

Effects of Internal Corporate Social Responsibility on Company Performance: The Case of RMG Sector of Bangladesh

Dr. Md. Habibur Rahman¹

Dr. Tabassum Zaman²

Abstract

Contributions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in social and economic development have been well established in the literature. But CSR practices by businesses in Bangladesh have been at a very low level. The current study is an attempt to explore the contributions of CSR to company performance when it is directed towards their own employees and workers. Specifically, the study focuses on performance of companies in the apparel industry of Bangladesh that accounts for about 84 percent annual exports with a contribution of over USD 32 billion to the economy and generating employment for almost 45 lakh people. Company performance in this study has been measured by changes in production, purchase order, revenue, and profit due to the CSR activities undertaken for the workers and employees. Both qualitative and quantitative research techniques are applied for analyzing data collected through primary survey on a sample of CSR practicing and CSR non-practicing apparel manufacturing enterprises in Bangladesh. The study findings reveal that, internal CSR practicing companies are doing better than the non-CSR practicing companies in the areas of employee and worker absenteeism, production target meeting performance and retention of employees and workers. All these contribute to improvement in company profitability and business sustainability.

Key Words : Internal Corporate Social responsibility, absenteeism, retention, target meeting capacity, production, purchase order, profit, and revenue.

1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to corporate conscience, citizenship, social performance, or sustainable responsible business. CSR functions as a built-in, self-regulating mechanism whereby business monitors and ensures its active compliance with the spirit of law, ethical standards, and international norms (Fontaine, 2013). By the late 1990s, the idea of CSR became almost universally sanctioned and promoted by governments and corporations to nongovernmental organizations and individual consumers.

¹ Professor, Department of Economics, Jagannath University, Dhaka-1100, Bangladesh.
Email: rhabib63@yahoo.com

² Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Jagannath University, Dhaka-1100, Bangladesh.
Email: tabassumzamanjnu@gmail.com

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) defines CSR as “the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as the local community and society at large” (Castka, Balzarova & Bamber, 2004). In the context of free market economy, corporations are increasingly operating their businesses across boundaries where sensitivity to social and environmental issues and accountability to society at large are considered pivotal for corporate performances (Haque, 2008). Although Bangladesh is moving towards a free market economy neither government nor private initiatives have been sufficient enough to promote good corporate governance that would lead to an acceptable level of corporate social responsibility (Yesmine, 2015).

Contributions of CSR in employee development, health and safety, employee motivation, reduction in operating costs, enhancing productivity are found in the studies conducted in context of different countries (El-Garaihy, Mobarak, & Albahussain, 2014). Despite all its benefits, CSR practices in Bangladesh, where poverty and income inequality have been the major challenges, are still at a very low level. CSR through micro level initiatives may impact macro performance of the country in general.

The current study is an attempt to identify the effects of CSR on company performance through increased labor productivity of an organization in the context of Bangladesh. Specifically, the study will focus on effectiveness of internal CSR in improving employee wellbeing and increasing worker productivity, revenue growth, and profitability. All these effects are critical for business sustainability in the long run.

The paper is organized in the following way. Section 1 contains introduction and the objectives of the study. Section 2 presents theoretical framework for analysis along with review of relevant literature. Section 3 deals with methodology of conducting study that includes selection of sample enterprises, data collection and analysis tools and techniques. Section 4 deals with the study findings along with analysis and interpretation. Section 5 presents conclusion and recommendations of the study.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This research is inspired by the theory and approach which explicates the effects of internal CSR. The Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960; Homans, 1958; Settoon, Bennett & Liden, 1996) holds two forms of exchange in organizations: economic and social. Economic exchange between employees and an organization is usually explicit and contractually based on defined terms and monetary rewards. In contrast, social exchange has unspecified obligations with often indirect chains of exchange (Blau, 1964) and concerns “the nonmonetary aspects of employment, especially those rooted in social exchange concepts” (Deckop, Cirka, & Andersson, 2003). According to the motivational processes of Social Exchange Theory the norm of reciprocity explains relationships among human resource practices, trust-in-management and employee commitment (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Settoon *et al.*, 1996; Blau, 1964).

