



Research Article

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Corporate Social Responsibility Communication in Sustainable Agriculture Through the Lens of its Stakeholders

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ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a vital strategy for businesses seeking to enhance their brand image while contributing to society. India stands out as the first country to mandate CSR activities under Section 135 of the Companies Act 2013, requiring high-profit corporations to allocate at least 2% of their earnings to CSR initiatives. Companies often collaborate with government agencies or NGOs, directing funds toward social and environmental projects. This study explores stakeholder perspectives in the agricultural sector, particularly organic farmers, corporate sponsors, and media entities, to understand CSR's role in sustainable agriculture. Using a qualitative approach grounded in Stakeholder and Agenda-Setting theories, the research highlights how CSR communication through media can bridge the gap between corporations and stakeholders. Findings reveal that many farmers remain unaware of CSR support in sustainable agriculture, emphasizing the need for enhanced corporate media strategies. The study concludes that effective CSR communication fosters continuous engagement, ultimately helping corporations create a sustainable agricultural ecosystem. It provides valuable insights for businesses to better address farmers' needs through strategic CSR initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Food is a fundamental need for all living beings. In today's health-conscious world, the demand for clean, safe, and environmentally responsible food has increased significantly. This has brought sustainable agricultural practices—especially organic farming—into greater focus. Although global food production is rising, conventional farming continues to cause serious environmental harm due to excessive use of chemical fertilizers (Thangminlun Haokip & Ph. Menaka Sharma, 2024). In contrast, organic farming offers a more sustainable alternative—socially, economically, and ecologically. Currently, over 187 countries practice some form of sustainable agriculture, and 72.3 million hectares of farmland worldwide have transitioned to organic methods (Panwar et al., 2022; Das et al., 2020).

In India, agricultural productivity stagnated after the Green Revolution, and the sector now faces challenges like depleting natural resources, income insecurity, and climate threats. While awareness of organic methods exists among Indian farmers, the transition remains limited due to high costs and inadequate infrastructure (Dasari Giridhar & Manan Bhan, 2024). In this context, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can play a transformative role. Mandated under India's Companies Act, CSR requires eligible companies to invest in socially and environmentally beneficial activities. Many firms align their CSR strategies with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), often collaborating with NGOs to implement grassroots-level projects (LEAF et al., 2025).

Wani and Raju (2018) highlight the potential of CSR to support climate-resilient agriculture, water conservation, and rural livelihoods. Similarly, Oppewal et al. (2006)

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suggest that CSR can address issues like monoculture, water scarcity, and globalized food systems. Strategically applied, CSR can enhance food security, strengthen farmer resilience, and promote sustainable farming. It can also provide businesses with reputational benefits and opportunities for carbon credits (Zeng et al., 2025; Kirechev, 2021).

Despite its promise, CSR's contribution to agriculture remains underutilized. Mathur and Poddar (2023) observe that many corporates adopt a passive approach, with limited infrastructure and transparency in fund allocation. Although agriculture accounts for 16.73% of India's GDP, farmers still face capital constraints and lack institutional support (The Hindu, 2024). While ₹53,046.75 crores were spent across relevant CSR sectors between 2014–15 and 2022–23, not all these activities directly support sustainable farming. A key problem is the absence of inclusive planning and stakeholder dialogue. Many initiatives fail due to poor communication and lack of farmer consultation (Jaidka, 2017).

Effective communication is essential for CSR success in agriculture. Kartikawangi (2015) proposed a “Collaborative Social Responsibility Interrelations Model” that emphasizes dialogue, mutual understanding, and shared responsibility. Transparent reporting and participatory approaches are critical to ensure accountability and long-term impact.

In conclusion, unlocking CSR's full potential in sustainable agriculture requires a shift toward transparent, inclusive, and communication-driven approaches. When aligned with sustainability goals and farmers' real needs, CSR can drive a more equitable and ecologically sound transformation of India's agricultural sector. This study aims to explore stakeholder perspectives—including organic farmers, corporate representatives, and media professionals—on how CSR and communication strategies can bridge existing gaps in promoting sustainable agriculture.

