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Role of Corporate Social Responsibility in Ensuring Availability and Sustainable Management of Water and Sanitation

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Abstract

Despite the fact that safe and drinkable water is a basic necessity for human survival, there are still millions of people who lack access to this water. Today Indian companies are advocating for sustainable and ethical approaches to water resource management through their corporate social responsibility initiatives. Research has shown that corporate social responsibility initiatives have directly led to the global mobilization of millions of individuals as water activists. Further more companies are adopting modern technologies to reduce water waste and boost operational effectiveness. These indicate that corporate social responsibility encompasses not only moral considerations but also financial and environmental considerations. Corporate social responsibility efforts are perceived by many firms as excessively costly. However, companies can find ways to cut expenses by forming strategic partnerships and leveraging technological improvements. One such strategy is to use these collaborations to promote water conservation and the upkeep of cleanliness.[1]

Keywords-: *CSR, Sustainable, Water, Sanitation, Technology, Conservation, Cleanliness.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility today in India is being governed by Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013 which mandates that companies with a specified turnover, net worth, or profit must contribute a minimum of 2% of their average net profits over the last three years to CSR activities and Schedule VII which lays out a list of permissible CSR activities which includes water sanitation and conservation thus aligning with SDG 6. Many companies in India have recognized the importance of SDG 6 and have directed their CSR efforts towards addressing water and sanitation challenges. These initiatives often involve building infrastructure for clean water supply, installing water purification systems, promoting rainwater harvesting and conducting awareness campaigns on water conservation and sanitation practices. The collaboration between corporate organizations, government agencies and NGOs has played a vital role in scaling up these efforts and ensuring that the benefits reach the most vulnerable sections of the society. The integration of CSR and SDG 6 in India is helping to drive sustainable development and address critical water and sanitation issues. Through these efforts, Indian companies are not only fulfilling their legal obligations but also contributing to the long-term well-being of society and the environment.[1]

Corporate Social Responsibility plays an important role in attaining SDG 6 in India. The Central Government of India in 2014 launched the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India) campaign on 2 October to get rid of open defecation and manual scavenging in the next five years. In India, the legal framework for CSR and its alignment with SDG 6 which concentrates on ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all has evolved significantly. While not a legal statute, the National Water Policy provides guidelines for sustainable water management and conservation. It influences regulatory practices and aligns with SDG 6 by emphasizing efficient water use and equitable distribution and

[1] Ritika Pathania, Dr. Sunil Kumar, CSR Non-Compliance and Corporate Accountability in India: Examining Corporate Social Responsibility Violations, Vol 4, no 11, International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews, 2075-2082 (2023).

The Swachh Bharat Mission which was launched in 2014, SBM aims to improve sanitation and cleanliness across India. The mission has specific targets related to sanitation facilities and cleanliness, contributing to SDG 6 objectives. Companies can align their CSR activities with SBM initiatives to support water and sanitation improvements. [2]

Clean water scarcity is a major issue which is affecting millions of people around the globe. To provide support to this goal, more and more Indian companies today are embracing CSR initiatives aiming on clean water and sanitation. The need for such strategies becomes even more important because India is facing a huge clean water crisis. Approximately 2 billion people are unable to get clean drinking water and 3.6 billion without appropriate sanitation facilities. This scarcity is further aggravated by rapid urbanization, rise in population, climate change and pollution. The lack of clean water and sanitation adversely affects public health, economic development and education making it a major issue for the nation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores how Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives in India align with SDG 6 which concentrates on ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation.

i) "Corporate Social Responsibility in India: Cases and Concepts" by Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee and Karen A. Schuler (2012)

The book offers a comprehensive examination of CSR practices in India including case studies of Indian companies and their approaches to social and environmental issues. It explores how CSR strategies can address various aspects of sustainable development, including water management. It discusses several CSR initiatives related to water resources illustrating how Indian companies contribute to sustainable water management and sanitation.

ii) Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development in India: A Study of Corporate Water Stewardship" by Ashok S. Jha (2015)

This book explores CSR practices with regards to sustainable development in India with a specific focus on water stewardship. It examines various corporate initiatives aimed at managing water resources sustainably. The book provides insights into how Indian companies are addressing water-related challenges through CSR, aligning their practices with the objectives of SDG-6.

iii) "Sustainable Development Goals and Corporate Social Responsibility: Case Studies from India" edited by Ramesh B. Aithal and V. Rajesh (2019) - This edited volume covers various aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals and CSR in India. It includes case studies that highlight how companies are addressing different SDGs, including SDG-6. The book includes case studies focusing on water management and sanitation, providing practical examples of how CSR initiatives contribute to achieving SDG-6.

