreneurship. In areas where tribes predominate, they have the ability to promote inclusive and sustainable progress when combined.

Tribal entrepreneurship facilitates economic empowerment by empowering tribal groups to generate income by utilizing their natural resources, traditional knowledge, and indigenous talents. Through self-employment, small businesses, and community-based endeavours, it boosts local economies while also protecting

cultural identity and encouraging environmental care. Social dignity and economic resilience can be attained by indigenous groups through the integration of sustainable practices with entrepreneurial endeavours. Examining inclusive growth through CSR and indigenous entrepreneurship in this setting provides insightful sustainability insights. In order to ensure that growth is not only extensive but also long-lasting, it emphasizes how localized, culturally aware, and ecologically concerned interventions may turn marginalized tribal populations into engaged participants in the development process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

G. Yoganandham (2024) on the topic decolonizing development: a study of tribal communities and the intersection of economic, social, and cultural factors in their development and sustainability. The study focuses on three key areas such as economic development and resource management, social and cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability.

N. Sharma et al. (2025) This study seeks to know the contribution of the Indian Knowledge System in SDGs formation and its achievement. The research also examines the Indian state's current status of SDGs under ESE factors to know the role of a good ESE score in overall performance under the sustainability index. On the topic from tradition to transform: sdgs and the role of the indian knowledge system in india's growth through ese (environment, social, and economic) facto

According to Kotler and Lee (2005), there are many more advantages to marketing, including the possibility of boosting corporate respect, improving product quality, establishing brand preference, and fostering community goodwill. The covert goal of CSR initiatives is frequently a marketing tactic, even though corporations are aware that CSR is a voluntary behaviour. According to earlier definitions, corporate social responsibility is the voluntary and

charitable actions taken by businesses to help the underprivileged. Profit-making was Drucker's primary duty to society, but he also thought that "it was important that management consider the impact of every business policy and action upon the society" (Joyner & Payne, 2002).

CSR can be utilized as a tactic to concentrate on fresh prospects and address market concerns about social, economic, and environmental issues. According to Arganathan P. (2010), a strategic approach to corporate social responsibility (CSR) guarantees long-term survival and enhances the company's reputation while also assisting businesses in expanding their operations and addressing issues that affect stakeholders.

According to O'Neill, Hershauer, and Golden (2009), the Navajo Nation, the biggest Native American tribe in the US, established Navajo FlexCrete, an entrepreneurial company that recycles waste materials to create green building products. This helps to preserve the Navajo tribe's heritage and creates economic, social, environmental, and cultural value. Research on sustainable entrepreneurship in the future could contribute to a better understanding of the entrepreneurial dynamics that maintain communities.

The rate at which the stock of health "capital" of others depreciates over their lives may be slowed down by entrepreneurial activity. Research on the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries has confirmed that entrepreneurial activity has produced new goods and services that improve people's health (e.g., Roth-aermel & Deeds, 2004).

The study by Ramani, Sadre Ghazi, and Gupta (2016) concentrated on how social entrepreneurs manage innovation and provide water and sanitation facilities, as well as how they help achieve sustainable development goals.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine how inclusive economic growth in underserved communities is facilitated by tribal entrepreneurship.
2. To investigate how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs support economically viable tribal livelihoods.

Hypotheses of the study

1. Promoting tribal enterprises contributes directly to local livelihood generation and economic inclusion.
2. Policy support for entrepreneurship and CSR initiatives can accelerate livelihood inclusion in tribal regions.

Important aspects of the goal

Reducing Poverty and Empowering the Economy

By offering options for self-employment, tribal entrepreneurship lessens reliance on labour markets that are exploitative. Through the utilization of both contemporary markets and traditional talents (such as weaving, handicrafts, agriculture, forest products, and ecotourism), it facilitates income diversification. Such entrepreneurship builds economic independence and lowers poverty in underserved populations.

Creating Jobs and Promoting Local Development

Tribal business owners frequently employ locals, generating employment in their own communities. In addition to strengthening local economies and ensuring that money stays in the community, this also helps to reduce migration. Through regional companies like agribusinesses, small-scale industries, or service-based endeavours, it also promotes rural development.

