# Role of Corporate Social Responsibility in Advancing Sustainable Development: A Study of Reliance Industries Limited

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#### Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a vital mechanism through which companies contribute to sustainable development and societal well-being. This study analyzes the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives undertaken by Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) during the financial year 2022–23 and assess their alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Using descriptive research design and secondary data sourced from the National CSR Portal and RIL's official CSR report, the analysis highlights that the company exceeded its mandated CSR expenditure, with a major focus on healthcare, education, poverty eradicating hunger and malnutrition. RIL's initiatives addressed 14 out of the 17 SDGs, reflecting a comprehensive approach to sustainable and inclusive growth. The study finds that RIL not only contributes to national development priorities but also demonstrates strong corporate commitment to global sustainability objectives. While the company's efforts are notable, certain areas such as environmental sustainability require greater attention. This research contributes to the growing literature on CSR and sustainability by providing a case-based understanding of how corporate actions can be aligned with global development frameworks.

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Reliance Industries Limited (RIL), Environmental Sustainability

# Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to a broad framework of policies, practices, and programs embedded into an organization's core business functions, supply chains, and decision-

making processes (Jaysawal and Saha, 2015). It functions as a social development initiative encompassing various domains such as education, rural upliftment, environmental sustainability, women's empowerment, healthcare, livelihood promotion, hygiene, access to clean drinking water, and sanitation. CSR also includes key aspects of corporate ethics, governance, and accountability. According to the United Nations and the European Commission, CSR supports the 'triple bottom line' concept—emphasizing profit generation, environmental protection, and the pursuit of social justice (Mathur and Midha, 2012). As defined by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, CSR is "the ongoing commitment by businesses to act ethically and contribute to economic development while enhancing the quality of life of employees, their families, and the broader community and society" (Garg, 2014).

#### **CSR** in India

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India has deep historical roots. In ancient times, the concept was embedded in the cultural and religious tradition of daan (charitable giving). During the Gupta period (320–550 CE), philanthropic activities flourished, with emperors contributing substantial portions of state treasury for the welfare of the public. Indian philosophers like Kautilya, along with their Western contemporaries from the pre-Christian era, emphasized ethical conduct in trade and business. The idea of philanthropy also gained prominence under Mughal rule, particularly during Emperor Akbar's reign, and continued into the British colonial period (Jaysawal and Saha, 2015).

CSR is therefore not a recent development in India. Renowned Indian corporations, such as the Tata Group and Indian Oil Corporation, have a long-standing tradition of engaging in community service, donations, and charitable initiatives. In the modern context, the primary objective of CSR is to enhance a company's positive impact on society and its stakeholders. Increasingly, businesses are integrating CSR policies, practices, and programs into their operational frameworks. Many companies now recognize that CSR is not merely an indirect cost but a strategic tool for building goodwill, safeguarding reputation, and enhancing competitiveness.

To this end, organizations often establish dedicated CSR teams responsible for formulating policies, setting objectives, and managing budgets. These initiatives are usually guided by a well-

defined social philosophy aligned with the company's core business strategy. Employee participation plays a critical role in executing CSR activities, which commonly focus on community development, education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and rural empowerment (Garg, 2014).

Post-independence, the Tata Group expanded its CSR efforts significantly. J.R.D. Tata, a visionary industrialist, emphasized the importance of corporate involvement in public welfare beyond routine business responsibilities, advocating for meaningful contributions toward nation-building (Ahmed, 2013).

# **Legal Framework of CSR in India**

The legal foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India is primarily established under the Companies Act, 2013, which made India the first country to mandate CSR for certain categories of companies. The key provisions under this framework are as follows:

- **Applicability:** CSR provisions apply to companies meeting any of the following financial criteria in a given financial year:
  - o Net worth of ₹500 crore or more,
  - o Turnover of ₹1,000 crore or more, or
  - o Netprofit of ₹5 crore or more.

Such companies are required to constitute a CSR Committee and spend at least 2% of the average net profits of the preceding three financial years on CSR activities.

- **CSR Committee:** The Board must form a CSR Committee comprising at least three directors, including at least one independent director. The committee is responsible for formulating and recommending a CSR policy to the Board and monitoring its implementation.
- **CSR Policy:** This policy outlines the CSR activities to be undertaken, execution mechanisms, budget allocation, monitoring and reporting frameworks, and timelines for implementation.

