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Integrating Corporate Social Responsibility into Sustainable Entrepreneurship: A Study of Business Models and Social Impact Practices among Indian Startups

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ABSTRACT: This study examines how Indian startups are integrating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) into the design of their business models rather than treating it as an after-profit activity. The analytical concern is not whether a young firm spends money on philanthropy, which few startups are legally required to do, but whether social and environmental value is built into what the firm sells, how it produces and delivers it, how it earns revenue, and how it is governed. The study adopts an exploratory, secondary-data and documentary-analysis design. Evidence is drawn from Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) and Press Information Bureau releases up to September 2026, Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) CSR filings, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) disclosure rules, funding reports from Tracxn and the Impact Investors Council, and peer-reviewed research on sustainable entrepreneurship and mandatory CSR. By 31 January 2026, India had 2,12,283 DPIIT-recognised startups, of which 1,02,054 had at least one woman director or partner. Development CSR expenditure by companies rose from ₹24,966 crore in 2019-20 to ₹34,909 crore in 2023-24, and climate-technology funding increased from about US\$0.32 billion in 2020 to US\$2.6 billion in 2025. The analysis identifies five sustainable business-model archetypes and four channels through which corporate CSR reaches startups: CSR-funded incubation, value-chain procurement, impact capital and social-sector finance. It finds that integration is strongest where the social or environmental benefit is the product itself, and weakest where impact is added to an unchanged commercial model. Sustaining the gains will require simple impact-measurement standards for small firms, protection against mission drift during scale-up, and better linkage between the ₹35,000-crore CSR pool and early-stage impact ventures.

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has traditionally been judged by a single measure: whether the new venture survives and grows. Social and environmental outcomes were regarded as externalities that the state or mature corporations would deal with later. That division of labour is breaking down. Climate risk, resource scarcity, unequal access to finance, health and education, and rising consumer and investor scrutiny have made it harder for any firm, including a young one, to separate its commercial logic from its social consequences. The question for a startup is no longer whether it should be responsible, but how responsibility can be built into a business model that must also be financially viable.

India offers a distinctive setting for this question. It was the first country to make CSR spending mandatory by law. Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013 requires companies above specified thresholds of net worth, turnover or net profit to spend at least 2% of their average net profits of the preceding three years on activities listed in Schedule VII. Development CSR expenditure reported in MCA filings reached ₹34,908.75 crore in 2023-24, and cumulative spending over the five years from 2019-20 to 2023-24 exceeded ₹1.44 lakh crore. At the same time, India has become one of the largest startup ecosystems in the world. The Startup India initiative, launched on 16 January 2016, crossed two lakh recognised startups in December 2025, and a new gazette notification of 4 February 2026 widened the definition of a startup, doubled the turnover ceiling to ₹200 crore and created a separate Deep Tech category.

These two developments have largely been studied apart. The CSR literature in India concentrates on large listed companies and on whether mandated spending affects their value or behaviour, while the entrepreneurship literature concentrates on funding, survival and scaling. Most startups fall below the Section 135 thresholds, so the legal duty does not apply to them. Yet many of the most visible Indian ventures of the past decade, in clean energy, electric mobility, waste recycling, agricultural value chains, inclusive finance and low-cost health care, have placed social or environmental value at the centre of what they sell. For these firms, CSR is not a budget line but a design principle.

This paper makes three contributions. First, it treats startups as the unit of analysis and asks how CSR principles are translated into the components of a business model: value proposition, value creation and delivery, value capture and governance. Second, it assembles the latest national data up to September 2026 on the startup ecosystem, CSR expenditure, disclosure regulation and impact-oriented funding, much of which has not yet been examined in academic work. Third, it identifies the channels through which the large pool of mandated corporate CSR reaches, or fails to reach, sustainable startups. The paper does not attempt to estimate causal effects from secondary data; it seeks to establish whether the available evidence is consistent with an integration model of CSR and to indicate what future primary research should measure.