Culture and Indigenous Knowledge Preservation - Tribal business frequently makes use of indigenous crafts, art, herbal medicine, agriculture, and knowledge derived from forests. Tribal legacy is preserved while contemporary employment possibilities are created through the

sustainable monetization of indigenous abilities.

Empowerment of Women- Gender equality is improved and women have greater power over household income and decision-making when they run their own tribal businesses, frequently through Self-Help Groups. In marginalized communities, this has a multiplier effect on nutrition, health, and education in addition to uplifting families.

Links for Sustainable Development-

When based on environmentally beneficial methods (such as organic farming, ecotourism, and forest products), tribal entrepreneurship supports the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It strikes a balance between environmental preservation and economic growth, which is essential for underserved areas that rely on natural resources.

Efforts for corporate social responsibility (CSR) that support sustainable tribal livelihoods.

The goal is to investigate the ways in which corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives which are voluntary and legally required by Section 135 of the Indian Companies Act, 2013 can help tribal people maintain sustainable means of subsistence. The emphasis is not just on immediate gains but also on the empowerment of marginalized tribal communities, resilience, and long-term livelihood stability. This objective seeks to critically examine the ways in which corporate social responsibility initiatives support the overall development of indigenous communities. It looks at how much CSR initiatives address long-term livelihood sustainability and go beyond charity by giving tribal inhabitants more access to economic possibilities, encouraging skill development, generating jobs, and supporting entrepreneurship. By doing this, the goal hopes to assess if CSR actually serves as a driving force behind the empowerment of tribal communities, the

mitigation of vulnerabilities, and the promotion of inclusive and sustainable growth in accordance with sustainable development principles.

Essential Elements of the Goal of Economic Empowerment

- Through employment creation in local industries, skill development, vocational training, and entrepreneurship support, CSR can offer chances to generate money. It can support the growth of microbusinesses, handicrafts, agro-based pursuits, and companies centered around forest products, all of which complement the customary abilities of tribal communities. Programs for financial literacy and market connections under CSR can improve self-reliance.
- Sustainability in the Environment Tribal lives are intimately linked to the environment and natural resources. The environment and livelihoods can be protected by CSR initiatives that prioritize afforestation, watershed management, soil protection, and renewable energy. Organic farming, ecotourism, and the sustainable collection of minor forest products (MFPs) all contribute to striking a balance between ecological preservation and economic demands.
- Preserving Culture Indigenous knowledge, traditional art, craft, and culture are essential to tribal identity and livelihood, and CSR may help preserve these. Tribal heritage is protected from being undermined by industrialization by supporting cultural businesses.
- Institutional Partnerships & Strengthening, Tribal communities can have a voice in decision-making via strengthening producer groups, SHGs, cooperatives, and local government institutions through CSR. Governmental, non-governmental, and corporate partnerships can increase the impact.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the role of tribal entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth among tribal communities. The research integrates quantitative approach to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the socioeconomic outcomes associated with entrepreneurship and CSR participation. The study was conducted among tribal communities located in rural and semi-rural regions where entrepreneurship programs and CSR interventions have been implemented. The target population includes tribal households, entrepreneurs, CSR beneficiaries, and local development officers. A stratified random sampling method was employed to ensure representation of both CSR beneficiary and non-beneficiary groups, and entrepreneur versus non-entrepreneur households.

- Sample Size: 200 respondents (100 entrepreneurs and 100 non-entrepreneurs), of which 90 were CSR beneficiaries and 110 were non-beneficiaries.
- Strata: (i) Entrepreneurship status (entrepreneur / non-entrepreneur) and (ii) CSR participation (beneficiary / non-beneficiary).

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Secondary information was gathered from CSR project reports, government publications, NGO documentation, academic journals, and district-level development data. The collected data were coded and analyzed using SPSS and Excel. The following statistical tools were applied:

1. Descriptive Statistics: To summarize demographic and economic characteristics, including mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage distributions for key variables such as income, employment, and asset ownership.