iv) "CSR and the Environment: Insights from Indian Corporates" by Meera R. Kapoor (2020) - This book explores the relationship between CSR and environmental sustainability, including water management. It provides insights into how Indian corporates address environmental issues through their CSR activities. It includes discussions on water-related CSR initiatives and their impact in attaining sustainable water management.

v) "Sustainable Business Practices in India: Aligning with SDG 6" by R. Venkata Reddy and S. N. Reddy (2021) - Focused on the alignment of Indian business practices with Sustainable Development Goals, this book includes detailed discussions on SDG-6. It provides case studies of how Indian businesses are integrating water management into their CSR strategies.The book provides practical examples of CSR initiatives aimed at improving water access and quality, highlighting how companies contribute in the attainment of SDG-6.

vii) "Business and Water Stewardship: Practices and Innovations in India" edited by Arun Kumar and Neelam Sethi (2022) - This book focuses on water stewardship practices by businesses in India, detailing innovative approaches and case studies. It explores how companies are incorporating water stewardship into their CSR strategies. It highlights various business practices that align with SDG-6, including innovations and effective strategies for water management.

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[2] S. K. Sarkar; Girija K. Bharat, Achieving Sustainable Development Goals in water and sanitation sectors in India, Vol 11, Issue 5, Journal of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Development, 693–705 (2021).

3. Research Questions

3.1 What are the key challenges faced by Indian companies in implementing effective water and sanitation initiatives and how these challenges be overcome?

Integrating Sustainable Development Goal 6 which focuses on clean water and sanitation into CSR strategies can present several challenges for Indian companies. Addressing these challenges effectively is crucial for the successful implementation of water and sanitation initiatives. [3]

i) Navigating Complex Regulatory Framework

India's regulatory landscape for water and sanitation includes multiple laws and regulations such as the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, the Environment Protection Act, 1986, and the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010. Each law addresses different aspects of water management and pollution control. Regulations can vary significantly between central and state levels, adding complexity to compliance efforts.

ii) Obtaining Necessary Permits and Approvals

Implementing water and sanitation projects often requires various permits and approvals including environmental clearances and water use permits governed by different regulatory bodies. The process for obtaining these permits can be slow and prone to bureaucratic delays.

iii) Managing Water Rights and Usage Conflicts

Legal frameworks governing water rights and usage can be complex with rules differing across states and regions. Conflicts over water allocation can arise between companies and local communities or other users. Disputes over water rights can lead to legal challenges and impact project implementation.

iv) Community and Social Impact Considerations

Laws such as the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Act require companies to consult with local communities and assess the social impacts of their projects. Inadequate community engagement can lead to legal challenges including lawsuits or resistance from affected communities.

v) Addressing Environmental Litigation Risks

Companies may face litigation with regards to environmental impacts which includes issues in relation to water pollution or inadequate sanitation measures. Environmental litigation can result in significant legal costs and damage to a company's reputation.

vi) Diverse and Complex Water Issues

India faces a range of water-related issues including water shortage, pollution and uneven distribution. The country's diverse climatic conditions and varying levels of water availability across regions complicate the implementation of uniform solutions. CSR programs must tailor their approaches to local conditions which can be resource-intensive and require detailed understanding of regional water issues.

vii) Inadequate Infrastructure and Resources

Many areas in India, especially rural regions, suffer from inadequate water and sanitation infrastructure. While CSR initiatives can provide much-needed support, the scale of the problem often exceeds the capacity of individual corporate efforts. Building and maintaining infrastructure such as water treatment plants and sewage systems require significant investment and long-term commitment, which can be challenging for companies working within limited budgets or short project timelines.

viii)Develop and Implement Water Management Strategies

Create comprehensive strategies and initiatives to achieve these goals. This might include investing in water-saving technologies, improving wastewater treatment processes and adopting water recycling and reuse practices.

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[3] Rishikaa Handa, Comparative Analysis of Sustainability Laws in India, Jus Corpus Law Journal, Feb 07,2021 .

ix)Engage Stakeholders and Collaborate: Engage with various stakeholders including employees, local communities, government agencies, NGOs and industry peers to foster collaboration on water and sanitation initiatives. Partnerships can enhance the effectiveness of the company's efforts and lead to more sustainable outcomes.

x)Continuously Improve and Innovate: Use the insights gained from monitoring and reporting to continuously refine and enhance water management practices. Innovation and adaptation to new technologies and approaches can further strengthen the company's commitment to SDG 6.

3.2 How are Indian companies aligning their corporate strategies with the objectives of SDG6 to ensure sustainable water and sanitation management?

