
Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives for Displaced People and the Level of Awareness thereof: A Study of Hydro Power Project in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract:

In India, development-induced displacement is common. Many multinational corporations establish themselves in the name of development by seizing the land of rural people under the pretext of development making them the victims of this process. To contain the negative impact of development, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a transformative initiative that Indian businesses have been asked to engage in. CSR is a positive move toward collective upliftment and community well-being as mandated by the government. CSR initiatives in India must have to be in line with the socio-economic development of the country. In the recent times, in India, CSR has become a renewed enterprise for social change. And with the changes in CSR norms, it has provided a new tool for development and related activities. CSR, whether directly or indirectly, aids in relief and rehabilitation of effected people. In the present study, the contribution of CSR initiatives has been examined towards relief and rehabilitation of effected people due to establishment of Hydro Power Projects in the state of Himachal Pradesh. The government has made it mandatory for the project developers to address certain specific conditions for the betterment of the effected/displaced people. The developers participated in a great deal in the process of development through the CSR initiatives. The change is visible at the grassroots levels in the area of study.

Keywords: Initiatives, Hydro Power Projects, Displaced People, Corporate Social Responsibility and Programmes

Introduction

In the present times, the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a popular topic in Indian businesses, especially after the recent changes in the Indian Companies Act 2013. Now, the companies have to spend 2% of their gross profits on social welfare activities like education, women's welfare, self-employment and others. The main goal of CSR is to help improve the life of poor people and raise their living standards. Although the recent changes in the Company Act are new, the CSR has a long history in India. Indian business organizations have always been involved in giving back to the society through charities, donations and voluntary help. The roots of CSR in India go back to the early 19th century when merchant communities, like the Gujaratis and Parsis, contributed to the wide range of social causes. They funded the building of schools, temples, rest houses, provided help during disasters and natural calamities.¹

In the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, the Hydro Power Projects have become essential for generating clean energy. There are a number of Hydro Power Projects in the state that produce energy not only for the local consumers but also for other parts of the country. The Hydro Power Projects are very important for generating cheap electricity and power but at the same time, these projects often lead to the displacement of local communities. The local people lose their homes, land and face numerous challenges. In this backdrop, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs play a vital role in improving the welfare of the displaced individuals and the communities. The focus of the present article is to examine how CSR initiatives help in providing support and enhance the quality of living of the displaced population. In the state of Himachal Pradesh, the Hydro Power Projects have led to significant losses of homes, agricultural land of the local population apart from limiting the access of people to natural resources. Displaced individuals often face difficulties in finding new livelihoods and adapting to new environments, and maintaining their cultural identities. The families have to struggle to secure basic needs like food, water, and shelter, whereas, children have to drop out from schools. The social structures break down creating great miseries to the individuals and the families.

Ordinarily, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) includes efforts made by the business organisations, in this case the project developers, to contribute positively to the welfare of communities and societies. In the context of Hydro Power Projects, the major CSR fall under following categories.

Compensation and Rehabilitation: Project developers provide fair compensation for lost land and homes which, otherwise, is a difficult situation for the governments owing to budget deficits and funds. The compensation provided by project developers help displaced families rebuild their lives. Additionally, the compensation facilitates people resettle in to new areas, build homes and find alternative employments.

Skill Development Programs: CSR initiatives are very effective in the areas of training and development of skills of displaced populations. Many individuals who get displaced may lack skills needed for new jobs and livelihood options at the alternative places. CSR initiatives offer training to the affected people to acquire requisite skills, such as carpentry, plumbing or hospitality and so on. By empowering individuals with new skills, project developers help people secure better employment opportunities and alternative options for sustainable livelihood.

Education Support: Education being crucial for the future of displaced children, CSR programmes provides scholarships, and infrastructure improvements to schools. Such support ensures that the children have easy access to quality education, enabling them to build a brighter future.

Healthcare Access: Displacement due to hydro power projects leads to increased health risks. Thus, project developers partner with local health organizations to provide medical care and awareness programs. Regular health camps, vaccinations, and maternal care significantly improve the health of displaced communities. CSR initiatives in the area of health significantly augment the efforts of the government.