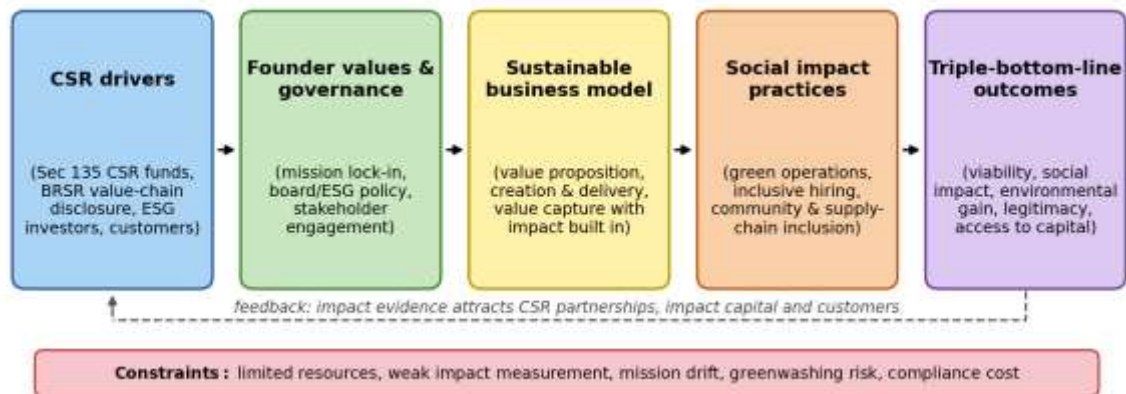
2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: FROM RESPONSIBILITY TO BUSINESS-MODEL DESIGN

Four bodies of theory guide the analysis. Carroll's (1991) pyramid describes CSR as a layered set of economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities, and Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory argues that a firm creates value for, and depends on, a wider set of groups than its shareholders. Both frameworks were developed for established corporations. Porter and Kramer (2011) moved the debate closer to entrepreneurship with the idea of shared value, in which firms create economic value by addressing social needs through their products, value chains and local ecosystems. Elkington's (1997) triple bottom line supplies the outcome criteria: economic viability, social benefit and environmental quality.

The sustainable entrepreneurship literature explains why new ventures may be especially suited to this integration. Dean and McMullen (2007) show that environmental degradation can be viewed as a market failure that creates entrepreneurial opportunities, and Shepherd and Patzelt (2011) define sustainable entrepreneurship as the discovery and exploitation of opportunities that sustain nature and communities while generating economic gain. Hockerts and Wüstenhagen (2010) distinguish between 'emerging Davids', new ventures that enter with a sustainability-driven proposition, and 'greening Goliaths', incumbents that adopt sustainability later; they argue that the two co-evolve, with Davids pioneering and Goliaths scaling. Schaltegger and Wagner (2011) add that sustainability innovation becomes entrepreneurship only when it reaches the mass market.

The business-model literature translates these ideas into design choices. Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) describe a business model as the logic by which a firm creates, delivers and captures value. Stubbs and Cocklin (2008), Bocken et al. (2014) and Geissdoerfer et al. (2018) extend this to sustainable business models, in which environmental and social value are explicit elements of the value proposition and value capture is measured against more than profit. Research on hybrid organisations (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Ebrahim et al., 2014) warns that firms pursuing social and commercial goals simultaneously are exposed to mission drift, particularly when growth capital rewards financial returns alone.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework: integrating CSR into the business models of Indian startups



Source: Authors' construction based on Carroll (1991), Porter and Kramer (2011), Hockerts and Wüstenhagen (2010) and Bocken et al. (2014).

Combining these perspectives, the study proposes an integration framework with five linked elements (Figure 1). External CSR drivers, including corporate CSR budgets under Section 135, value-chain disclosure required by SEBI's Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR), ESG-oriented investors and conscious customers, create demand for responsible practice. Founder values and governance determine whether that demand is internalised or treated as marketing. The sustainable business model is the point of integration, where social and environmental value is designed into the proposition, operations and revenue logic. Social impact practices are the observable behaviours that follow. Triple-bottom-line outcomes, if they can be demonstrated, return to the start of the chain by attracting CSR partnerships, impact capital and customers. The chain is not automatic: limited resources, weak impact measurement, mission drift, greenwashing and compliance cost can each weaken it.

3. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study pursues four objectives:

- (i) to trace the policy and regulatory architecture that links CSR with the startup ecosystem in India;
- (ii) to examine the current scale and direction of the startup, CSR and impact-funding landscape;
- (iii) to identify the sustainable business-model archetypes and social impact practices adopted by Indian startups; and
- (iv) to identify the constraints that limit integration and suggest policy and managerial responses.

The design is exploratory and descriptive, relying on secondary data and documentary analysis. Four categories of sources were used. The first comprises official data from DPIIT, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, including Press Information Bureau releases and replies in Parliament up to September 2026, and the National CSR Portal. The second comprises regulatory instruments: the Companies Act, 2013 and the Companies (CSR Policy) Amendment Rules, 2021; SEBI circulars on BRSR (2021) and BRSR Core (2023); the framework for the Social Stock Exchange; and the DPIIT' gazette notification G.S.R. 108(E) of February 2026. The third comprises market data on funding from Tracxn's India Tech Annual Funding Report 2025 and India Climate Tech 2026 Report, the Impact Investors Council's review of impact investment in 2025, and PRIME Database's analysis of CSR by NSE-listed companies. The fourth is peer-reviewed research on CSR, sustainable entrepreneurship and sustainable business models, selected for conceptual relevance and, where possible, Indian evidence.

Business-model archetypes were identified by grouping startups according to where social or environmental value sits in the business model, following Bocken et al. (2014). Illustrative ventures were chosen from publicly documented cases to show each archetype, not to represent the population. The integration intensity scores reported in Figure 5 are the authors' qualitative assessment on a five-point scale, based on the documentary evidence, and are intended as a heuristic for

comparison rather than a measurement. Figures were cross-checked across at least two sources where possible, and all ratios are the authors' calculations from the cited figures. Because the data are secondary and relate to different periods, the findings are interpreted as indicative associations rather than causal effects.

4. POLICY ARCHITECTURE: WHERE CSR MEETS THE STARTUP ECOSYSTEM

The institutional environment relevant to sustainable startups combines rules that impose responsibility on large companies with schemes that support new ventures. Table 1 summarises the principal components. The common logic is that regulation creates a pool of corporate money and a demand for responsible supply chains, while startup policy lowers the cost of building ventures that can meet that demand.

Table 1. Policy and regulatory components linking CSR and startups in India

Component	Scope / applicability	Relevance to startups	Key concern
Section 135, Companies Act (2013; amended 2021)	Net worth $\geq$ ₹500 cr, turnover $\geq$ ₹1,000 cr or net profit $\geq$ ₹5 cr; 2% of average net profit	Most startups below threshold; large corporates become CSR partners and funders	Spending concentrated in a few states and sectors
Schedule VII, item (ix)	Contributions to incubators and R&D in science, technology, engineering and medicine funded by government	Channels CSR money into incubators that support impact startups	Restricted to government-supported incubators
SEBI BRSR (2021) and BRSR Core (2023)	Top 1,000 listed companies; value-chain disclosure phased in	Large buyers seek suppliers with verifiable ESG data	Reporting burden on small suppliers
Social Stock Exchange (SEBI framework, 2022)	Not-for-profit and for-profit social enterprises	New route to raise capital against measured impact	Few listings; costly impact audit
Startup India, FFS, SISFS, CGSS	DPIIT-recognised startups	Seed grants, fund-of-funds capital and credit guarantees	Impact not a selection criterion
DPIIT notification G.S.R. 108(E) (Feb 2026)	Turnover cap ₹200 cr (₹300 cr Deep Tech); cooperatives eligible	Longer runway for climate and deep-tech ventures	Benefits still tied to age and turnover

Source: Compiled from the Companies Act, 2013; MCA CSR Rules; SEBI circulars (2021, 2022, 2023); DPIIT notifications (2026).