- Permitted Activities: CSR efforts must align with Schedule VII of the Companies Act,
  which includes areas such as poverty alleviation, education, gender equality, health,
  environmental sustainability, and rural development. Preferably, activities should be carried
  out in regions where the company operates.
- Reporting: Companies are required to disclose CSR policies and initiatives in their Board's
  Report and on their official website, detailing the amount spent, nature of activities, and their
  impact.
- Non-compliance Penalties: Failure to comply may attract penalties ranging from ₹50,000 to ₹25 lakh, and in some cases, imprisonment of responsible officers for up to three years.

Overall, the Companies Act, 2013 provides a robust and structured legal framework for CSR, encouraging companies to actively participate in nation-building while adhering to ethical and responsible business practices.

# **Reliance Industries Limited (RIL)**

Dhirubhai H. Ambani founded Reliance Industries Limited (RIL), an Indian multinational company based in Mumbai, Maharashtra. It is India's largest private sector enterprise, with a total revenue of INR 9,74,864 Cr. in the fiscal year 2022-23. Reliance Industries Limited is a Fortune 500 company and largest private sector corporation of India. RIL has grown from a textiles and polyester corporation to a multifaceted operator in energy, materials, retail, entertainment, and digital services. Each of these areas is dedicated to innovation-driven, exponential growth. It offers a diverse portfolio of products and services that benefit all Indians on a daily basis, both economically and socially.

## **Reliance Foundation**

Reliance Foundation, established in 2010 by Nita Ambani, serves as the philanthropic arm of Reliance Industries Limited (RIL). As one of the largest private foundations in India, it is actively engaged in diverse areas such as rural transformation, education, healthcare, disaster response, sports, arts, and culture. The foundation is committed to fostering sustainable development through initiatives that deliver measurable and meaningful social impact. Its strategic approach to social responsibility emphasizes innovation, scalability, and long-term

sustainability, with a particular focus on empowering marginalized and underserved communities across the country.

# Social Impact Area of RIL Contributing To 14 SDGs

Following are the social impact area of RIL:

- 1. **Rural Transformation:** Aims to improve the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in rural areas. The targeted outcomes of the programme align with the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):
  - SDG 1: No Poverty
  - SDG 2: Zero Hunger
  - SDG 5: Gender Equality
  - SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
  - SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
  - SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities
  - SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
  - SDG 14: Life Below Water
- 2. **Women's Empowerment:** Aims to promote gender equality and enable women to reach their full potential and participate equally in all aspects of society. This program aligns with the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):
  - SDG 1: No Poverty
  - SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being
  - SDG 4: Quality Education
  - SDG 5: Gender Equality
  - SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- 3. **Art, Culture and Heritage:** To support initiatives essential to our society by promoting creativity, inclusion, and economic development. This program contributes towards the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):
  - SDG 1: No Poverty
  - SDG 4: Quality Education
  - SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

- 4. **Health:** To provide funding to healthcare organizations and initiatives, to support public health campaigns, and to advocate for policies that improve access to care. This program aligns with the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):
  - SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being
  - SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- 5. **Disaster Management:** To help communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters through technology-enabled disaster relief efforts. This program aligns with the following SDGs:
  - SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being
  - SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
  - SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities
  - SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
  - SDG 15: Life on Land
- 6. **Other Initiatives:** Aims to ensure high-quality animal care and treatment, to protect wildlife and animals, and to reduce human-animal conflict.
- 7. **Education:** To provide access to quality education for all, with a strong focus on the disadvantaged and marginalized. This program aligns with the following SDGs:
  - SDG 4: Quality Education
  - SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
  - SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- 8. **Sports for Development:** Aims to foster holistic development and leadership among India's youth through sports. The targeted outcomes of the programme align with the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):
  - SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being
  - SDG 4: Quality Education
  - SDG 5: Gender Equality
  - SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
  - SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
  - SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

#### **Literature Review**

Varma (2014) observed that Indian corporations had not traditionally adopted or documented CSR as a structured practice, often treating it as mere charity. However, with the introduction of mandatory CSR provisions, there has been a noticeable shift toward greater transparency through financial disclosures, sustainability reports, and public platforms. The study concluded that in a developing country like India, corporate financial support is essential to address pressing issues such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and hunger. Hence, making CSR mandatory is both timely and necessary.

**Jaysawal and Saha** (2015) emphasized that CSR marks a significant turning point in ensuring a harmonious relationship between business and society. The legal provision mandating CSR for all eligible companies has regulated its growth and enhanced its credibility. According to the authors, increasing public expectations and scrutiny from stakeholders—such as opinion leaders, consumers, and civil society—have strengthened the case for corporate accountability. Therefore, dismissing CSR as superficial or performative is fundamentally incorrect.

