

# **Narratives of Change: A Study of CSR Initiatives in Indian Textiles Sector**

**Kislaya Choudhary**

**National Institute of Fashion Technology, Mumbai, India  
kislaya.choudhary@nift.ac.in**

## **ABSTRACT**

The textile manufacturing industry forms the foundation of the global fashion supply chain by contributing to material creation and manufacturing. The Indian textile industry employs 45 million people directly, as well as an additional 60 million indirectly through allied industries (IIAD, 2024). This research aims to explore the role of the evolution of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in fostering sustainable communities in India, using the Welspun Foundation's initiatives within the textile sector as a case study. The study will look into three main research questions. Using local community knowledge to transform textile production into a more sustainable approach is the first research question. The second is how telling experiential stories can help people understand each other and their culture. And the third is how powerful corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs can be in promoting inclusion and ethical decision-making practices.

The research approach to CSR exemplifies how businesses can contribute to sustainable development by deeply engaging with local communities. By training artisans in sustainable textile practices, CSR initiatives in India blend traditional craftsmanship with modern sustainability techniques, preserving cultural heritage while enhancing livelihoods. The research will delve into authentic storytelling and community engagement, reshaping textile processes. By engaging local artisans and women, the foundation challenges the global textile and fashion industry's often exploitative practices, encouraging a model of responsible production. These stories serve as powerful educational tools, illustrating the positive impact of sustainable practices on individuals and communities.

Through a detailed case study of the CSR activities taken up as an industry attachment by the researcher, this research will contribute to a broader understanding of how textile industry initiatives can drive sustainable development at a community level. This study's research methodology entails conducting first-hand interviews with women and key individuals involved in various community engagements. This approach allows for the direct collection of qualitative data from individuals actively involved in and impacted by these initiatives, ensuring that their perspectives and experiences are represented in the analysis. The findings will discuss insights for stakeholders in

the textile sector, emphasizing the need for inclusive, ethical practices that honour and elevate local cultural narratives.

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainable Communities, Textile Industry, Local Communities, Authentic Storytelling, Cultural Narratives, Ethical Making Practices.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The National Institute of Fashion Technology provides faculty with an industrial attachment opportunity, allowing them to visit and work with industry for two to six weeks, with the aim of advancing their learnings in terms of industry upgrades (NIFT, 2012). In the year 2024, an industry attachment was undertaken by the researcher with the department of Sustainability and CSR at Welspun Living Ltd. to gather a descriptive account of the socio-environmental initiatives taken up by the economically focused industrial landscape in India.

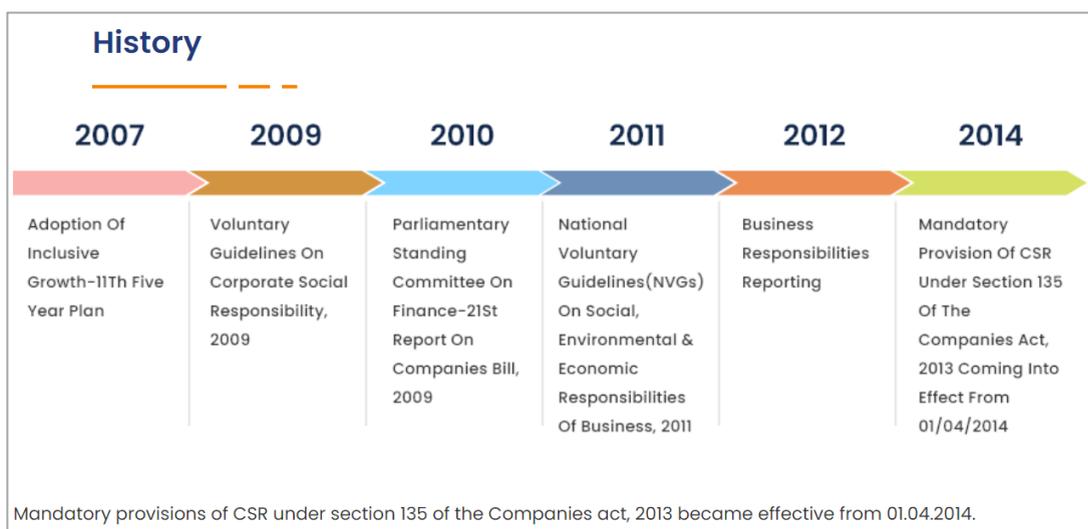
## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review first discusses the evolution of corporate social responsibility in India before delving into the concept of community engagement. We have considered various CSR initiatives, including those of Arvind Ltd., Aditya Birla Group, and Welspun Living. However, we conducted a detailed analysis of the Welspun Case Studies to establish a central focus for this research.