Two features stand out. First, the legal architecture places the CSR obligation on large companies while leaving startups free to define their own responsibility. This means that integration in startups is voluntary and strategic, not compliance-driven, which fits the sustainable-entrepreneurship view that responsibility can be a source of opportunity. Second, the rules that could connect the two worlds are narrow. Schedule VII permits CSR contributions to incubators only where they are funded by government bodies, and BRSR value-chain disclosure is still being phased in. The bridge exists, but it is thin.

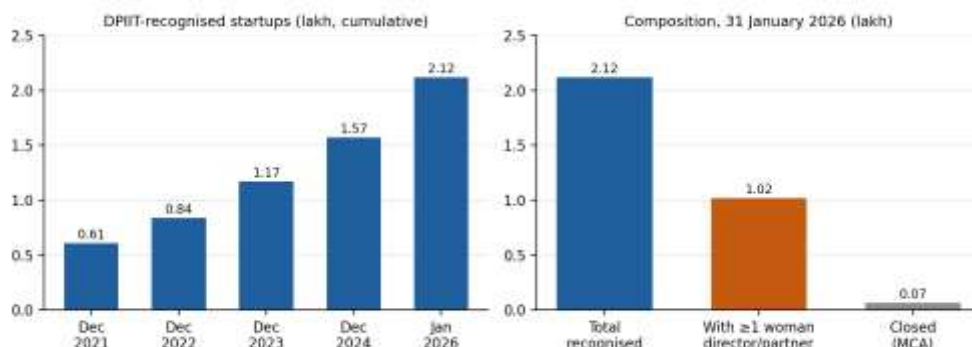
5. SCALE AND TRENDS: STARTUPS, CSR AND IMPACT CAPITAL

5.1 The startup ecosystem

The number of recognised startups has grown rapidly. DPIIT recognition rose from about 61,000 at the end of 2021 to 2,12,283 by 31 January 2026 (Figure 2), and official data released in June 2026 put direct employment in recognised startups at about 23.4 lakh. Diversity has also improved. Of the recognised entities, 1,02,054, or about 48%, have at least one woman director or partner, and as of January 2026 only 6,789 had been recorded as closed by the MCA, a closure ratio of about 3.2%

on the recognised base (authors' calculation). This low figure should be read carefully, because many inactive firms are not formally struck off, but it indicates that the recognised population is large and still expanding.

Figure 2. Growth and composition of DPIIT-recognised startups, 2021–2026



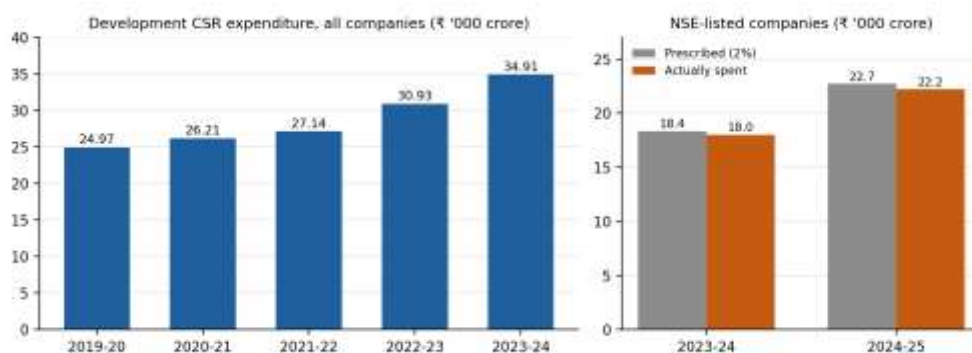
Source: Authors' compilation from DPIIT and Ministry of Commerce and Industry releases; PIB (17 March 2026). Values for 2021–2024 are approximate year-end figures.

Funding has become more selective. Tracxn reports that Indian technology startups raised about US\$10.5 billion in 2025, lower than in the peak years of 2021 and 2022, even as India remained the third most-funded ecosystem globally. Investors have moved toward ventures with clearer paths to revenue, which matters for sustainable startups: an impact proposition must now be accompanied by credible unit economics.