Community Development Projects: Beyond individual support, CSR initiatives also focus on overall community development. This includes building infrastructure such as roads, water supply systems, and sanitation facilities. Improved infrastructure is essential to enhance the overall quality of life for everyone in the community.

Though the CSR activities play an important role in the welfare of people, however, there is a flip side too.² Some project developers do not fully understand the culture specific needs of displaced communities or they focus more on profit than social responsibility. The project developers do not fully engage with local communities, neither do they listen to their concerns to tailor CSR initiatives accordingly. In such cases, the government plays a critical role in regulating CSR issues and ensuring that project developers fulfill their responsibilities in letter and spirit. Proper monitoring and evaluation of CSR initiatives becomes essential to ensure that the intended benefits reach the displaced populations.

As a whole, CSR has been a very significant step is augmenting the welfare and development efforts of the country. The positive impact of CSR initiatives on environment, health, education and in other areas has been visible to all stakeholders. Sood and Arora, (2006) brings out that CSR in India has played a path breathing role in areas of community development, environment and social welfare.³ Hieu (2011) found that organizing and participating in public welfare activities by the business organisations have been very impactful. The companies spend extra time as well as money for improving working environment and overall life of the people. By doing that, the company gets a favourable public image which is their asset.⁴

The Study

As pointed out earlier that the present study has examined CSR efforts of two mega hydro power projects i.e. Nathpa Jhakri and Karchham Wangtu in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh. The sample constituted the

displaced people only. To have representative sample, 150 respondents from Nathpa Jhakri and 150 respondents from Karchham Wangtu Hydropower Projects (a total of 300 respondents) were identified for the purpose of final data collection. The sampling was done by adopting a stratified random sampling approach.

During the stage I, the Hydro Power Projects were identified purposively. In Kinnaur district, Nathpa Jhakri (1500 MW) and Karchham Wangtu (1000 MW) being two biggest projects that have displaced maximum number of people from their original place of residence were chosen. Although, there are many other hydropower projects functioning in the Kinnaur district but these two hydropower projects were chosen, keeping in view that they had displaced the largest of people from their original destination.

In the stage II, it was thought essential to draw a sample of affected people with the help of revenue officers/patwaris. A list of affected people was prepared from the revenue records. Thereafter, every fifth respondent was randomly chosen from the prepared list.

Objectives and Data Collection

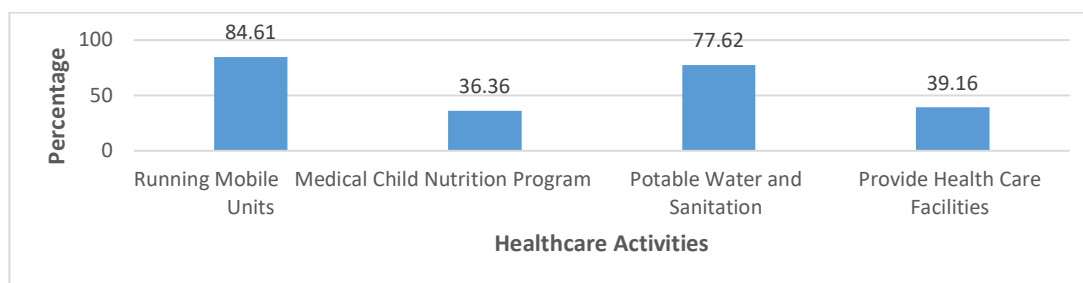
Interview Schedule was specifically designed to get the required information. The data was collected by visiting each household and interviewing the identified affected people. The primary objective was to study the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives undertaken for the displaced people besides knowing the awareness level of displaced people regarding these CSR initiatives.

Discussion and Interpretation

For a better understanding of the issue at hand, the paper has been divided into two parts. The first part deals with the types of CSR initiatives/activities undertaken by the project developers, whereas, the second part focuses on the extent of awareness of the affected people about these initiatives.