Indian companies are increasingly aligning their corporate strategies with the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 6. This alignment reflects a recognition of the critical importance of water conservation, sanitation, and clean water access, especially in a country where water scarcity and inadequate sanitation are prevalent issues. Indian companies are taking both direct operational measures and indirect social responsibility initiatives to contribute toward SDG 6. Here are some key strategies and initiatives they are adopting: [4]

i)Water Stewardship Programs: Companies are implementing water stewardship plans to handle water resources responsibly. This includes efforts to reduce water consumption, enhance water recycling and ensure that water usage is efficient and sustainable. For example, companies like Mahindra & Mahindra have established comprehensive water management systems to minimize their water footprint.

a) Investment in Water Infrastructure: Some companies are investing in water infrastructure projects such as building or upgrading water treatment facilities to improve water quality and accessibility. This helps not only in their operational areas but also benefits the other section of the society.

b) Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives: Many Indian companies integrate water and sanitation projects into their CSR strategies. These initiatives often involve community engagement projects such as constructing sanitation facilities in underprivileged areas or promoting hygiene education.

c) Innovation and Technology: Companies are leveraging technological innovations to enhance water efficiency and management. This includes adopting advanced water purification technologies, smart water meters and data analytics to monitor and optimize water usage.

d) Partnerships and Collaborations: Many Indian companies are collaborating with governmental bodies, NGOs and international organizations to address water and sanitation challenges. These partnerships help in scaling up initiatives and leveraging expertise from different sectors.

e) Policy and Governance: Companies are also engaging in policy advocacy and supporting governance structures that promote sustainable water management. This includes participating in forums and working groups focused on water policy and sustainability practices. Through these strategies Indian companies are not only contributing to SDG6 but also aligning their corporate operations with broader sustainability goals which helps in ensuring long-term resource availability and community well-being.

3.3 What can be learned from successful case laws and case studies of Indian companies that have effectively contributed to SDG 6 and how can these models be replicated?

Successful case studies of Indian companies that have effectively contributed to Sustainable Development Goal 6 provide valuable insights into the strategies, practices and innovations that have led to positive outcomes in water and sanitation management.

[4] Sanjay Seth, Mahindra-TERI Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Habitats, The Energy and resources Institute,31 Mar,2021.

Here's what can be learned from these case laws and case studies and how these models can be replicated:

i)Indian Council for Enviro-Legal Action vs. Union of India[5]

A landmark judgment by the Supreme Court of India which addressed the issues of environmental protection and corporate accountability. It highlights the constitutional right to a healthy environment, enforces the polluter pays principle and mandates stronger regulatory and corporate accountability for environmental protection. In this case ICELA, an environmental NGO, filed a petition against the Union of India and several industrial units, alleging that the industrial activities were causing severe environmental damage and harming public health. The petition primarily focused on the discharge of pollutants and their impact on the environment and local communities. This landmark case addressed the responsibility of companies for environmental damage, including water pollution. The Supreme Court emphasized the "Polluter Pays Principle," holding companies liable for the cost of cleaning up pollution and compensating affected communities. The Supreme Court established legal precedent for corporate responsibility in preventing and remedying water pollution, reinforcing that companies must adhere to stringent environmental standards.

ii)Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum vs. Union of India[6]

This judgment is a foundational decision in Indian environmental law emphasizing the right to a clean ecology, the responsibilities of polluting industries, and the need for effective regulatory oversight and sustainable development practices. This case involved pollution from tanneries affecting water quality in the Vellore region. The Supreme Court held that companies were liable for the ecological damage caused by their operations and mandated the implementation of stringent pollution control measures. This right encompasses the right to live in an environment free from pollution. The Supreme Court recognized the principle of sustainable development which requires balancing the economic development with environmental protection. It highlighted the need for industrial activities to be conducted in a manner that does not compromise the ecological development and public health. The Court ordered the tanneries to undertake immediate steps to control pollution, including setting up effluent treatment plants and ensuring proper disposal of waste. It emphasized that industries must adopt pollution control measures and bear the costs associated with remediation.

iii)Tata Power Co. Ltd. vs. Union of India[7]

This judgment is significant for its reinforcement of environmental compliance, the authority of regulatory bodies and the principle of sustainable development. It underscores the judiciary's role in ensuring that industrial activities do not undermine environmental protection, while balancing business interests with the imperative to safeguard natural resources. This case is an important decision by the Supreme Court of India concerning environmental regulations and corporate compliance. Tata Power Co. Ltd., one of India's largest power generation companies, challenged certain environmental regulations and directives issued by the Union of India and its regulatory bodies. The dispute centered on the compliance requirements related to environmental standards and pollution control. The Supreme Court emphasized the necessity for industrial operations, including power generation, to adhere to environmental regulations. It upheld the requirement for Tata Power Co. Ltd. to comply with new and existing environmental standards aimed at reducing pollution and mitigating environmental damage. The Court affirmed the authority of regulatory bodies to set and enforce environmental standards. It upheld the government's power to impose regulations that are necessary to ensure environmental protection, even if these regulations impact the operations of industries.