### **Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility in India: Engaging Local Communities in the Textile Industry**

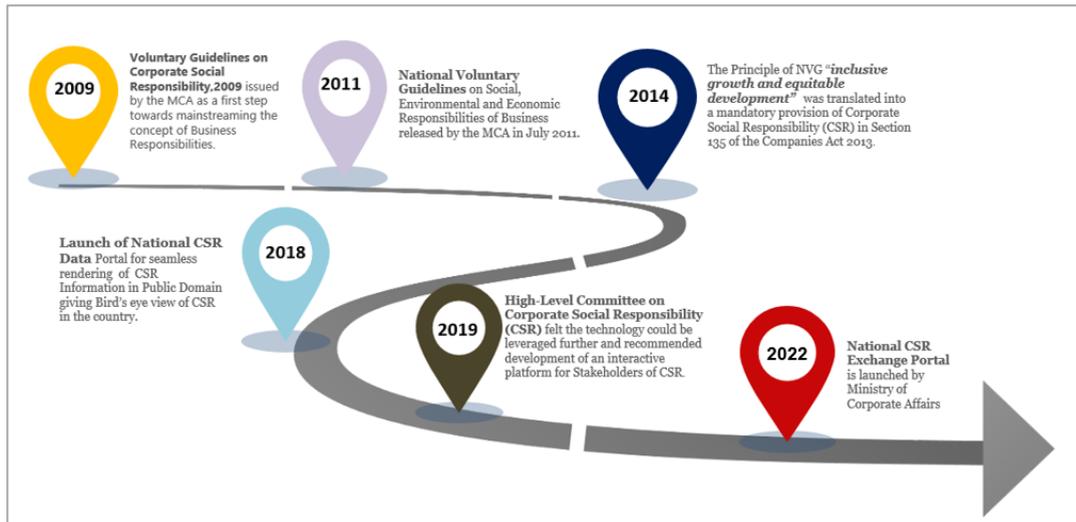
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India has undergone significant evolution, particularly within the textile industry, which is a vital sector of the Indian economy. This evolution reflects broader changes in corporate governance, community engagement, and sustainable development practices. The integration of CSR initiatives with local community development has become a hallmark of modern business strategy, particularly in the textile industry. The early stages of CSR in the Indian textile industry were characterized by philanthropic activities led by prominent business families such as the Tatas and Birlas. Moral obligations and a sense of social duty largely drove these early efforts. Initiatives included providing housing, healthcare, and education for workers and their families, although these were informal and lacked strategic frameworks (Gupta, 2014). Following India's independence, industrial policies and social welfare schemes provided a foundation for more structured CSR activities. The textile industry's CSR efforts began aligning with national development goals, particularly in rural areas where many textile mills were located. Companies engaged local communities through initiatives aimed at improving living standards, promoting education, and enhancing healthcare (Kumar & Devi,

2017). The economic liberalization of the 1990s was a pivotal moment for CSR in India. With increased global competition and the entry of multinational corporations, Indian textile companies faced new pressures to adhere to international standards of corporate governance and social responsibility. This period saw a shift from ad-hoc philanthropic activities to more strategic CSR initiatives, focusing on sustainability and community development (Ghosh, 2003). A significant milestone in the evolution of CSR in India was the enactment of the Companies Act, 2013. This legislation mandated that companies meeting certain financial criteria spend at least 2% of their average net profits over the previous three years on CSR activities (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, 2013). This law formalized CSR practices and ensured that companies in the textile sector actively engaged with local communities.



**Fig 1: CSR Evolution in India**

Several case studies illustrate the effective engagement of local communities through CSR in the Indian textile industry: Welspun India's Spun Project: This initiative focuses on creating sustainable employment opportunities for women in rural areas through the production of handcrafted textiles, promoting economic empowerment and preserving traditional crafts (Welspun India, 2021). Arvind Limited's Rural Development Programs: Arvind has implemented comprehensive rural development programs, including water management projects, agricultural support, and education initiatives, significantly impacting local communities (Arvind Limited, 2020).