5.2 CSR expenditure and its concentration

Mandatory CSR has created a large and growing pool of social capital. MCA filings show development CSR expenditure rising from ₹24,965.82 crore in 2019-20 to ₹34,908.75 crore in 2023-24, an increase of about 40% in four years (Figure 3). Among NSE-listed companies, PRIME Database reports that spending rose 23% to ₹22,212 crore in 2024-25 against a prescribed amount of ₹22,732 crore, with ₹3,223 crore transferred to unspent CSR accounts for ongoing projects. The pool is concentrated. Earlier analyses of listed-company CSR found that environmental projects received only about 3% of spending and that aspirational districts received a similar small share, while education, health and rural development dominated. Environmental, livelihood and technology-for-development themes, in which impact startups operate, therefore remain under-funded, and most CSR still flows as project grants suited to non-profits rather than commercial ventures.

Figure 3. CSR expenditure by Indian companies



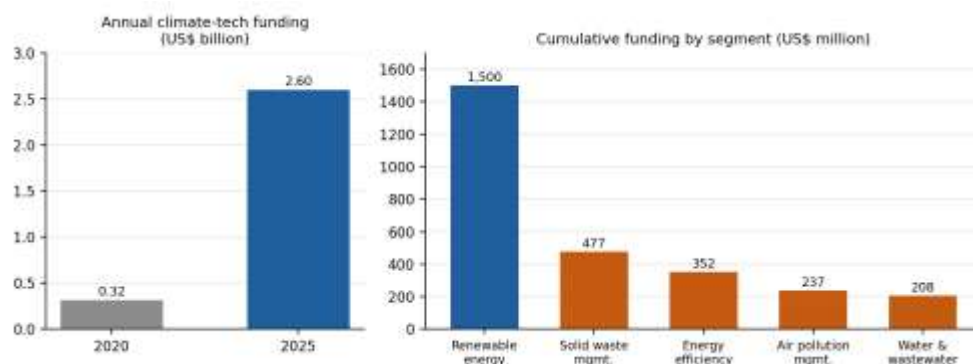
Source: MCA reply in Rajya Sabha, PIB (10 February 2026); PRIME Database Group (April 2026) for NSE-listed companies.

5.3 Climate and impact capital

Alongside CSR, private capital has begun to reward sustainability-oriented business models directly. Tracxn's India Climate Tech 2026 Report finds that Indian climate-technology firms have raised about US\$12.8 billion cumulatively across 1,583 funded companies, and that annual funding rose from about US\$315 million in 2020 to US\$2.6 billion in 2025 (Figure 4).

Renewable energy accounts for the largest segment at US\$1.5 billion, followed by solid waste management, energy efficiency, air-pollution management and water. The Impact Investors Council reports that US\$5.29 billion of equity was invested in 256 impact-driven enterprises in 2025, across agriculture, climate, education, financial inclusion and health care. Table 2 reports the key indicators.

Figure 4. Climate-technology funding in India



Source: Tracxn, India Climate Tech 2026 Report (June 2026), as reported by Down To Earth.

Table 2. Key indicators of the startup, CSR and impact-capital landscape (latest available)

Indicator	Value	Reference date
DPIIT-recognised startups	2,12,283	31 Jan 2026
Startups with at least one woman director/partner	1,02,054 ($\approx 48\%$)	31 Jan 2026
Recognised startups recorded as closed (MCA)	6,789 ($\approx 3.2\%$)	31 Jan 2026
Development CSR expenditure, all companies	₹34,908.75 crore	FY 2023-24
CSR spent by NSE-listed companies	₹22,212 crore	FY 2024-25
Cumulative CSR, 2019-20 to 2023-24	> ₹1.44 lakh crore	Feb 2026
Indian tech startup funding	$\approx$ US\$10.5 billion	2025
Annual climate-tech funding	$\approx$ US\$2.6 billion	2025
Impact equity investment	US\$5.29 billion in 256 enterprises	2025

Source: DPIIT/PIB (2026); MCA/PIB (2026); PRIME Database (2026); Tracxn (2025, 2026); Impact Investors Council (2026).

6. SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS-MODEL ARCHETYPES AMONG INDIAN STARTUPS

The documentary evidence points to five recurring archetypes, distinguished by where social or environmental value sits in the business model (Table 3). In each case the responsible element is not an add-on but the reason customers pay.