According to Stakeholder Theory, Freeman (1984) asserts that firms have relationships with many constituent groups which have an interest in the activities

and outcomes of a firm. These stakeholders both affect and are affected by the actions of the firm. Therefore, balancing the needs of the multiple stakeholders in the activities and outcomes of a firm is crucial. Stakeholder approach of analysis indicates that a business is not only accountable to its owners, it also has obligations to various groups of stakeholders, such as employees, customers, business partners, government and non-governmental organizations (Panwar, Rinne, Hansen .& Juslin, 2006; Juslin & Hansen, 2003).

The economic aspect of CSR has been signified in the literature by Carroll and others. Carroll's (1979, 1991) four-dimensional CSR approach includes economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities of a firm to consider economic ethics in the reconstruction of CSR theory. In this connection Friedman justifies the relationship between business ethics and economic profitability as prescribed by Carroll. Friedman's (1970) final verdict is that it is a social responsibility of a firm to maximize profit within the boundaries of legal rules (Husted & Salazar 2006, Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2007).

The theoretical framework of corporate social responsibility is highlighted in the following flow chart focusing on the impacts of two theories on CSR, the Social Exchange Theory and Carroll's Four Dimensional CSR Approach. The framework which is used in the study is focusing on how CSR is having its impact on its stakeholders through economic and social channel and how it further results in firm's performances.

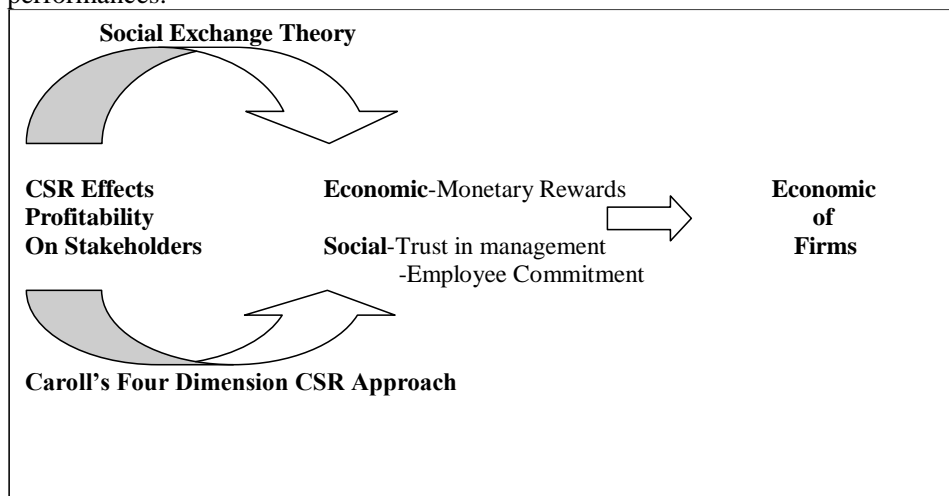


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of Corporate Social Responsibility

Empirical evidence suggests that workplace health and wellbeing programs ensure productivity of employees by reducing staff turnover, absenteeism, presenteeism, disability and workers' compensation (Compcare, 2011). Thus the application of social exchange theory on CSR issue signifies the role of stakeholders of CSR.

The study focused on empirical evidences regarding CSR impacts on firm performances. The economic benefits from internal CSR have been identified by

some studies. Internal CSR practices such as employee development, health and safety policies, create motivating environment in organizations, reduce organization's operating costs, and enhance its productivity (El-Garaihy et al., 2014). Internal CSR practices also increase employee motivation and satisfaction as employees are aware that their employer is taking steps to ensure their well-being. This reduces employee absenteeism and increase employee performance. Intangible benefits, arising from increased employee motivation and satisfaction as a result of internal CSR practices, provide organizations with competitive advantage in the agile business environment (low, 2016). Firm performance is likely to improve because employees view socially responsible organization as a fair organization and reciprocate this fairness through dedication, loyalty and increased productivity (Aguilera, Ruth, Rupp, Deborah, Williams, Cynthia, Ganapathi & Jyoti, 2004).

Recent research on worker motivation shows that one of the incentives used to motivate employees is internal CSR activities undertaken by companies (Skudiene & Auruskeviciene, 2012). Some studies have shown that internal CSR positively impacts employee turnover, recruitment, satisfaction, retention, loyalty and commitment. Therefore, employers may be able to use the firm's internal CSR profile as an instrument to enhance employee motivation (Heslin & Ochoa, 2008).