CSR Initiatives

The major CSR initiatives undertaken by the project developers in the area of the study were in the area of health, education, women empowerment, development of agriculture and horticulture and promotion of tourism. From the survey, it was found that the efforts of the project developers in health and education were very significant. Given the mountainous terrain of the place, they initiated mobile medical units along with nutritional programmes for the children. The arrangement of potable water was also made, both, at the destination as also at the alternative places. The project developers also made arrangements for cleanliness and sanitation by providing financial help to the people for constructing the drains/toilet and other related infrastructures. Arrangements were made for creating health care facilities like provisioning basic/generic medicines and in some cases the physicians/doctors were also hired to arrange/organise health camps/sensitization rallies etc. Similarly, in the area of education, the project developers established new schools and provided books/uniforms to the needy children. Volunteers/professionals were invited to initiate sensitization programmes highlighting the importance of education in day today life. The issues related to school drop-out children were also addressed besides making efforts to increase enrolment of children at destination as well as new places. The project developers established anganwadis for nutrition as well as pre-school education. In many places, computer labs and libraries were established by the developers. Overall, the CSR initiatives in the area of education were lauded by the displaced people as well as the officials of the government. Local population participated in a big way in the implementation and planning of the CSR initiatives.



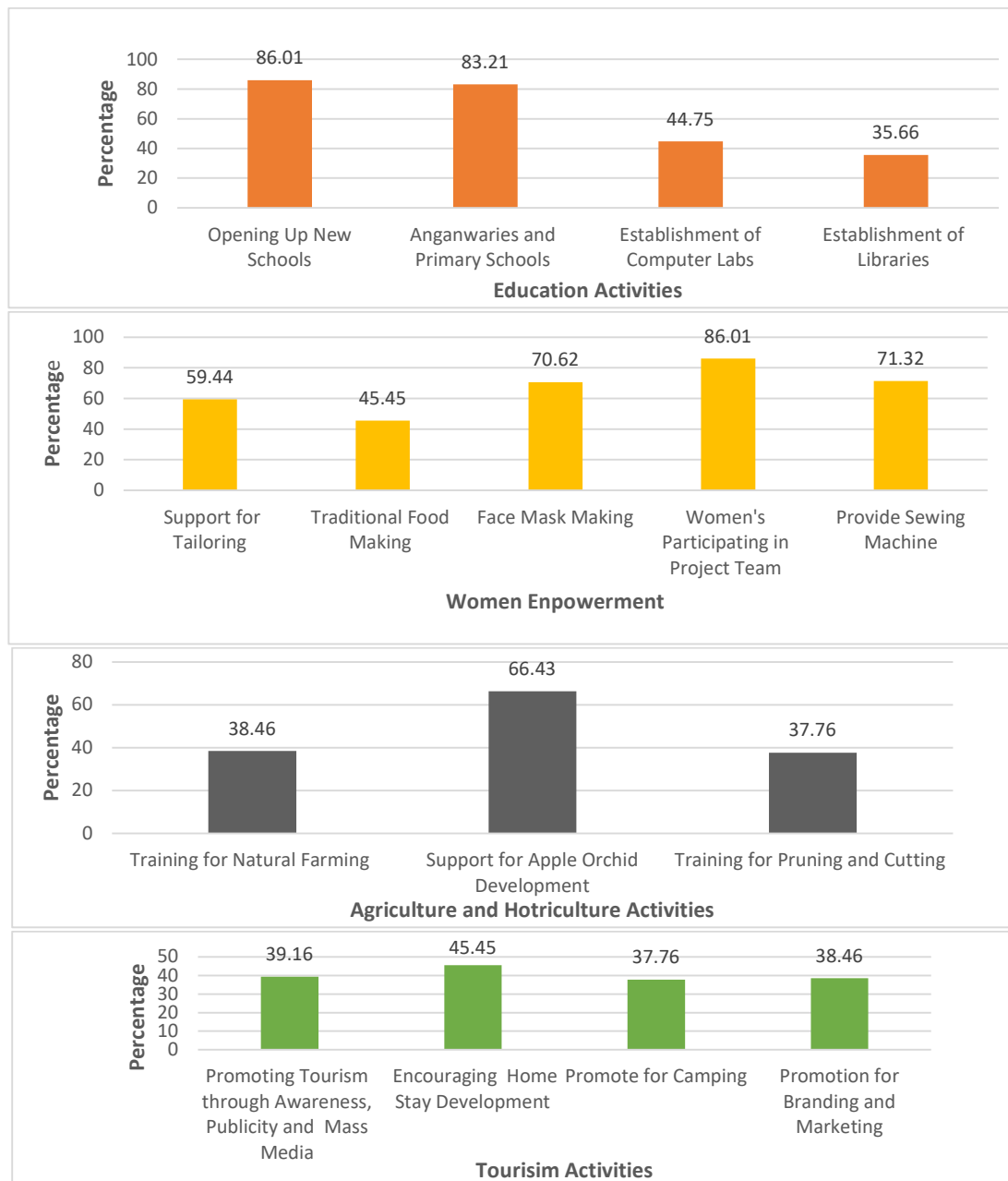


Figure1: Shows distribution of the Respondents as per Welfare Initiatives under CSR