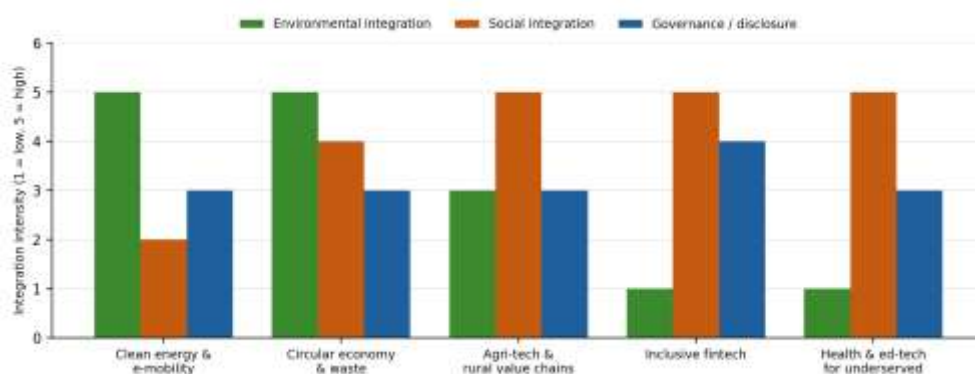
Table 3. Sustainable business-model archetypes and illustrative Indian startups

Archetype	Where impact is embedded	Revenue logic	Illustrative ventures
Clean energy and e-mobility	Product substitutes fossil-fuel use	Asset sales, leasing, pay-per-use	Ecozen (solar cold storage and pumps), Yulu (shared e-mobility)
Circular economy and waste	Waste converted into a resource; recycling traceability	Commissions, material sales, EPR compliance services	Recykal (recycling marketplace), Phool (temple-flower upcycling)
Agri-tech and rural value chains	Market access, inputs and advisory for smallholders	Input margins, output trading, platform fees	DeHaat (full-stack farmer platform)
Inclusive fintech	Credit, savings and insurance for underserved users	Interest spread, fees, partner commissions	Micro-lending and rural digital payments ventures
Health and ed-tech for underserved	Low-cost access to care or learning	Low-price subscriptions, B2G and CSR contracts	Tele-diagnostics and vernacular learning ventures

Source: Authors' classification following Bocken et al. (2014); ventures drawn from publicly available company information and are illustrative only.

Two patterns emerge from the archetypes. Where the environmental benefit is the product, as in clean energy, e-mobility and recycling, integration is deep on the environmental dimension but may be thinner on the social dimension, for example in the working conditions of informal waste pickers or gig riders. Where the social benefit is the product, as in agri-tech, inclusive finance, health and education, integration is deep on the social dimension but environmental practice is often unexamined. Governance and disclosure are generally moderate across all archetypes, because few startups are required to report and most lack the systems to do so (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Integration intensity by business-model archetype



Source: Authors' qualitative assessment based on documentary evidence (1 = low, 5 = high); indicative only.

The circular-economy archetype shows the most balanced profile, because recycling ventures that formalise informal collectors create both environmental and livelihood value. This is consistent with Porter and Kramer's (2011) argument that shared value is greatest when a firm redefines productivity in its value chain rather than simply selling a greener product.

7. SOCIAL IMPACT PRACTICES AND CHANNELS OF CSR INTEGRATION

Viewed at the level of practice, integration appears as a set of behaviours that go beyond the core product. Table 4 maps the main practice dimensions against the observed pattern, the driver behind it and the risk it carries.