**Fig 2: CSR Evolution in India (Recent)**

### **Strategic Community Engagement**

Today's CSR practices in the Indian textile industry emphasize strategic engagement with local communities. Companies have adopted various models to integrate community development into their business strategies. These include sustainable livelihoods, education and skill development, healthcare initiatives, and environmental sustainability. Organizations such as Arvind Limited and Welspun India have initiated programs to create sustainable livelihoods for local communities, focusing on skill development, vocational training, and entrepreneurship (Arvind Limited, 2020; Welspun India, 2021). Various textile companies have launched educational initiatives, built schools, and provided scholarships. These efforts aim to improve access to quality education and enhance employability through skill development programs (Chatterjee, 2018). CSR activities in healthcare range from setting up medical camps and mobile health units to establishing hospitals and health centers. These initiatives aim to improve healthcare access and outcomes for local communities (Patil & Shirke, 2018). Textile companies are increasingly focusing on environmental sustainability as part of their CSR strategies. Initiatives include water conservation projects, waste management programs, and the adoption of eco-friendly production practices (Singh & Misra, 2020). The evolution of CSR in the Indian textile industry reflects a broader shift toward more structured, strategic, and sustainable practices. From philanthropic beginnings to mandatory CSR spending, the industry has increasingly recognized the importance of engaging local communities. This engagement not only enhances corporate reputation but also contributes to the socio-economic development of the regions where these companies operate.

### **METHODOLOGY**

As part of the FIA (faculty industry attachment) objectives, the faculty conducted qualitative research on the endorsement aspect of sustainable practices by women beneficiaries' communities who are directly and indirectly associated with the textile

industry.

The following methodology was incorporated to conduct this research.

<p><b>Secondary research</b> Study of Online resources &amp; literature on Sustainability &amp; CSR Welspun Reports on Sustainability Secondary references shared by SPUN</p>
<p><b>Primary research</b> Interaction with team leaders and field staff Interaction and discussions with women beneficiaries (local community)</p>
<p><b>Analysis</b> The analysis of this research is a descriptive account of first-hand experiences and insights shared by the key team leaders, field staff and women beneficiaries from local community.</p>

**Fig 3:** Qualitative Discussions with the beneficiaries of the Sustainability & CSR initiatives by Welspun Foundation

### Bilingual Questionnaire for Women Stakeholders

We prepared open-ended questions and translated them into the local language, taking into account the qualitative nature of the proposed research. An expert, representing regional community languages from Welspun Foundation Anjar, joined this research to facilitate the interviews. We designed the questions to spark informal conversations, potentially steering them toward instances of transformation women have undergone and their future prospects.

<p><b>Objectives of the Research</b></p> <p>Through a detailed case study of the CSR activities taken up as an industry attachment by the researcher, this research will contribute to a broader understanding of how textile industry initiatives can drive sustainable development at a community level. This study's research methodology entails conducting first-hand interviews with women and key individuals involved in various community engagements. This approach allows for the direct collection of qualitative data from individuals actively involved in and impacted by these initiatives, ensuring that their perspectives and experiences are represented in the analysis. The findings will discuss insights for stakeholders in the textile sector, emphasizing the need for inclusive, ethical practices that honour and elevate local cultural narratives.</p> <p>शोधकर्ता द्वारा उद्योग संलग्नक के रूप में की गई सीएसआर गतिविधियों के एक विस्तृत केस स्टडी के माध्यम से, यह शोध इस बात की व्यापक समझ में योगदान देगा कि कपड़ा उद्योग की पहल सामुदायिक स्तर पर सतत विकास को कैसे चला सकती है। इस अध्ययन की शोध पद्धति में महिलाओं और विभिन्न सामुदायिक जुड़ावों में शामिल प्रमुख व्यक्तियों के साथ प्रत्यक्ष साक्षात्कार करना शामिल है। यह दृष्टिकोण इन पक्षों में सक्रिय रूप से शामिल और प्रभावित व्यक्तियों से गुणात्मक डेटा के प्रत्यक्ष संकलन की अनुमति देता है, यह सुनिश्चित करते हुए कि विवेचन में उनके दृष्टिकोण और अनुभवों का प्रतिनिधित्व किया गया है। निष्कर्ष कपड़ा क्षेत्र में हितधारकों के लिए अंतर्दृष्टि पर चर्चा करेंगे, जिसमें समावेशी, नैतिक प्रथाओं की आवश्यकता पर जोर दिया जाएगा जो स्थानीय सांस्कृतिक आदतों का सम्मान और उन्नयन करते हैं।</p> <p><b>हिंदी में प्रश्नावली</b></p> <p>1. हमें अपने बारे में, नाम की उम्र, गाँव, प्राथमिक और माध्यमिक व्यवसाय के बारे में कुछ बताएं। Tell us something about yourself, name age, village, primary and secondary occupation उत्तर .....</p> <p>2. वेलस्पन फाउंडेशन से आपको क्या, कितने समय का प्रशिक्षण मिला है ? What is the training you have received from Welspun foundation and duration. उत्तर .....</p>	<p>3. प्रशिक्षण और विशेषज्ञों के साथ बातचीत के बाद आपने क्या बदलाव अनुभव किए हैं? What are the changes you have experienced after the training and interaction with the experts उत्तर .....</p> <p>4. आपने एक-दूसरे से क्या सीखा है और कृपया एक यादगार कहानी साझा करें What have you learned from each other and please share a memorable story उत्तर .....</p> <p>5. अपने समुदाय के लिए आपका दृष्टिकोण क्या है? What is your vision for your community उत्तर .....</p>
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**Fig 4:** Qualitative Discussions with the beneficiaries of the Sustainability & CSR initiatives by Welspun Foundation