From the figure 1, it is evident that a large majority of about 86.61% respondents replied in affirmative about the initiation of mobile medical units and other initiatives like potable water and sanitation were appreciated by over 77.62% of the respondents. The Child Nutrition Program received support from 52 respondents (36.36%), suggesting a need for greater awareness around the importance of nutrition in child development. The initiative to provide healthcare facilities garnered support from 56 respondents (39.16%), indicating a moderate recognition of the need for improved healthcare infrastructure. Towards improvement of education in the affected areas, over 86.01% people agreed that the project developers indeed constructed new buildings for new schools besides establishment of anganwaries and primary schools (83.21%). These findings are also corroborated by the study done by Ramaprakasha, (2018) who found that among the selected companies, the CSR amount spent on promotion of education was the highest at 42 % followed by promotion of environment sustainability at 17%and promotion of healthcare at 13%.⁵The Establishment of computer labs received moderate support (44.75%)

whereas establishment of libraries was endorsed by 35.66 %.

The project developers did a commendable job in the area of women empowerment. They started small training centres for tailoring apart from providing training and skills in traditional food making as well as other activities like mask making and sewing centres for generating employment. The Figure 1 shows that over 70.62% respondents were of the view that the project developers indeed made efforts towards making people learn mask making as well as sewing skills (71.32%). The survey revealed that 85 respondents (59.44%) supported initiatives relating to tailoring. Support for traditional food making was expressed by 65 respondents (45.45%), indicating a significant opportunity to promote cultural practices and addressing economic needs. There was high level of women participating in project teams (86.01%). This highlights the community's commitment to inclusivity and gender equality.

Major activities initiated in the area of agriculture and horticulture included training for natural farming, besides pruning and cutting of trees/plants/herbs/etc. Project developers supported (financially and otherwise) apple orchid development. Since the area was mountainous and good for apples, most of the people depend, directly and indirectly, on apple orchids. The initiatives in agriculture and horticulture had a significant impact on the life of the affected population. The local population appreciated these initiatives very much. From the Figure 1, it is clear that 66.43% respondents endorsed that the project developers made honest efforts for all sort of support to apple orchid development. Besides this, a little more than one third (38.46%) respondents informed the research team that the project developers also arranged training for natural farming and pruning/cutting (37.76%).

In the tourism sector, the initiative for promoting tourism received support from 56 respondents (39.16%). This indicates a moderate interest in tourism as an economic driver. Support for encouraging home stay development was endorsed by 65 respondents (45.45%). To community members see the potential for local tourism to generate additional income and appreciated the efforts of project developers in this area. By providing training and resources for families interested in hosting tourists, the project developers facilitated economic development of the locals while promoting cultural exchange. The initiative to promote camping was expressed by 37.76%, indicating a lower level of support from the developers. In spite of good impact of CSR initiatives, there were potential barriers in infrastructure or marketing, which needed to be addressed to fully realize camping as a viable tourism option. For promotion for branding and marketing, 38.46% respondents replied in the affirmative. This highlights recognition of the importance of marketing in attracting tourism and promoting local products. The hydropower project developers also supported local businesses towards enhancing their visibility in bigger markets.

Overall, the CSR initiatives undertaken by the project developers were very impactful towards effective rehabilitation of the displaced people. These efforts were not only appreciated by the effected people but also supported and approved by them. In the survey, most of the effected people were very happy and endorsed that CSR initiatives made a significant effect in addressing the challenges and the problems faced by them due to development induced displacement. It was also observed that the project developers encouraged participation of the local people in planning as well as implementation of each initiative. The participation of people proved very useful and yielded good results.