iv) M.C. Mehta v. Union of India[8]

This case is one of the earliest and most significant environmental cases in India. The petitioner, M.C. Mehta, an environmental lawyer, sought to prevent industries located along the Ganga River from polluting the water. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of protecting the Ganga, issuing directions to industries to install effluent treatment plants and directing local authorities to ensure proper sewage treatment. This case directly aligns with SDG 6, particularly targets related to improving water quality by reducing pollution and minimizing the release of hazardous chemicals.

[5] AIR 1996 SCC(3)212
[6] AIR 1996 SC 2715
[7] AIR 1999 SCC3466
[8] AIR 1988 1 SCC 471

4. Role of Indian companies in attainment of SDG6 goals[9]

i)Mahindra Susten- Mahindra Susten plays a major role in advancing the objectives of SDG 6. The company develops and deploys advanced water purification technologies including systems designed for both urban and rural settings. These systems use innovative filtration and treatment methods to ensure safe drinking water. It also promotes water conservation practices within its operations and encourages the adoption of these practices in the communities it serves. It is also involved in infrastructure projects that improve water supply and sanitation systems. This includes the construction and upgrading of water treatment plants and distribution networks.

ii)Hindustan Unilever- A leading consumer goods company in India plays an active role in contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 6. HUL has implemented extensive water conservation measures across its manufacturing facilities. The company focuses on reducing water usage through the adoption of water-efficient technologies and practices. Many of HUL's manufacturing sites operate under a Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) policy which ensures that all wastewater is treated and reused, with no discharge into the environment.

iii)ITC Limited- one of India's leading conglomerates actively contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 6. ITC has implemented extensive rainwater harvesting systems across its facilities. This includes the collection and storage of rainwater for reuse in industrial processes and landscaping. The company focuses on recycling and reusing water within its operations. This involves treating wastewater and repurposing it for non-potable uses such as irrigation and cooling systems. It also adopts an integrated approach to water management that includes reducing water consumption, enhancing water use efficiency and implementing water conservation practices across its supply chain.

iv)Reliance Foundation-The philanthropic arm of Reliance Industries Limited, has made significant contributions toward Sustainable Development Goal 6. The Reliance Foundation implements comprehensive water resource management programs that integrate various water conservation techniques. This includes watershed management, rainwater harvesting and efficient water use practices. The Foundation undertakes watershed development projects to improve water availability in drought-prone regions. This involves activities such as building check dams, creating water retention structures and soil conservation.

5.Suggestive Measures to Achieve SDG 6[10]

There are many legal solutions and strategies that need corporate support and initiatives to achieve SDG 6. These strategies can help address regulatory, compliance, and enforcement challenges related to water and sanitation. Here are some key legal strategies to consider:

5.1. Strengthen Environmental Compliance and Monitoring

While India has comprehensive environmental regulations, enforcement and monitoring are often inconsistent particularly in water management. Companies may not always adhere strictly to pollution control norms or water usage regulations due to lax enforcement. Indian laws should be amended to include more stringent monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. This could involve regular audits of companies' water usage and wastewater treatment processes with penalties for non-compliance. The establishment of a centralized digital platform for real-time monitoring and reporting of water-related data by companies could improve transparency and accountability.

5.2. Mandatory Water Risk Assessments

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[9] Romesh Sharma, Om Raj Katoch, Analysis of the Targets and Progress toward Meeting the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal -6 on Clean Water and Sanitation: Evidence from India, South Asian Journal of Social Studies and Economics, Sep 2022.

[10] Nikita Singhi and Vishwas Bharadwaj, The Cost of Environmental Non-Compliance – Does the Polluter Really Pay?,Indraprastha Law Review , Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2020.

Although environmental impact assessments (EIAs) are required for certain projects, there is no specific mandate for companies to conduct comprehensive water risk assessments. Indian law should mandate that all companies especially those in water-intensive industries, conduct regular water risk assessments. The findings should be publicly disclosed and companies should be required to develop mitigation strategies as part of their operational plans.