Beschorner and Hajduk (2016), in their study "Responsible Practices are Culturally Embedded: Theoretical Considerations on Industry-Specific Corporate Social Responsibility," analyzed how CSR is perceived differently across large organizations and industries. Their findings highlighted that CSR practices are shaped by industry-specific needs rather than firm size alone. They argued that if "economic activities" were reframed as "fields of needs," CSR practices and policies would tend to converge among companies offering similar goods and services. The study presents several theoretical insights into the contextual understanding of CSR in specific industrial sectors.

Jain (2017), in his work "The Mandatory CSR in India: A Boon or Bane," discussed the significance of the 2% mandatory CSR provision under the Indian Companies Act. He viewed it as a creative solution to address socio-economic disparities in India. Although not perfect, the provision was introduced out of necessity, especially as many businesses had previously ignored the social and environmental costs of their operations. The study suggested that industries such as technology, chemical, and oil could greatly benefit from integrating environmental safety and sustainability into their CSR strategies. Overall, Jain considered the legal mandate a potential

win-win for both businesses and society, aiding India's journey toward inclusive and sustainable development.

**Agarwal (2018),** in his study "The New Spectrum of Corporate Social Responsibility in Developing Economies," noted that CSR has evolved into a vital element of business success in today's competitive environment. He highlighted the growing significance of CSR as a marketing and social engagement tool. However, he also pointed out that the CSR framework in developing countries, especially in Asia and India, remains underexplored, and called for a more comprehensive examination of the CSR landscape in these regions.

**Kunjukunju** (2020) analyzed corporate CSR spending trends and found that although expenditure increased between 2014 and 2015, it remained relatively low considering the size and profitability of Indian corporations. Notably, the top 100 firms accounted for nearly 80% of total CSR spending. Despite the law being in effect for five years, around 26% of leading companies still failed to allocate the mandated 2% of their net profits toward CSR activities. This lack of compliance reflects the need for stronger enforcement and commitment among corporations to meet their social responsibilities.

## **Objectives Of The Study**

- 1. Toanalyze the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices of Reliance Industries Limited during the financial year 2022–23.
- 2. To assess the alignment of Reliance Industries Limited CSR initiatives with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

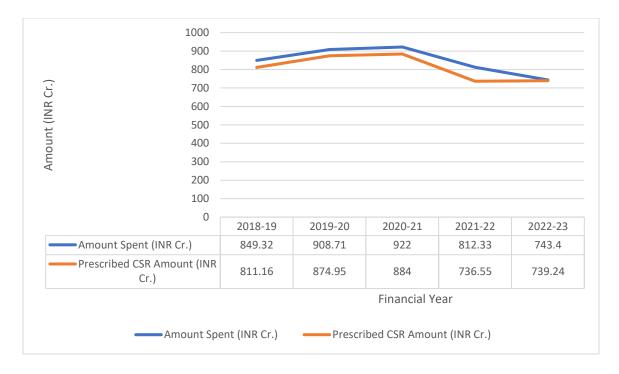
# Methodology

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This study uses a descriptive research design to examine the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities of Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) during the financial year 2022–23 and their alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The research is based entirely on secondary data collected from reliable sources, mainly the National CSR Portal and RIL'sofficial CSR report (2022–23). The data is interpreted using descriptive statistics, tabular representations and graphical tools.

# **Data Analysis And Interpretation**





Source: National CSR Portal as on April 14, 2025

Note: RIL: Reliance Industries Limited, CSR: Corporate Social Responsibility

Figure 9.1 shows the trend of CSR spending by Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) over five financial years from 2018–19 to 2022–23, comparing the actual amount spent with the prescribed CSR amount. In 2018–19, the company spent ₹849.32 crore against a prescribed amount of ₹811.16 crore. This upward trend continued in 2019–20 and peaked in 2020–21 with an actual CSR expenditure of ₹922 crore, surpassing the prescribed ₹884 crore. However, from 2021–22 onward, both the prescribed and actual CSR amounts began to decline, with ₹812.33 crore spent in 2021–22 and ₹743.4 crore in 2022–23. Despite this reduction, the overall trend indicates a responsive CSR approach.