Awareness about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Second part of this article was to examine the extent of awareness of the displaced people about the CSR initiatives. Awareness of the local people about the welfare initiatives such as CSR is very crucial for the effective implementation of these initiatives. In general, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) contributes to community welfare by improving their overall quality of living. CSR addresses various issues such as health care, school education, welfare of women environmental effects, youth and children. In this context, lack of consumer awareness about CSR among various stakeholders such as consumers, shareholders and employees become a major stumbling block. In a developing country like India, the lack of awareness becomes a key issue in CSR implementation.⁶ Contrary to the popular perception, the extent of awareness of the people about CSR initiatives was not as bad in the area of study. It was found that almost eight out of ten displaced people of the area were knowing about initiatives in one or the other way. Since the respondent's awareness towards Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can have a decisive role in motivating displaced people for availing the benefits, it was thought appropriate to examine the level of awareness of the displaced people about the CSR initiatives. The data is presented in Table 2.

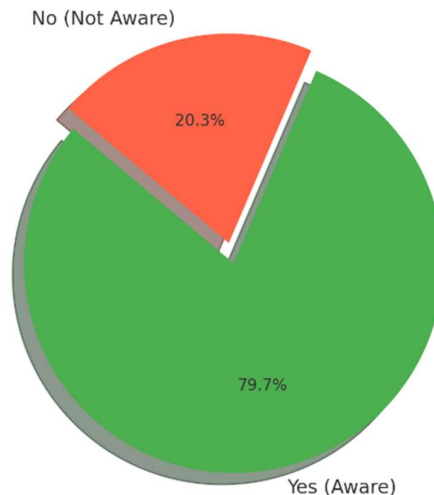
Table 2: Distribution of the Respondents as per Awareness about Corporate Social Responsibility

S. No	Response	Distribution of the Respondents		Total (N=300)
		NathpaJhakriHPP (N=150)	KarchamWangtuHPP (N=150)	
1	Yes	121(80.67)	118(78.67)	239(79.67)
2	No	29(19.33)	32 (21.33)	61(20.33)
3	Total	150(100)	150(100)	300(100)
Yes Response (N=239) Sources of Awareness*				
1	Through NGOs	175(73.22)	169(70.71)	
2	Through developers	181(75.73)	183(76.56)	
3	Through Govt. Agencies	201(84.10)	203(85.77)	
4	Radio, TV, Newspapers, Mass Media etc.	183(76.56)	187(78.24)	

Figures in parentheses denote percent

* Multi Response Table

As is evident from the table that a proportion of more than three fourth (79.67%) sampled respondents were aware about various CSR initiatives undertaken by the project developers. Only a little more than one fifth (20.33%) of respondents were found to be affirmative about having not full knowledge about the CSR as shown in pie chart in Figure 2.

Awareness about Corporate Social Responsibility (N=300)**Figure 2: Shows distribution of the Respondents as per Awareness about Corporate Social Responsibility**

The findings of this study are corroborated by the study carried out by Mishra (2012) who found that over 80% of the 186 respondents of her online survey were aware of CSR initiatives in her area of the study.⁷ Similarly Abha (2015) who studied urban and rural consumers in select cities of North India found that a majority (71.55%) of the respondents were aware of CSR.⁸ Another similar study Bolia, (2020) also endorsed the findings of our study which reported that 89.9% of respondents were knowing the CSR initiatives.⁹

The analysis further revealed that in Nathpa Jhakri Hydro Power Project, majority (80.67%) were aware while a little less than one fifth (19.33%) of the total respondents were not aware about CSR. Similarly, the data collected for Karcham Wangtu Hydro Power Project too revealed that nearly 78.67% of displaced people were aware about the CSR and nearly more than one fifth (21.33%) of the total respondents were not aware.