Conceptual Framework

To understand how corporations engage with stakeholders, R. Edward Freeman's Stakeholder Theory (1984) provides a foundational lens. It emphasizes that businesses must address the needs and interests of all stakeholders—shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and governments—for long-term success. Companies aligning with stakeholder interests tend to perform better in financial outcomes, social responsibility, and sustainability (Bhasin, 2020). When integrated with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), this theory highlights the importance of dialogue, collaboration, and networking. Actively engaging stakeholders allows corporations to develop realistic, community-responsive CSR strategies.

Effective CSR communication is critical to this process. Yang (2023) argues that transparent communication

builds trust and increases awareness among stakeholders. Media serves a vital role in facilitating this dialogue. As a communication bridge, it amplifies CSR efforts and shapes public perception (Jain & De Moya, 2017). Positive media portrayal of corporate sustainability enhances stakeholder engagement and contributes to brand value (Fombrun & van Riel, 2003).

Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) further contextualizes media's influence. By prioritizing certain issues, media not only reflects but also shapes societal concerns. This is particularly relevant to CSR in agriculture, where public perception is shaped by what media highlights and how it frames it (Drew, 2023; Zain, 2014).

The study conceptualizes the relationship between corporations and organic farmers through a Venn diagram model, illustrating how CSR communication—mediated by media—creates dialogue, networks, and collaborative spaces for sustainable agricultural planning and implementation.

Study Propositions

- Organic farmers are aware of current CSR activities in sustainable agriculture.
- Despite their potential, CSR contributions to sustainable agriculture remain limited.
- Communication gaps and lack of proper evaluation systems restrict CSR investments in agriculture.
- Media-facilitated CSR communication strengthens corporate–farmer relationships through dialogue and collaboration.
- CSR strategies that integrate stakeholder perspectives through effective media use lead to improved outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, situational case study approach with a single-case embedded design to explore how CSR, media, and sustainable agriculture intersect

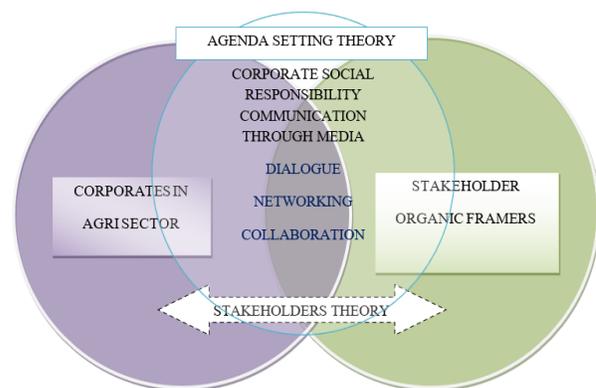


Figure 1: Conceptual framework showcasing the role of CSR communication between corporates and stakeholder

(Ram Athuja, 2001). This design allows for an in-depth examination of multiple stakeholder viewpoints within one overarching case (Putter, 2019). The primary case involves five organic farmers from the Kongu belt in Tamil Nadu, selected for their active participation in sustainable agriculture and mentorship roles. Data collection occurred in two phases. In Phase 1, researchers attended the Young Farmers' Conclave in Pollachi on December 28, 2024, to identify and interview relevant farmers. Interviews were conducted in person and virtually (via Zoom, Google Meet, or phone), guided by a semi-structured questionnaire covering CSR awareness, communication, and media engagement.

In Phase 2, two CSR heads from Tamil Nadu-based organic companies and two senior journalists (from print and electronic media) were interviewed to understand corporate and media perspectives. These discussions focused on CSR planning, communication strategies, and the media's role in fostering partnerships. All interviews were transcribed and analysed using explanation-building (Rogger & Joseph, 1991). Each stakeholder group—farmers, corporates, and media—was treated as a sub-unit to allow for multi-perspective analysis within a unified conceptual framework.

The descriptive Statistics of the Organic Farmers (OF) (sub-unit one) is presented in the table 1.