**Table:** Development Sector-wise CSR Spending of RIL during F.Y. 2022-23

S.	CSR	Developme	State	District	Mode of	Amou	Percenta
No	Projects	nt Sectors			Implementati	nt	ge w.r.t.

•					on	Spent (INR Cr.)	Total CSR Spent (%)
1.	Disaster Managemen t	Environmen tal Sustainabilit y	Assam	Cachar	Other Implementing agencies	3.11	0.42
2.	Promoting Sustainable Environmen t, Arts and Culture	Environmen tal Sustainabilit y	Pan India	NEC/ Not Mention ed	Directly by the Company	1.02	0.14
3.	Promoting Sustainable Environmen t, Arts and Culture	Environmen tal Sustainabilit y	Pan India	NEC/ Not Mention ed	Other Implementing agencies	15.60	2.10
4.	Reliance Foundation Schools	Education	Maharasht ra	Mumbai City	Other Implementing agencies	3.83	0.52
5.	Scholarship and Education Support	Education	Maharasht ra	Mumbai City	Other Implementing agencies	11.30	1.52
6.	Promoting Institution of Eminence-	Education	Maharasht ra	Raigad	Other Implementing agencies	206.77	27.81

	Jio Institute						
7.	Infrastructur	Education	Pan India	NEC/	Directly by	23.41	3.15
	e			Not	the Company		
	Developmen			Mention			
	t for			ed			
	Primary						
	Schools,						
	Aanganwadi						
	and Other						
	Initiatives at						
	Manufacturi						
	ng Si						
8.	Infrastructur	Education	Pan India	NEC/	Other	11.45	1.54
	e			Not	Implementing		
	Developmen			Mention	agencies		
	t for			ed			
	Primary						
	Schools,						
	Aanganwadi						
	and Other						
	Initiatives at						
	Manufacturi						
	ng Si						
9.	Other	Education	Pan India	NEC/	Other	24.36	3.28
	Initiatives			Not	Implementing		
	Including			Mention	agencies		
	Programme			ed			
	Partnerships						
10.	Preventive	Healthcare	Maharasht	Mumbai	Other	160.61	21.60

	and Public		ra	City	Implementing		
	Healthcare				agencies		
	Initiatives						
11.	Covid-19-	Healthcare	Pan India	NEC/	Other	24.88	3.35
	Mission			Not	Implementing		
	Covid			Mention	agencies		
	Suraksha			ed			
12.	Drishti	Healthcare	Pan India	NEC/	Other	2.16	0.29
	Corneal			Not	Implementing		
	Transplant			Mention	agencies		
	and Other			ed			
	Initiatives						
	for Visually						
	Impaired						
13.	Medical	Healthcare	Pan India	NEC/	Directly by	71.92	9.68
	Relief and			Not	the Company		
	Assistance			Mention			
	Programme			ed			
	at Sites						
14.	Medical	Healthcare	Pan India	NEC/	Other	3.06	0.41
	Relief and			Not	Implementing		
	Assistance			Mention	agencies		
	Programme			ed			
	at Sites						
15.	Other	Healthcare	Pan India	NEC/	Other	19.06	2.56
	Initiatives			Not	Implementing		
	Including			Mention	agencies		
	Programme			ed			
	Partnerships						

16.	Other	Poverty,	Pan India	NEC/	Other	37.77	5.08
	Initiatives	Eradicating		Not	Implementing		
	Including	Hunger,		Mention	agencies		
	Programme	Malnutrition		ed			
	Partnerships						
17.	Sustainable	Poverty,	Pan India	NEC/	Other	44.25	5.95
	Livelihoods	Eradicating		Not	Implementing		
	Programme	Hunger,		Mention	agencies		
		Malnutrition		ed			
18.	Drinking	Safe	Pan India	NEC/	Directly by	9.30	1.25
	Water	Drinking		Not	the Company		
	Supply and	Water		Mention			
	Other Rural			ed			
	Developmen						
	t						
	Programmes						
	at						
	Manufacturi						
	ng Sites						
19.	Drinking	Safe	Pan India	NEC/	Other	13.23	1.78
	Water	Drinking		Not	Implementing		
	Supply and	Water		Mention	agencies		
	Other Rural			ed			
	Developmen						
	t						
	Programmes						
	at						
	Manufacturi						
	ng Sites						

Grand Total (INR Cr.)							100
				ed			
	Sports	Sports		Mention	agencies		
	Grassroot	Promote		Not	Implementing		
21.	Promoting	Training to	Pan India	NEC/	Other	33.95	4.57
				ed			
	Sports	Sports		Mention	agencies		
	Grassroot	Promote		Not	Implementing		
20.	Promoting	Training to	Pan India	NEC/	Other	22.36	3.01