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

As part of the FIA (faculty industry attachment) objectives, the researcher conducted qualitative research on the endorsement aspect of sustainable practices by women beneficiaries' communities who are directly and indirectly associated with the textile industry and are a part of the local community.

This research will contribute to a broader understanding of how textile industry initiatives can drive sustainable development at a community level, through a detailed case study of the CSR activities the researcher took up as an industry attachment. This study's research methodology entails conducting firsthand interviews with women and key individuals involved in various community engagements. This approach allows for the direct collection of qualitative data from individuals actively involved in and impacted by these initiatives, ensuring that their perspectives and experiences are represented in the analysis. The findings will discuss insights for stakeholders in the textile sector, emphasizing the need for inclusive, ethical practices that honour and elevate local cultural narratives.

### **Case Study: Sustainability & Design Analysis**

We conducted face-to-face interviews with the team leaders of Design, Sustainability, and CSR to gather insights and understand the role of design for sustainability. The origin point of the textile industry is farming and water supply. Understanding the sustainability goals requires connecting all the dots of natural and human resources. Design plays an integral role in the implementation of sustainable systems, products, and endorsements. SPUN, established in 2014, aimed to support communities and women affected by the 2001 Bhuj earthquake. Welspun India Ltd. collaborated with local craftswomen to support their recovery and find new livelihoods. SPUN explores sustainability while honouring the regional crafts knowledge of communities. The initiative produces artisanal products inspired by integrating traditional knowledge in sustainable systems and designs (SPUN, 2014). Recognized as one of the world's top 100 corporate-ready social enterprises, SPUN employs over 2200 women. Through partnerships such as IKEA, Spun created sustainable products made from recycled materials. The MÄVINN collection is a good example of the integration of regional skills and sustainable community engagement (Social Entrepreneurship, IKEA 2024). The various examples of such partnerships include hand-quilted patchwork bedspreads by John Lewis, the Vardande collection by IKEA, and hand patchwork quilts by John Lewis. These projects by SPUN foster empowerment by providing employment opportunities for the local women community, utilizing textile waste, and incorporating indigenous practices.

### **Case Study: Socio-economic-environmental Narratives from the Community Stakeholders**

During the interaction, the women from Anjar village described how the CSR initiatives

by Welspun Group have created modes of empowerment through education and training in agriculture, water, and waste management. The local schools have become community centers for training and learning. The CSR field representatives provide support to the local community regarding various government initiatives and identify training requirements. The respondents were women in the age group from 23 to 48. Through the discussions, we gained an understanding of the support environment that CSR creates for women who do not work in factories. These women, who were at home, represented a diverse range of educational backgrounds and circumstances. Women believed they could make a difference but didn't know where to start or who to ask for help. The CSR initiatives encompassed environmental concerns such as water conservation and the cleaning and maintenance of local water bodies. Purification of soil and maintaining excellent health and hygiene for local communities were also their top priorities. Therefore, women emerged as a significant stakeholder in these initiatives. They entrusted the improvised water bodies and soil maintenance to the local communities. We conducted online interviews with about ten women and reached out to fifteen more through field studies.

Through initiatives such as WelKrishi (agriculture), Wel Netrutava (leadership), Wel Prakarti (nature), and Wel Shiksha (education), Welspun CSR teams have formed a relationship with the local ecosystem and people. Through the Wel Netratutva initiative, women's health, hygiene, and skill development certification programs are run year-round in community centers. Micro-finance schemes and self-help group formation have been extended to women from regional villages as entrepreneurship support. These trainings include areas such as health and nutrition, organic vegetable farming, and food and craft-based skills.