Gnana Saravanan

Founder of *Deesan Farms* in *Perumatti* Panchayat on the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border, Gnana Saravanan has been a full-time organic farmer since 2016. Driven by the vision of producing safe and healthy food, he believes that consumers should understand the processes behind their meals. For Saravanan, CSR must focus around stakeholders' needs, as they directly and indirectly influence corporate operations. "It is a collective responsibility to develop the agricultural sector," he says. He advocates for CSR models where companies adopt villages, collaborate with farmers, introduce technological infrastructure, and conduct regular monitoring. According to him, such approaches can foster community-based farming systems. He emphasizes that CSR initiatives should begin with thorough research into farmers' actual needs. Transparent planning, communication, and execution—amplified through media—can inspire others and promote collective

development. Saravanan believes media plays a pivotal role in connecting corporates, farmers, and governments, making sustainability efforts more impactful.

Kumaraguru Manickavasagam

At Sigma Estates in *Kotagiri*, *Kumaraguru Manickavasagam* cultivates over 40 varieties of organic fruits and vegetables across 20 acres. He also mentors aspiring farmers and sustainability enthusiasts. He critiques current CSR trends for focusing more on carbon credits and urban tree planting than genuine grassroots support. "Actual farmers are neither benefitted nor encouraged by these activities," he states. While he acknowledges limited government aid, he emphasizes the need for better infrastructure, value addition, and market access for sustainable farmers. He recommends that CSR funds support dedicated farmers throughout the crop cycle, rather than short-term training. These success stories could then inspire others. He also points out that most media coverage highlights urban CSR activities, overlooking rural agriculture. "In the past eight years, I haven't come across any CSR initiative that significantly supports sustainable agriculture," he notes.

Soumya Balasubramaniyam

Soumya Balasubramaniyam, educated at TISS and founder of the HOOGA Seed Keepers Collective, works to preserve native seeds and promote agro-biodiversity. Her organization collaborates with Sangamithra Microfinance and Krishi Vigyan Kendra to educate and support farmers in native seed cultivation. She believes CSR in agriculture is underutilized. "Many companies are not investing CSR funds in farming. If they start doing that, it would create a revolution," she asserts. She advocates for CSR programs that align with farmers' real needs, with third-party evaluations to ensure accountability. Moreover, she stresses the importance of documenting CSR initiatives through media, which strengthens transparency and stakeholder engagement. "Media can help companies communicate better with their stakeholders by sharing the entire journey," she adds.

Pradeep Kumar Manickam

A former corporate professional, *Pradeep Kumar Manickam* founded *Rangamalai Organic Farms* and now mentors' students in organic farming, value addition, and entrepreneurship. He sees farming as a social

Table 1: The Descriptive Statistics of the Organic Farmers (OF) (sub-unit 1)

<i>Sub unit one (OF)</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Acers</i>	<i>Years of experience</i>
a.	Gnana Saravanan	Palakkad	10 acres	8 Years
b.	Kumaraguru Manickavasagam	Kotagiri	20 acres	9 Years
c.	Soumya Balasubramaniyan	Erode	Not specified	4 Years
d.	Pradeep Kumar Manickam	Karur	5 acres	10 Years
e.	Kali Prakash	Pollachi	Not specified	5 Years

responsibility. He appreciates companies that involve employees in CSR decisions, as this ensures stakeholder inclusion. “CSR can inspire farmers to adopt organic practices when tailored to address their real-world challenges,” he observes. He supports long-term CSR strategies such as village adoption models, where corporates offer sustained technological and financial assistance. However, he identifies a significant barrier: farmers’ limited awareness about CSR itself. “Transparent media coverage can raise awareness and amplify CSR’s impact on sustainable agriculture,” he suggests.

Kali Prakash

Founder of *Panmayam Organic Farms* and an expert in permaculture, *Kali Prakash* also runs a food enterprise promoting organic produce. He believes that many CSR activities prioritize branding over genuine sustainability. “CSR should focus on long-term impact, not short-term visibility,” he argues. He urges corporates to fund technologies that enable community farming and resource sharing. According to him, CSR must evolve into a grassroots tool for change. Supporting farmer-led innovations and awareness campaigns can create enduring benefits. “Rather than visibility-driven efforts like carbon credits, companies should engage directly with farmers—or via media—to design truly effective CSR strategies,” he concludes.

The descriptive Statistics of the Corporates (sub-unit 2) is presented in the table 2.

