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PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE THROUGH CSR: A STUDY ON PADDY FARMING IN FEROZEPUR DISTRICT, PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a critical mechanism for addressing environmental and social challenges, especially in the agricultural sector. This study investigates the role of CSR in paddy farming in Ferozepur district, Punjab, focusing on its effectiveness in mitigating environmental degradation. Paddy farming in the region has been linked to severe environmental issues such as water overuse, soil erosion, and pollution from excessive pesticide and fertilizer use. Using both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the study analyzes CSR interventions in sustainable farming practices aimed at reducing environmental harm while enhancing the livelihoods of local farmers. The findings suggest that CSR initiatives in the region have led to substantial improvements in water conservation, soil health, and reduced chemical usage, while also providing economic benefits to farmers. The paper concludes that CSR in paddy farming has the potential to balance environmental conservation with economic growth, though certain barriers need to be addressed for broader impact.

KEYWORDS: Paddy farming, soil deterioration, sustainability and Productivity,

1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to businesses' commitment to contribute positively to societal and environmental welfare, integrating sustainable practices into their operations. In agricultural sectors, CSR can address significant challenges such as environmental degradation and resource depletion. In Ferozepur district, Punjab, paddy farming plays a central role in the local economy but also contributes to environmental issues like excessive water usage, soil degradation, and chemical contamination. This study aims to evaluate the impact of CSR initiatives specifically aimed at promoting sustainable agricultural practices in paddy farming in Ferozepur, analyzing their effectiveness in mitigating these environmental issues while improving the livelihoods of local farmers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The environmental consequences of traditional paddy farming practices—such as high-water consumption, soil erosion, and contamination from chemical fertilizers—have been well documented (Chaudhary, 2018). CSR initiatives have emerged as a potential solution to these challenges, promoting water conservation, organic farming practices, and reduced chemical input. For example, CSR programs supporting the adoption of the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) and eco-friendly pest management have been shown to mitigate environmental harm while increasing agricultural productivity (Besser, 2015). However, CSR's role in paddy farming in Ferozepur specifically has not been comprehensively studied. This research seeks to fill this gap by investigating the impact of CSR initiatives on the environmental sustainability of paddy farming in the region.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative data collection through surveys and qualitative insights from interviews to examine the role of CSR in paddy farming in Ferozepur district. The following steps were undertaken:

3.1. Data Collection

- **Survey Questionnaires:** A total of 100 paddy farmers from Ferozepur district were surveyed. These farmers were chosen based on their involvement in CSR programs that focus on sustainable farming practices. The survey covered a range of topics, including the farmers' awareness of CSR, participation in CSR programs, perceived environmental benefits, and economic outcomes.
- **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 representatives from CSR organizations, 5 local agricultural experts, and 5 government officials. These interviews aimed to understand the motivations behind CSR initiatives, their implementation, challenges faced, and perceived outcomes in the region.
- **Secondary Data:** Reports and case studies from CSR organizations operating in Punjab were analyzed to provide a comparative context. Academic literature on CSR in agriculture was also reviewed to deepen understanding of global trends.

3.2. Sample Selection

The sample was purposively selected to include farmers in Ferozepur district, Punjab, who were involved in CSR programs aimed at promoting sustainable agricultural practices. This focus ensured that the study directly evaluated the impacts of CSR in the region. For this nearby 100 farmers was interviewed to collect data regarding paddy farming.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Impact of CSR on Environmental Degradation

The study found that CSR initiatives have positively impacted the environment in Ferozpur, with key benefits across several environmental factors:

Table 1: Environmental Benefits of CSR Programs

Environmental Aspect	Impact of CSR Initiatives	Percentage of Farmers Reporting Improvement
Water Management	Efficient irrigation techniques (e.g., SRI) reducing water usage	70% of farmers reported significant water savings
Soil Health	Use of organic fertilizers, crop rotation, and reduced chemical use	75% of farmers noted improved soil fertility and structure
Chemical Reduction	Adoption of eco-friendly pest management	60% of farmers saw a decrease in pesticide usage and water contamination

- **Water Management:** CSR programs promoting the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) led to a 30% reduction in water usage. Farmers who adopted SRI reported significant water savings, which is crucial in a region facing declining groundwater levels. Data from the survey indicated that 70% of respondents using SRI techniques noted reduced irrigation costs and improved water efficiency.
- **Soil Health:** CSR interventions encouraging organic farming and crop rotation were associated with a 25% improvement in soil fertility. Farmers adopting organic practices experienced lower soil erosion and enhanced soil structure. Specifically, 75% of surveyed farmers reported improvements in soil health after two years of transitioning to organic methods.
- **Reduction in Chemical Use:** CSR-driven eco-friendly pest management programs reduced chemical pesticide usage by 40%. Farmers participating in these initiatives reported fewer incidents of pesticide runoff, leading to improved water quality in local streams and rivers. The environmental monitoring data provided by CSR organizations indicated a marked decrease in pesticide residues in surrounding water bodies.

4.2. Economic and Social Benefits to Paddy Farmers

CSR initiatives provided substantial economic benefits for farmers in Ferozpur:

Table 2: Economic Benefits of CSR Programs for Farmers

Economic Aspect	Impact of CSR Initiatives	Percentage of Farmers Reporting Benefit
Increased Productivity	Use of SRI methods leading to better yields	80% of farmers reported 15-20% higher yields
Fair Trade and Market Access	Access to fair trade markets for higher prices	60% of farmers experienced price stability and income increase
Capacity Building	Training on sustainable farming practices	75% of farmers expressed greater confidence in farm management

- **Increased Productivity:** The adoption of sustainable farming techniques, such as SRI, led to a 20% increase in average rice yields. This was reflected in a 15% rise in farm income due to higher productivity, as reported by 80% of the farmers surveyed.
- **Fair Trade and Market Access:** Many CSR programs facilitated access to fair trade markets, ensuring that farmers received better prices for their crops. As a result, 60% of participating farmers reported a stable income flow, which improved their financial security.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** CSR-driven training initiatives provided farmers with the knowledge to manage their farms sustainably. Over 75% of surveyed farmers reported increased confidence in using new farming techniques, including water management and organic farming practices.

4.3. Challenges and Barriers

While CSR initiatives have shown positive results, the study identified several barriers to broader adoption:

- **Limited Financial Resources:** Some farmers faced financial difficulties in transitioning to sustainable practices. The initial investment required for new irrigation systems and organic inputs was cited as a major barrier. Nearly 40% of the farmers reported that they would have struggled to adopt CSR-driven practices without financial assistance.
- **Resistance to Change:** Traditional farming practices are deeply embedded, and some farmers were hesitant to adopt new methods. Resistance to change was particularly prevalent among older farmers, with 30% of the survey participants expressing skepticism about the effectiveness of CSR programs.

- **Policy Gaps:** Although CSR initiatives have contributed to environmental sustainability, their impact has been limited by a lack of supportive government policies. Some interviewees mentioned that CSR efforts could be more impactful if government policies aligned better with CSR goals, particularly in terms of funding and infrastructure support.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that CSR initiatives in Ferozpur district have made meaningful contributions to reducing environmental degradation in paddy farming. By promoting sustainable water management, soil health, and the reduction of chemical use, CSR has fostered both environmental and economic benefits for local farmers. However, to maximize the impact of CSR programs, it is essential to address barriers such as financial constraints, resistance to change, and the need for stronger government policies.

The findings suggest that CSR has significant potential to promote sustainable farming practices in Ferozpur and can serve as a model for other regions. Future research should explore ways to overcome existing challenges and expand the reach of CSR programs to ensure long-term sustainability in paddy farming.

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