2. Chi-Square Test (χ^2): Used to examine the association between categorical variables such as entrepreneurship and employment status, migration, CSR participation, livelihood diversification, and asset improvement.
- Formula:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

where O = observed frequency, E = expected frequency.

To ensure the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted with 20 respondents, and necessary modifications were made based on feedback.

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for internal consistency was found to be 0.84, indicating high reliability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table -1 Objective 1: To examine how inclusive economic growth is facilitated by tribal entrepreneurship

Group	n	Mean Monthly Income (INR)	Employed (%)	Migrated for Work (%)
Entrepreneur households	100	16 200	87	12
Non-entrepreneur households	100	10 800	64	31

Descriptive tests

- Average income difference = ₹5 400.
- Std. Dev.: entrepreneurs = ₹3 200; non-entrepreneurs = ₹2 800.
- t-test (income) → $t = 11.4$, $p < 0.001$ → significant.
→ Entrepreneurs earn $\approx 50\%$ more on average.
- Employment rate difference = 23 pp ($p < 0.01$, two-proportion z-test).
- Migration rate difference = -19 pp ($p < 0.05$).

Table-1.1 Chi-square test 1: Entrepreneurship × Employment Status

	Employed	Unemployed	Total
Entrepreneur	87	13	100
Non-entrepreneur	64	36	100

- $\chi^2 = 13.23$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.0003 (< 0.05)$
- Significant association: entrepreneurship strongly linked with higher employment.

Table-1.2 Chi-square test 2: Entrepreneurship × Migration Status

	Migrated	Not Migrated	Total
Entrepreneur	12	88	100
Non-entrepreneur	31	69	100

- $\chi^2 = 8.68$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.003 (< 0.05)$
- Entrepreneurship significantly reduces the probability of migration.

Descriptive and Chi-square analyses indicate that households engaged in tribal entrepreneurship experience higher income, greater employment, and lower out-migration compared with non-entrepreneur households. The significant χ^2 values

confirm a strong statistical relationship between entrepreneurship and inclusive growth indicators. This supports the hypothesis that promoting tribal enterprises contributes directly to local livelihood generation and economic inclusion.

Table-2 Objective 2: To investigate how CSR programs support sustainable tribal livelihoods

Group	n	Mean Household Income (INR)	Livelihood Diversified (%)	Assets Improved (%)
CSR beneficiaries	90	15 700	76	69
Non-beneficiaries	110	11 200	48	41

Descriptive tests

- Average income difference = ₹4 500 (p < 0.01, t = 9.1).
- Livelihood diversification rate difference = 28 pp (p < 0.01).
- Asset improvement difference = 28 pp (p < 0.01).

Table-2.1 Chi-square test 1: CSR Participation × Livelihood Diversification

	Diversified	Not Diversified	Total
CSR beneficiary	68	22	90
Non-beneficiary	53	57	110

- $\chi^2 = 16.7$, df = 1, p < 0.001
- Significant association: CSR participation linked with diversified livelihoods.

Table.2.2 Chi-square test 2: CSR Participation × Asset Improvement

	Assets Improved	Not Improved	Total
CSR beneficiary	62	28	90
Non-beneficiary	45	65	110

- $\chi^2 = 11.9$, df = 1, p = 0.0006 (< 0.05)
- CSR initiatives significantly improve asset ownership and livelihood security.

Descriptive statistics and Chi-square results show that CSR participation is significantly associated with higher incomes, more diversified livelihoods, and improved household assets. The relationship is statistically robust (p < 0.01 in all cases), implying that CSR-led interventions; especially those combining skill training with market linkage; meaningfully enhance the economic sustainability of tribal households.

Both objectives’ analyses support the central thesis that tribal entrepreneurship and CSR participation significantly contribute to inclusive and sustainable economic growth. The Chi-square tests confirm strong statistical associations, while the descriptive comparisons illustrate substantive economic improvements. Collectively, these findings validate the study’s hypotheses and reinforce the argument that policy support for entrepreneurship and CSR initiatives can accelerate livelihood inclusion in tribal regions.

Limitations of the Study

- The study is confined to selected districts and may not represent all tribal regions.
- Self-reported income and participation data may contain response bias.
- The cross-sectional design limits causal inference, though significant associations are established statistically.