Kalaiselvi Balamurugan and Vidya Prakash: Emerging Voices in Sustainable CSR

Kalaiselvi Balamurugan, founder of *Aruvi Eco Company*, left her corporate career to pursue sustainability and launched the firm in 2023. Specializing in dried fruit and leaf-based products, *Aruvi Eco* now offers over 20 SKUs and serves 5,000+ customers. Although CSR funding hasn’t

begun, the company plans to support integrated farming by educating farmers on using livestock to build sustainable ecosystems. Kalaiselvi observes that “infrastructure and charity projects receive more CSR attention than agriculture.” She adds, “Sustainable farming lacks instant visibility, and companies hesitate to explore it. But if even a few begin, others will follow.” *Aruvi Eco* actively uses media and agri-influencers to promote their brand and create awareness, stating, “It’s a win-win—our brand grows, and they gain visibility.” *Vidya Prakash*, CEO of *Uyir Organic Farmers Market*, leads a farmer-led initiative launched in Erode in 2015 to promote chemical-free farming. Through *Uyir Agri Development Trust*, CSR funds are used to provide cattle to organic farmers and ensure minimum support prices by covering transport costs. “Our focus is farmer profitability,” says *Vidya*. “When farmers feel secure, they trust us.” *Uyir* uses social media to share CSR updates and receive direct feedback from farmers, enhancing transparency and community engagement. “It helps us share authentic updates and analyze impact,” she notes. Both leaders emphasize that effective media use is essential in CSR communication—bridging gaps, building trust, and promoting sustainable agriculture.

The descriptive Statistics of the Media Personnel (sub-unit 3) is presented in the table 3.

Vincent R. Adithyan and Xavier Selva Kumar: Media Perspectives on CSR in Sustainable Agriculture

Vincent R. Adithyan, a senior journalist with over two decades of experience, observes that corporate CSR investments tend to focus on high-visibility sectors like climate change, space technology, and education. These areas are often perceived as more relevant and impactful in the public domain. “Though companies are responsible for contributing to society’s well-being through CSR, many prioritize short-term goals. Agriculture, particularly sustainable practices, requires a long-term commitment,

Table 2: The Descriptive Statistics of the Corporates (sub-unit 2)

(Sub unit two) Corporates	Name	Location	Mission / vision	Year
a.	Aruvi Eco Company (Online and offline shopping available)	Vanjipalayam, Tiruppur	Providing healthy food with eco consciousness. Foster a healthier, happier and more sustainable world	2023
b.	Uyir Organic Farmers market (Online and offline shopping available)	Erode	Transforming the society by producing and supplying natural foods to reduces risk of diseases caused by consuming chemicals used in agriculture farms.	2015

Table 3: The Descriptive Statistics of the Media Personnel (sub-unit 3)

Sub unit 3 (Media)	Name	Type of Media	Years of Experience
a.	Vincent R Adithyan	HINDU TAMIL DHISAI (Newspaper)	20 years
b.	Xavier Selva Kumar	BBC (News channel)	30 years



which most profit-driven companies are reluctant to undertake,” he explains.

Vincent points out that sustainable agriculture remains underfunded in CSR agendas because it lacks instant visibility and measurable short-term outcomes. He also highlights a common misconception that agriculture is already well-supported by government schemes, leading many corporates to divert funds elsewhere. However, he emphasizes the transformative potential of CSR in this field, especially for marginalized farming communities. “If companies share their CSR success stories with us, we can amplify them to the public, inspiring wider adoption,” he suggests, underscoring the role of media in creating awareness and momentum.

Xavier Selva Kumar, a journalist with BBC Tamil, shares similar concerns. He advocates for CSR implementation at the micro-level, arguing that localized interventions have a greater chance of success and recognition. “Small farmers often hesitate to transition to sustainable farming due to financial fears. If CSR could help ease this transformation, it would make a meaningful difference,” he says.

According to Xavier, media coverage of CSR typically centers around sectors like education, healthcare, and IT—areas that align with India’s rapid development narrative and offer corporates more visibility. He also draws attention to the credibility gap in CSR communication. “Print allows for better documentation, avoids bias, and builds credibility for CSR initiatives,” he notes, making a case for more transparent and detailed storytelling in print media.