5.3. Expand the Scope of Corporate Social Responsibility
Indian companies are required to spend a certain percentage of their profits on CSR activities, but the focus on water and sanitation varies. CSR provisions in the Companies Act should be amended to specifically encourage investments in water and sanitation projects particularly in regions with severe water stress or inadequate sanitation infrastructure. This could include building community water treatment plants, supporting local water conservation projects and improving sanitation facilities in schools and rural areas.

5.4. Introduce Legal Requirements for Water Neutrality
The concept of water neutrality where companies offset their water usage by ensuring equivalent water savings or replenishment, is not widely enforced. There should be introduction of a legal requirement for large water-consuming industries to achieve water neutrality. Companies would be required to compensate for their water usage by investing in water conservation projects, replenishing local water sources, or improving water efficiency in their operations. This could be a phased requirement, starting with the most water-intensive industries.

5.5. Promote Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for Water Infrastructure
Public-private partnerships for water infrastructure development exist but are not widespread particularly in rural and underserved areas. Indian law should promote and facilitate more public-private partnerships focused on water and sanitation infrastructure development. Legal provisions could streamline the approval process, provide co-funding opportunities and establish clear guidelines for the roles and responsibilities of private companies and government agencies in these partnerships.

5.6. Incorporate Local Community Involvement in Water Management
Local communities are often not adequately involved in corporate water management decisions, leading to conflicts and ineffective solutions. Laws should be amended to require companies to engage with local communities in the planning and implementation of water-related projects. This could involve mandatory public consultations, inclusion of community representatives in decision-making bodies and the establishment of grievance redressal mechanisms to address community concerns.

5.7. Gain a Comprehensive Understanding of SDG 6: Companies should start by gaining a deep understanding of SDG 6 and its specific targets. This involves recognizing the importance of ensuring access to safe and affordable drinking water, adequate sanitation, and hygiene for all and understanding how these issues align with their corporate values and operational practices.

5.8. Conduct a Water Impact Assessment: Evaluate the company's current water footprint including water usage, wastewater production and potential impacts on local water resources. This assessment should help identify risks, inefficiencies and areas where improvements are needed.

5.9. Set Clear, Measurable Goals: Companies should set particular, measurable, achievable, relevant and subject to a time limit goals for improving water use efficiency, reducing water pollution and ensuring sustainable water management in their operations and supply chains.
By making these changes to Indian law, the country can better align corporate practices with the objectives of SDG 6. Strengthening compliance, encouraging sustainable practices, and enhancing transparency and community involvement will help ensure that Indian companies contribute effectively to the sustainable management of water and sanitation resources.

CONCLUSION
Indian companies are influenced by a range of laws and regulations that guide their contributions to SDG 6. The Companies

Act, 2013 and related CSR rules mandate corporate involvement in water and sanitation projects. Additionally, environmental regulations and policies like the National Water Policy and the Swachh Bharat Mission shape corporate practices in water management and sanitation. Today Indian companies are increasingly recognizing the significance of SDG-6 and integrating it into their CSR strategies. Through impactful projects, strategic partnerships, and innovative practices, they are making substantial contributions to improving water and sanitation access. While challenges such as resource allocation and impact measurement persist, the ongoing efforts and commitment of Indian companies play a crucial role in advancing SDG-6 and promoting sustainable development in India.[11]

The journey through the intricate nexus of water creditworthiness, Sustainable Development Goal 6 unveils a narrative often obscured in the broader discourse on sustainability. Water in its essence, transcends its elemental form, encompassing economic, social and environmental dimensions that resonate profoundly with humanity's pursuit of resilience and progress. Understanding water creditworthiness extends beyond mere access to clean water and sanitation. It embodies a spectrum of implications, forging the backbone of resilient economies, healthy communities and sustainable environments. SDG 6 serves as a linchpin in steering humanity toward a sustainable future. Its undervalued significance demands a recalibration of priorities, policies and partnerships urging stakeholders to recognize the pivotal role of water access in the broader spectrum of sustainable development. The interplay between policy frameworks, collaborative partnerships, economic viability and adaptive strategies underscores the need for holistic approaches in addressing water-related challenges.

By harnessing the power of multi-stakeholder engagements, leveraging innovative solutions and advocating for inclusive policies, a transformative path emerges a path that champions universal access to clean water and sanitation as an essential pillar of global sustainability. As we conclude this exploration, the call to action reverberates louder than ever. It beckons policymakers, corporates and individuals alike to unite in a shared commitment - a commitment to prioritize water-centric initiatives, elevate the status of SDG 6 and drive concerted efforts toward a world where every individual and every ecosystem thrives through equitable access to this fundamental resource. In embracing this collective responsibility, we pave the way for a future where water, creditworthy and accessible becomes the cornerstone of a resilient, sustainable and thriving world.

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