Research findings from the USA and the UK show that, internal CSR is reflected in employee satisfaction and commitment levels resulting in increased employee productivity and company profitability (Hoskins, 2005). Internal CSR issues that employees may perceive as relevant are working hours, working conditions, flexibility, training, remuneration and employment terms (Hoskins, 2005).

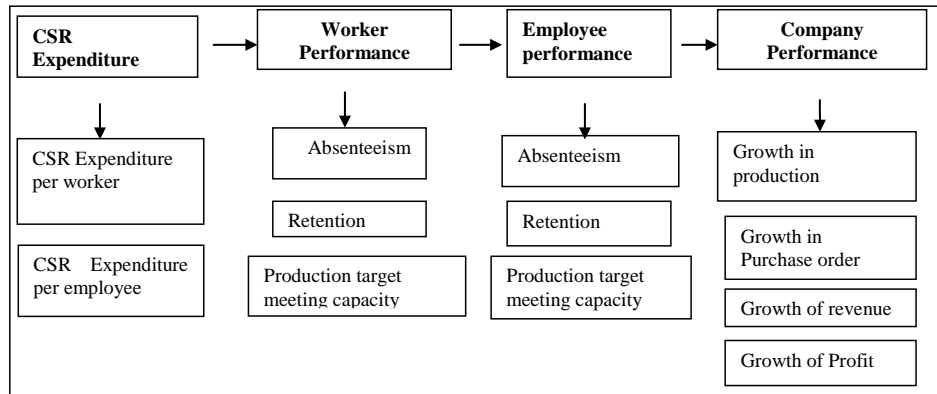
The emerging internal CSR literature suggests that employees expect and firms can demonstrate their social responsibility towards them by guaranteeing considerable rewards and recognition, offering personal development opportunities and work-life balance, ensuring occupational health and safety, involvement and empowerment as well as good retirement benefits (Maignan, Ferrell & Ferrell, 2005). Hence, arising from the given theoretical foundations, work-life balance, pay benefits, equality, diversity and job satisfaction turn out to be significant. Work-life balance is a factor which has the potential to affect important workplace issues such as employee turnover, stress, job satisfaction, and productivity (Bloom, Kretschmer & Van Reenen, 2006). Factors such as pay, the work itself, supervision, relationships with co-workers and opportunities for promotions contribute to job satisfaction (Opkara, 2002). In contrast perceptions of pay unfairness are related to a range of negative effects for organizations and individuals including job dissatisfaction, reduced organizational commitment, loss of trust in the organization, depression and somatic complaints (Shaw & Gupta, 2001).

In light of the above theories and empirical evidences the following analytical framework has been designed to conduct the current study. The framework introduces CSR expenditure as an independent variable, measured in terms of expenditure for workers and employees.

Accordingly, the study hypothesizes that CSR expenditure enhances company performance, the dependent variable in the model, measured in terms of production growth, purchase order, revenue growth and profit growth. The study highlights worker performance and employee performance as the intervening variables. It is

postulated that, improvement in the constituents' performance results in enhancement of company performance. However, performance of the employees and the workers are evaluated based on their absenteeism, retention and production target meeting capacities.

Box 1: Framework of Internal CSR



3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

In order to achieve the study objectives, both qualitative and quantitative research approaches have been followed. Data for the study are collected through face-to-face interviews with target respondents using semi-structured questionnaires. Secondary information for the study comprises trends of CSR on level of wellbeing, rate of absenteeism, rate of retention and productivity of workers and employees over one-year period, collected from the company records.

3.2 Sampling

The contribution of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the development of Bangladesh economy has been significant, both in terms of contribution to GDP and creation of employment opportunities (Islam, Khan & Siddiqua, 2013). Factories in the RMG industry have been the focus of this research due to its social and economic contributions especially in the areas of employment and export revenue income. Bangladesh apparel industry contributes about 84 percent to total annual exports (over USD 32 billion) and generating employment for almost 45 lakh people (Textile Today, 2019). Sample factories for the study comprise 5 CSR practicing factories and 4 CSR non-practicing factories in the woven sector of the RMG industry selected following purposive sampling technique. The sample factories are the affiliated members of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGME). The companies are identical in financial and human resources capacity. Respondents for the study consist of CSR service providers and CSR service receivers.

One key respondent from management level of each factory has been chosen for collection of management level data. In addition, 25 respondents (15 workers and 10

employees) from the CSR service recipient group and 20 respondents (12 workers and 8 employees) from the CSR non-practicing factories, selected randomly, have been interviewed under the study. Therefore, a total of 54 respondents provided required information and data for the study.