Source: National CSR Portal as on April 14, 2025

Note: RIL: Reliance Industries Limited, CSR: Corporate Social Responsibility, NEC: Not Elsewhere Classified

Figure 9.2: Development Sector-wise Percentage of CSR Allocation

ICSDG-CIP-2025 25<sup>th</sup> -26<sup>th</sup> April

2025

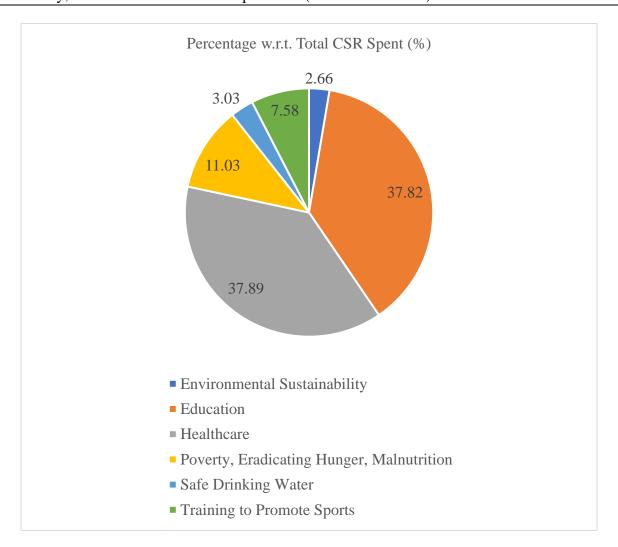


Table 9.1 and Figure 9.2 shows the development sector-wise CSR expenditure and percentage w.r.t. total CSR spent of RIL for the F.Y. 2022-23. As per the data from the National CSR Portal, during F.Y. 2022-23 the average net profit of RIL was INR 36962.1 Cr., prescribed CSR expenditure of RIL was INR 739.24 Cr. and RIL spent total INR 743.4 Cr. on different CSR activities. RIL distributed this amount across 21 CSR projects including development sectors such as environmental sustainability, education, healthcare and similar sectors. A significant portion of the CSR budget was allocated to healthcare (37.89%) and education (37.82%), highlighting RIL's emphasis on improving public health systems and enhancing educational infrastructure, including major investments in the Jio Institute and school development. Other keyfocus areas included poverty eradicating hunger and malnutrition (11.03%), sports promotion

(7.58%). While sectors like safe drinking water (3.03%) and environmental sustainability (2.66%) received relatively lower funding, they were still part of RIL's broad CSR spectrum.

## Conclusion

This study explored how Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) carried out its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities during the financial year 2022–23 and how these efforts supported the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The analysis showed that RIL spent more than the prescribed CSR amount, focusing mainly on healthcare and education. Together, these two sectors received nearly 76% of the total CSR budget, showing the company's strong commitment to improving health services and educational opportunities in India. RIL's CSR initiatives covered 14 out of the 17 SDGs, reflecting a well-rounded approach to sustainable development. The company's support for projects related to poverty reduction, sports, environmental protection, and clean water also highlights its efforts to address a wide range of social issues. By working both directly and through other organizations, RIL ensured that its CSR programs reached different regions and communities across the country. In conclusion, RIL's CSR strategy is well-aligned with national priorities and global goals. Its consistent efforts make it a strong example of how businesses can play an important role in promoting inclusive and sustainable growth.

# **Limitations And Suggestions For Future Research**

While this study provides valuable insights into the CSR practices of Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) and their alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it has certain limitations. First, the study is based solely on secondary data obtained from the National CSR Portal and company reports, which may limit the depth of analysis regarding on-ground implementation and actual impact. Second, the study focuses on a single company—RIL—within a specific financial year (2022–23), which restricts the generalizability of the findings across industries and periods. Additionally, the study does not include stakeholder perspectives, such as beneficiaries, employees, or implementing partners, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of CSR initiatives.

For future research, a comparative analysis of CSR practices among multiple leading corporations in different sectors could offer broader insights into industry trends and sector-specific contributions toward sustainable development. Longitudinal studies examining CSR activities over multiple years may help in identifying patterns, improvements, and long-term outcomes. Furthermore, incorporating primary data through surveys or interviews with stakeholders could enhance the depth and reliability of the research. Exploring the direct social and economic impact of CSR initiatives at the community level would also add value to future studies.

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