Here is a descriptive account of the conversations with women beneficiaries of Anjar village and Vapi. Kamla Ben from Anjar village says, 'The knowledge of locally produced spices helped me set up a home-grown business with training.' Asmita Kumar Kadwe (age 23), the youngest member, shares her knowledge of tribal recipes and highlights the local workers' fondness for these dishes. She adds, "The CSR team helped me set up a local canteen (Swadeshi Bhojnalaya) with tribal food as their main USP." Today, the women successfully operate this canteen, with assistance from the village's female vegetable farmers, spice makers, and other community members. The factory workers are the main clients. Since local community women are involved in cooking, they ensure good health and hygiene, thereby maintaining a healthy community for both factory workers and their own families. Due to the consistent demand from our factory clientele, our business model is carefully calculated to minimize food waste". Renu Ben, a 33-year-old from Anjar village, shares her story of courage: "It was difficult to enrol in the training programs because the elderly people were not very supportive." However, when I persisted in pursuing my childhood dream of learning stitching, they granted my request. Today, I have acquired the skill of stitching, and with some financial assistance, I have set up my sewing machine at

home and begun producing blouses and dresses for the community. This training has not only equipped me with a new skill, but it has also given me the confidence to communicate effectively. Palli Sorathiya (age 47) from Anjar Sinugara village speaks about training in vermin compost and animal farming to produce milk products. She says that the training of vegetable farming with a weekly module has enabled her to follow sustainability principles in her day-to-day life. She is able to use the training for her family support and self-confidence. She goes on to say, "I learned that there is no age for learning." Bhavna Ben (age 40) from Sinugara village speaks about cultivating the creepers and her growing fondness for the vegetables.