Key Findings

- *From Organic Farmers’ Perspective*
 - CSR activities supporting sustainable farming are rare, and most farmers lack awareness of what CSR entails.
 - Corporates often choose sectors that offer instant visibility over long-term impact areas like agriculture.
 - Farmers advocate for a comprehensive CSR strategy that includes end-to-end support—from planning to harvest—along with technical, infrastructural, and market assistance.
 - Effective CSR communication requires consistent collaboration between companies and farmers, fostering mutual trust and community building.
 - Publishing successful CSR narratives through media can encourage other farmers to reach out, either directly or via NGOs.
 - There is a pressing need for impact assessment systems to evaluate the effectiveness of CSR efforts and guide future investments.
 - Farmers emphasize that both corporates and the government share the responsibility of avoiding greenwashing, while consumers must be mindful of their consumption choices.

- *From Corporates’ Perspective*

- The delayed impact of sustainable agriculture makes it less attractive for CSR investment, especially for companies focused on short-term visibility.
- Corporates use media as a bridge to engage with farmers and promote brand visibility.
- Social media is viewed as the most efficient tool for CSR communication, offering direct engagement, real-time feedback, and easy documentation.
- Social platforms help in impact tracking, enabling companies to assess their CSR initiatives and stakeholder engagement.

- *From the Media’s Perspective*

- Companies’ profit-driven goals and preference for short-term results hinder CSR funding in sustainable agriculture.
- Media coverage is heavily skewed toward booming sectors like education, health, and technology, which offer better audience engagement and visibility.
- Print media is seen as a more trustworthy and balanced platform for sharing CSR stories, especially in areas like sustainable agriculture.

DISCUSSION

This study examines the role of CSR and CSR communication in promoting sustainable agriculture, drawing on insights from farmers, corporates, and media professionals. As established in existing literature, CSR has the potential to foster environmentally sound and economically viable farming practices. The findings support this, showing that all three stakeholder groups acknowledge CSR’s potential impact—provided companies genuinely engage with farmers’ needs. However, the lack of CSR awareness among farmers contradicts the study’s first proposition. Consistent with Mathur and Podder (2023), all stakeholders recognize the limited CSR presence in sustainable agriculture. Corporates, driven by short-term returns, often avoid long-term investments in this space, validating Proposition 2.

Farmers advocate for holistic CSR approaches that support them throughout the farming cycle. Yet, they note a disconnect between corporate planning and farmer realities, as highlighted by Jaidka (2017). Media professionals admit their focus remains on high-profile sectors, which aligns with agenda-setting theory—suggesting media prioritizes what is most attention-worthy in the current context. Both farmers and corporates see media as crucial to CSR communication—for relationship building and impact showcasing. Yet, there’s a divergence in preferred platforms: corporates prefer social media for its reach and analytics, while journalists favour print for its credibility and depth.

This gap highlights the need for a strategic media mix in CSR communication. Ultimately, companies interested in supporting sustainable agriculture must align their CSR and communication strategies with stakeholder needs. This supports stakeholder theory, which posits that addressing the expectations of all stakeholders leads to better outcomes. CSR communication—when transparent, participatory, and continuous—can strengthen trust, guide effective planning, and inspire community-based sustainable practices. By embracing media-facilitated collaboration, corporates can contribute to creating a robust ecosystem for sustainable agriculture, affirming Proposition 5 of the study.

CONCLUSION & LIMITATIONS

The study concludes that, through the integrated perspectives of farmers, corporates, and media professionals, the study confirms that CSR and CSR communication hold critical value in advancing sustainable agriculture—when driven by authentic engagement, long-term commitment, and inclusive dialogue. The study is limited to the perspective of the organic farmers who owns medium and large sized farms. Future study can incorporate the views of farmers with small land holding. As the samples were collected using purposive sampling, there exist limitations in the location. Also, the study only focused on the farmers who are the key stakeholder in sustainable agriculture. The study can be further extended to understand the perspective of other stakeholders like government, community, suppliers and distributors. The future direction of the study can focus on the in-depth case study analysis of a particular CSR initiative and the role of CSR communication within the boundary in sustainable agriculture rather than surfing in the broader concept. Also, the concept of Carbon credits in CSR is an unexplored area can be studied further.

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