Surprisingly, contrary to the popular expectations, the study indicated that in both Hydro Power projects, a huge chunk of more than one fourth (79.67 percent) respondents were aware about CSR. Chawala, (2019) found that in rural areas, the awareness of CSR was found less than the urban areas. And this was one of the reasons why the sampled organisations in his study faced a little resistance against CSR implementation and there was an overwhelming participation of the local people in planning and implementation of CSR initiatives.¹⁰

Further, from the analysis, it was found that in Nathpa Jhakri Hydro Power Project, the respondents that were aware about the CSR were more in comparison to Karcham Wangtu Hydro Power Project. Although there was not a big variation in both hydro power projects but comparatively awareness in Karcham Wangtu Hydro Power Project was better. Overall, the awareness of the respondents about the corporate social responsibility was fairly good, nevertheless, it does not mean that there is no scope for improvement. The awareness of the respondents can further be improved by providing regular periodic trainings and they can be given proper knowledge by way of organizing lectures/seminars/workshops etc. This definitely is not something which is unachievable and unrealistic. The project developers along with other concerned government officials as well as informal leaders of the community can organize such events on awareness generation in their respective areas. This can make the CSR initiatives even more impactful. Gupta, (2012) suggested that creating awareness of CSR, whether through workshops, training sessions, or explicit regulations, can change the culture of the Indian industry to make them more socially responsible. He opined that awareness can be achieved through a joint effort of the government and the retailers.¹¹ Contrast findings of Hazarika and Saikia, (2018) found that majority of the consumers were not aware about CSR. Therefore, requisite advertisements is the most essential initiative for generating awareness about CSR.¹²

From the analysis, it is clear that out of total 300 respondents, a little more than three fourth (79.67%) were aware about the CSR from different sources. The main source from where the respondents got the information about CSR was mainly the Government and the NGOs. Apart from that TV, radio etc. also provided very useful information. In many cases, the project developers themselves also provided information to the effected people. For Nathpa Jhakri Project, when the selected respondents were asked about the sources from whom they were made aware about the CSR nearly three fourth (73.22%) replied that it was the local NGOs whereas for 75.73%, it was the developers. Similarly, for Karcham Wangtu, the proportion was almost same. The data collected from both power projects also revealed that over 84.10% of the respondent from Nathpa Jhakri and 85.77% from Karcham Wangtu heard about CSR from the Government sources.

During the field work, the researcher were told that almost every month, staff from the projects visited their villages and explained to the people about their welfare based programs under the corporate social responsibility. For majority of respondents the main source of information were developers who created are executer which was create the awareness aswell as shared other relevant details regarding the CSR programmes with the displaced people. Singh and Kumar, (2018) have found that approximately half (46.51%) of the respondents in their study were provided awareness about the relief and rehabilitation programs by the project developers, whereas, 16.27% were informed by the non-governmental organizations. Awareness was also provided by the officials of the Government to about 37.20 percent respondents.¹³

Overall, it is evident from the data that the major sources of information regarding the corporate social responsibility were NGOs, developers and government agencies. Even though a large number of people were aware about the CSR, they still do not know the information in detail. Therefore, there is a need to create awareness through educational institutions, campaigns and awareness generation programs.

Conclusion

This analysis underscores the vital role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in enhancing the lives of communities impacted by the hydropower projects. In this study, the CSR initiatives aimed majorly in the areas of healthcare, education, and women's empowerment. As is clear from the data that a huge majority of respondents appreciated the CSR initiatives as their quality of life in terms of education, health and jobs was significantly improved by the initiatives undertaken by the project developers. These initiatives were useful in improving the overall living conditions of the displaced people. Although quite a good number of effected people were aware but still many community members were unaware of the available CSR initiatives, limiting their ability to fully benefit from them. The survey results revealed a strong community support for specific CSR efforts, particularly in healthcare and education. In healthcare, the while support for mobile medical units was high, many people remained uninformed about additional health programs, such as those addressing child nutrition and sanitation.

Similarly, in education, there was a robust backing for new schools and early childhood education, which reflected the community's understanding importance of education for personal and economic development. The study highlights that for further improvement, the project developers must focus more on raising awareness through workshops and community meetings, ensuring that displaced individuals know more about their rights and available resources. By fostering better communication and understanding, CSR initiatives can achieve even greater impact and sustainability. Overall, the CSR initiatives were very useful and effective. They were admired and appreciated by the local population. It is very important to highlight that there is still a lot of scope of improvement which can be brought about by increasing people's participation as well as by increasing their awareness even further. People knew about the details of each CSR initiatives but there was a long way to go.

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Conflicts of Interest:

There are no conflicts of interest

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