Findings

- Findings Related to Objective 1: Tribal Entrepreneurship and Inclusive Growth
 - Income and Employment: Descriptive analysis revealed that entrepreneur households had a mean monthly income of ₹16,200, compared to ₹10,800 among non-entrepreneur households. The t-test (p < 0.001) confirmed that this difference was statistically significant, suggesting that tribal entrepreneurship substantially enhances household income levels.
 - Employment Generation: The study found that 87% of entrepreneur households reported stable employment compared to 64% among non-entrepreneurs. The Chi-

square value ($\chi^2 = 13.23$, $p = 0.0003$) indicated a strong association between entrepreneurship and improved employment opportunities.

iii. **Reduced Migration:** Migration for external employment was markedly lower among entrepreneurs (12%) than non-entrepreneurs (31%). The Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 8.68$, $p = 0.003$) confirmed this association as significant, implying that entrepreneurship helps retain local labour and supports community-based development.

2. Findings Related to Objective 2: CSR and Sustainable Livelihoods

i. **Income Improvement:** CSR beneficiaries reported a mean monthly income of ₹15,700, compared to ₹11,200 for non-beneficiaries. The income difference was statistically significant ($t = 9.1$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that CSR participation contributed directly to livelihood enhancement.

ii. **Livelihood Diversification:** About 76% of CSR beneficiaries diversified their income sources compared to 48% of non-beneficiaries. The Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 16.7$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrated a significant relationship between CSR programs and livelihood diversification.

iii. **Asset Development and Financial Security:** A significant difference was found in asset creation, where 69% of CSR-supported households reported improved asset ownership, as against 41% among non-beneficiaries ($\chi^2 = 11.9$, $p = 0.0006$). This reflects the role of CSR in promoting financial resilience and sustainability.

iv. **Capacity Building and Skill Development:** Qualitative responses indicated that CSR projects emphasizing skill training, financial literacy, and value addition had better outcomes. Beneficiaries reported increased employability, higher productivity, and improved confidence in managing small enterprises.

v. **Sustainability and Community Development:** CSR interventions that incorporated indigenous knowledge systems

and local resource management practices were found to be more sustainable than externally imposed models. The long-term success of CSR initiatives was closely linked to community participation and relevance to local livelihoods.

Suggestions

- i. **Strengthen Access to Finance:** Facilitate microfinance, low-interest credit, and revolving funds tailored for tribal entrepreneurs to overcome capital constraints and scale up operations.
- ii. **Skill Enhancement and Entrepreneurship Training:** Regular training programs on business planning, marketing, and digital tools should be institutionalized through CSR and government collaboration to build entrepreneurial competencies.
- iii. **Market Linkages and Value Chain Integration:** Create direct market linkages and digital platforms to connect tribal producers with consumers and industries. CSR partners can play a crucial role in establishing sustainable market ecosystems.
- iv. **Inclusive CSR Models:** CSR programs should move beyond philanthropy to focus on capacity building, technology transfer, and social entrepreneurship. Inclusive CSR frameworks should emphasize long-term engagement and measurable social impact.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that tribal entrepreneurship and CSR interventions play a complementary and mutually reinforcing role in promoting inclusive economic growth and sustainable livelihoods among tribal communities. Quantitative results from descriptive and Chi-square analyses confirm that entrepreneurial engagement leads to higher income, improved employment, and reduced

migration, while CSR participation significantly enhances livelihood diversification, asset creation, and community resilience.

Tribal entrepreneurship serves as a driver of self-reliance and social empowerment, while CSR initiatives act as catalysts that provide the necessary support in terms of training, finance, and infrastructure. The synergy between these two mechanisms leads to sustainable and inclusive development, aligning with national priorities such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 5, 8, and 10). Overall, the findings emphasize the need for a holistic and participatory model of development; one that blends entrepreneurship, corporate responsibility, and indigenous knowledge to achieve long-term socio-economic transformation in tribal regions. The study underscores that inclusive growth is not merely about economic upliftment but also about social empowerment, cultural preservation, and sustainable community development.

Declaration by Authors

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