Table 4. Social impact practices of Indian sustainable startups

Practice dimension	Observed pattern	Driver	Risk
Environmental operations	Energy-efficient offices, reduced packaging, EV-based logistics	Cost saving; investor and customer expectations	Claims not verified; greenwashing
Inclusive employment	Women, rural youth and persons with disabilities hired and trained	Founder values; talent availability; incentives	Gig and contract work without social protection
Supply-chain inclusion	Sourcing from farmers, artisans, waste pickers and SHGs	Core model; BRSR demand from large buyers	Price pressure passes risk to suppliers
Community engagement	Awareness drives, skills training, local partnerships	Legitimacy; CSR co-funding	Seen as marketing if unlinked to the model
Governance and ethics	ESG policies, impact reports, mission statements in articles	Impact investors; SSE listing; later IPO	Mission drift during scale-up
Impact measurement	Outcome metrics (tonnes diverted, farmers served, loans issued)	Funding due diligence	No common standard; costly audits

Source: Authors' analysis based on Jenkins (2006), Bocken et al. (2014), SEBI BRSR framework and published startup impact reports.

Four channels connect these practices with corporate CSR. The first is **CSR-funded incubation**: companies may direct CSR money to government-supported incubators, which in turn fund and mentor impact startups, often through themed challenges in clean energy, agriculture or health. The second is **value-chain procurement**: as large listed companies begin to report value-chain ESG data under BRSR, they have reasons to buy from suppliers who can document responsible practice, which rewards startups that measure impact. The third is **impact capital**: impact investors and climate funds, including corporate venture arms, finance startups whose proposition aligns with sustainability goals. The fourth is **social-sector finance**, including the Social Stock Exchange and blended-finance structures that combine CSR grants with commercial capital to de-risk early-stage ventures.

Each channel carries its own friction. Incubator funding is limited to government-supported entities. BRSR value-chain disclosure is still phasing in and may impose reporting costs that small suppliers cannot bear. Impact capital remains concentrated in a few large deals and cities. The Social Stock Exchange has seen few listings because impact assessment is expensive relative to the amounts raised. As a result, much of the ₹35,000-crore annual CSR pool continues to flow to conventional grant projects rather than to ventures that could deliver impact at scale.

8. SYNTHESIS OF EVIDENCE

The research on mandatory CSR in India helps explain why large companies and startups relate to responsibility differently. Dharmapala and Khanna (2018) find that the Section 135 mandate increased CSR spending among firms just above the threshold, while some firms just below it reduced spending, suggesting that compliance rather than strategy drove behaviour. Manchiraju and Rajgopal (2017) report that the announcement of the mandate reduced shareholder value for affected firms, consistent with the view that mandated spending imposes a cost when it is disconnected from strategy. Gatti et al. (2019) argue that mandatory CSR changes the meaning of responsibility from a voluntary commitment to a quasi-tax. Table 5 summarises these and related studies.

Table 5. Synthesis of selected evidence on CSR and sustainable entrepreneurship

Study	Setting / design	Key finding	Relevance to Indian startups
Dharmapala & Khanna (2018)	India; regression discontinuity at CSR threshold	Mandate raised spending above threshold; some firms below cut spending	Compliance-driven CSR differs from strategic integration
Manchiraju & Rajgopal (2017)	India; event study of listed firms	Mandate announcement lowered shareholder value	CSR detached from strategy is costly
Hockerts & Wüstenhagen (2010)	Conceptual; industry evolution	New ventures pioneer sustainability; incumbents scale it	Startups as 'Davids' partnering with CSR-rich 'Goliaths'
Bocken et al. (2014)	Review; archetype development	Eight sustainable business-model archetypes	Basis for classifying Indian startup models
Jenkins (2006)	UK SMEs; qualitative	Small-firm CSR is informal and owner-driven	Founder values central in startups
Ebrahim et al. (2014)	Hybrid organisations; conceptual	Mission drift under commercial pressure	Risk as impact startups raise growth capital

Source: Compiled by the authors from the cited studies.

Three conclusions follow. First, CSR creates value when it is part of strategy and not a separate budget. Startups have an advantage here, because they can design responsibility into their model from the beginning rather than retrofitting it. Second, CSR in small firms is informal and closely tied to the founder (Jenkins, 2006), which means that governance mechanisms such as mission statements in company articles, independent directors and impact reporting become important as the founder's direct control weakens. Third, the hybrid nature of sustainable startups exposes them to mission drift. As they raise larger rounds from investors focused on growth, pressure to relax social or environmental commitments increases, and the absence of legal forms such as the benefit corporation in India leaves these commitments dependent on contracts and investor goodwill.