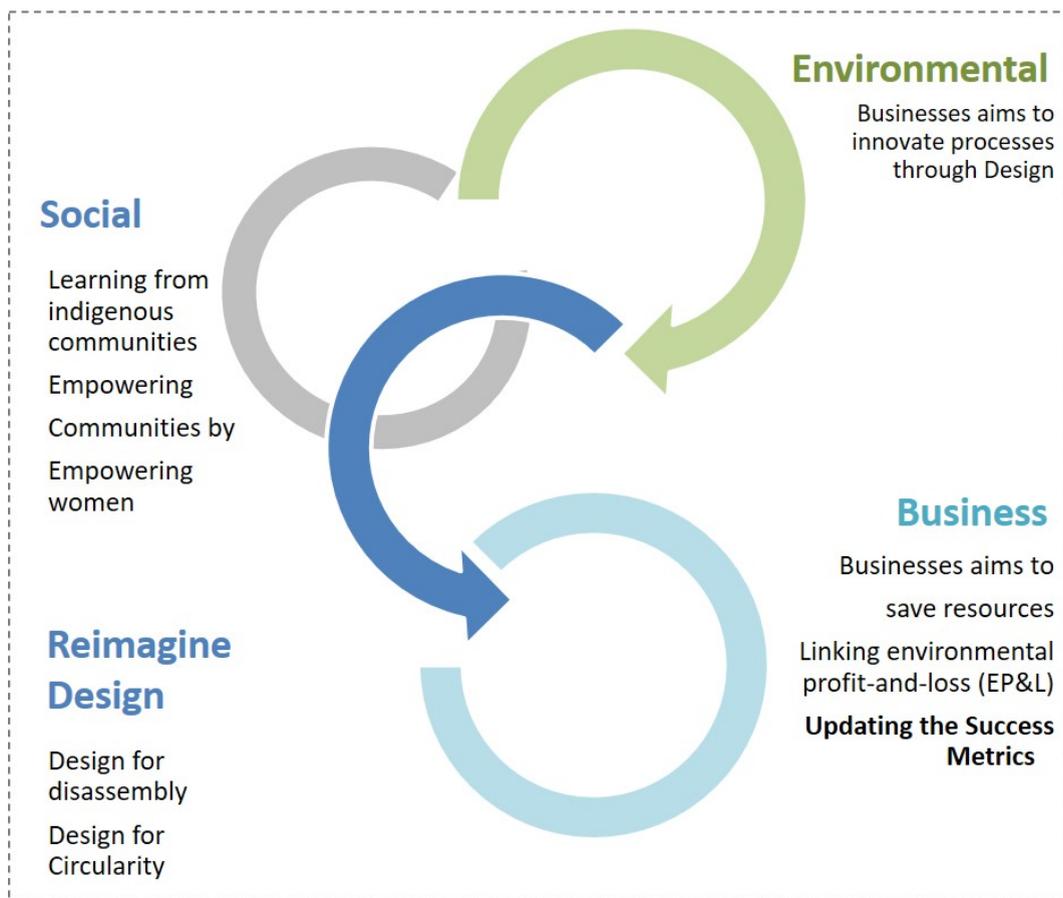


**Fig 5:** Women beneficiaries of the Sustainability & CSR initiatives by Welspun Foundation

(Left top: Stitching, Right Top: Grains & Spices, Left bottom: Vegetable Farming, Right bottom: Swadeshi Food and canteen management)

"When asked about their vision for the community, the women expressed a newfound collective self-assurance. While they aspire for economic prosperity for their families, they also prioritize environmental sustainability. They believe that a strong sense of community empowers them to overcome any adversity." They discuss adversity because they have experienced the earthquake previously. While these stories may be humbling, they also offer valuable insights into providing extended support to allied community groups outside the factory, and ensuring equal opportunities for all genders. These narratives provide additional perspectives on the interconnectedness

of smaller loops, highlighting circularity. This may be referred as the loops of interdependencies with reference to the resources and thoughtful approach. Businesses can aim to innovate through design to achieve enhanced sustainability, given the direct connection between the environment and business. Businesses may aim to link their profit and loss to the environmental scenario and upgrade their success metrics by including all stakeholders. Design for disassembly and design for circularity are the much-needed voices in today's industrial scenario; however, this isn't a circular model but rather a small interconnected loops model where various initiatives will slowly build the path to circularity.



**Fig 6:** Environmental and Social Initiatives

## CONCLUSION

FIA (Faculty industry attachment) is a window of opportunity to exchange knowledge and bring latest industrial exposure to classroom deliverance. This industry interaction was a valuable experience for me as a faculty as I could engage with key leadership management and understood the sustainability initiatives through a primary discussion.

This experience was also very special due to the sustainability is the foundation for initiating design projects. As a researcher and academician; its significant to

understand the complexities while the possibilities for viable solutions.

The textile industry is very complex, functioning as a vital medium for personal expression and cultural identity, and its presence is essential to its existence. While providing employment and economic prospects for a large workforce, the industry also inflicts suffering on the same people it depends on, as well as causing notable environmental consequences across its entire life cycle. The numerous obstacles and implications highlight the importance of establishing a circular/close loop system with allied industries to completely visualize the textile industry. Textiles industry has been identified as a sector with substantial influence to the environmental and social effects and the shared impact it causes to various other sectors. Textile sector also struggles with the transparency in value chain, excessive consumption, waste produce and the need for improved systems and circularity (UNEP, 2022). The European Commission is implementing a right-to-repair initiative to promote a fix-it culture, encourage sustainable product development, and reduce waste and pollution, aligning with the European Green Deal's climate and environmental objectives (Choe, T., Wege, E., & Seidel Wege, A., Deloitte 2023).

However, the interconnectedness of the social stakeholders often goes unnoticed by us. The initiatives under the CSR in India have integrated and touched various points which doesn't seem interconnected as obvious. The local water bodies and its preservation over its exploitation, the revitalization of soil by learning the organic means of farming techniques and establishing a local supply of the seed bank, natural fertilizers, other means to lead a healthy life and provide their families with good quality food. The initiatives also enhance the quality of local schools and introduce community training centers as per the regional requirements to support allied industries, support occupations while ensuring economic stability and social recognition. Such initiatives increase industry's commitment to the regional community and reinstates the people's commitment towards climate and local-preservation of environment, skill and migration. The CSR initiative offers strategic guidance and promotes cooperation through out the entire textile industry to expedite a fair shift towards a sustainable and circular value chain for textiles and fashion while encompassing the welfare of all stakeholders including women and children.

By making sustainability a strategic imperative, not an add-on, it's possible to navigate the risks and opportunities while building long term equity for the brand. Integrating community well-being and resilience for an inclusive growth considering environment, social equity can drive business innovation for a sustainable future.

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Figure1:

<https://www.csr.gov.in/content/csr/global/master/home/aboutcsr/history.html>

Figure 2: [https://www.csrchange.gov.in/Frontend/about\\_us](https://www.csrchange.gov.in/Frontend/about_us)

Figure 5: Shared by Welspun CSR

Figure 3, 4, 6: Researcher