9. DISCUSSION

The evidence suggests that CSR integration in Indian startups works best when three conditions are met: the social or environmental benefit is what the customer pays for, the startup can show evidence of that benefit, and some external actor, whether a corporate buyer, a CSR partner or an impact investor, rewards it. India has made considerable progress on the first condition. The growth of climate, circular-economy, agri-tech and inclusive-finance ventures shows that entrepreneurs increasingly see social and environmental problems as markets. Progress on the second condition is limited. Few startups measure outcomes consistently, and those that do use their own metrics, which makes comparison and verification difficult. The third condition is the weakest link. Large companies spend heavily on CSR and are beginning to report on their value chains, but the rules and practices that would route this money and demand toward startups remain narrow.

A second issue is the balance between dimensions. The archetype analysis shows that integration is often one-sided: environmental ventures may neglect labour conditions, and social ventures may neglect environmental footprint. A mature form of CSR integration would address both, as the triple-bottom-line framework implies. A third issue is scale. Startups that integrate CSR successfully at an early stage face their hardest test during rapid growth, when unit costs, investor expectations and competition all push toward trade-offs. The low closure rate among recognised startups is encouraging, but survival alone does not show whether impact commitments have survived.

10. POLICY AND MANAGERIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Widen the CSR–startup bridge.** Amend Schedule VII to allow CSR contributions to accredited private incubators and impact-focused alternative investment funds, with safeguards against related-party use.

- **Create a simple impact-reporting standard for small firms.** A lite BRSR template for startups and MSMEs, aligned with the metrics large buyers must report, would lower the cost of joining responsible value chains.
- **Use public schemes to reward impact.** Give additional weight to measurable social or environmental outcomes in selection under the Startup India Seed Fund and Fund of Funds, and in government procurement from startups.
- **Make the Social Stock Exchange usable.** Subsidise impact assessment for first-time issuers and allow pooled listings of small social enterprises.
- **Protect the mission during scale-up.** Founders should write social and environmental purpose into company articles and shareholder agreements, and policymakers should consider a benefit-company legal form.
- **Balance the triple bottom line.** Environmental ventures should adopt fair-work standards for gig and informal workers, and social ventures should measure their environmental footprint.
- **Measure outcomes, not intentions.** Startups should report a small set of verifiable outcome indicators each year; CSR partners should fund the cost of this measurement.

11. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has four principal limitations. First, it relies on secondary data from different sources and periods, which limits comparability and rules out causal inference. Second, official data describe the number, funding and composition of startups but not their social or environmental practices, so the archetype analysis rests on publicly documented cases that may over-represent successful and well-publicised ventures. Third, the integration-intensity scores are qualitative judgements and should be treated as heuristic. Fourth, company impact reports and media sources are produced by interested parties and have been interpreted accordingly.

Future research could survey founders across several cities and sectors to measure CSR integration directly and to test its association with survival, growth and access to capital. Structural equation modelling could examine the paths in the proposed framework, from CSR drivers through governance and business-model design to triple-bottom-line outcomes. Longitudinal case studies could follow startups through funding rounds to observe whether and how mission drift occurs. Comparative work on firms that supply BRSR-reporting companies could test whether value-chain disclosure is changing supplier behaviour.

CONCLUSION

Indian startups are showing that corporate social responsibility need not be a cost imposed after profit is made. In the most promising ventures, responsibility is designed into the business model itself: the product displaces fossil fuel, the platform connects smallholders to markets, the recycling chain formalises informal workers. The national context supports this shift, with more than two lakh recognised startups, a rapidly growing CSR pool of about ₹35,000 crore a year, and rising climate and impact capital. The same evidence shows that integration is uneven and fragile. It is often confined to one dimension of the triple bottom line, poorly measured, and exposed to mission drift as startups scale, while the channels that could connect mandated corporate CSR with sustainable ventures remain narrow. The central implication is that India's next step is not to create more rules for startups, but to connect the responsibility it already requires of large companies with the ventures that are building responsibility into their business models.

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