3.3 Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section presents analysis of the collected data and information within the above mentioned analytical framework. In the absence of any baseline data, the impact of CSR on workers and employees have been assessed and analyzed based on their perception of pre and post CSR situation. The responses are measured using mean values of their perceptions for each aspect on a 5- point Likert scale. Findings of the analysis have been cross checked with the views of the employers using similar set of data and method of analysis. Later, levels of performance and loyalty of the respondents have been compared to capture any significant difference between performance levels of CSR and CSR non-practicing companies. Also, comparison of perceptions is conducted at two levels, before and after CSR in the same company, and between the CSR factories and the non-CSR companies. Finally, impact of CSR on company performance has been validated by analyzing company data and perceptions of company management, and workers and employees.

4. Results

4.1 Gender Composition of Workers and Employees

As a typical feature of the RMG industry, production workers are found mostly female (about 58%) for both types of factories. On the other hand, employees are predominantly male. This finding indicates that, attributes such as manual dexterity, natural patience, and compliance of women might have placed them in the apparel manufacturing activities as a natural choice over men.

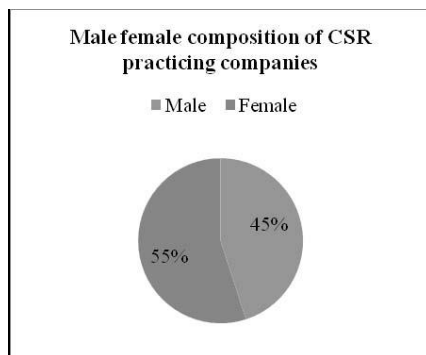


Figure 2: Male female composition of CSR practicing factories

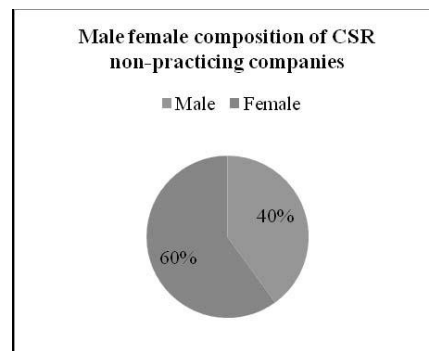


Figure 3: Male female composition of CSR non-practicing factories

4.2 CSR activities in response to Stakeholders' Requirement

The study identified CSR activities practiced in the sample companies. Later, appropriateness of CSR activities is examined by comparing the offered CSR

activities in response to the workers' and employees' requirements (Table 1). The study indicates that CSR providers are responding to the needs of the CSR seekers. It is observed that majority of the employees, and workers enjoy basically health and transportation facilities, and eventually become loyal to their employers resulting in improvement in their performance.

Table 1: CSR activities in response to Stakeholders' Requirement

A. CSR Activities in Compliance with Workers' Requirement

Prioritized CSR Activities		CSR facilities Offered	Weight given to individual activities (frequency of use per year)
1 st significant CSR	Medical and health facility Transport facility Day care	Free treatment, free spectacles Cultural programs, picnics Transportation allowance Early childhood development Parenting resource center Health access and linkage opportunities to health program Brest feeding promotion program Family planning kits distribution	Medical and health (10) Training (2) School (2) Entertainment (4) Financial help (2)
2 nd significant CSR	Target bonus and food allowance	Employment opportunity to physically challenged people Financial help for the S.S.C and H.S.C students Festival clothing	Fair shop (1)
3 rd significant CSR	Fair shop, training	Disable women training Fair shop	

B. CSR Activities in Compliance with Employees' Requirement

Prioritized CSR Activities		Type of CSR Activities Offered	Weight given to individual activities (frequency of use per year)
1 st significant CSR	Transport facility Insurance Treatment	Insurance mobile allowance Transport allowance In house medical treatment	Medical facility = 4 Insurance =2 Earned leave =2 Mobile allowance =4
2 nd significant CSR	Earned leave Attendance bonus Lunch Mobile allowance Day care	Fair shop Provide lunch Women empowerment specifically disable women Performance awareness Lions club social services- assist person with disability (PWD)	lunch =4 Transport =5 Fair shop =2 Attendance bonus =1 Target bonus =1
3 rd significant CSR	Fair shop, 3 month bonus	Attendance bonus Target bonus	

4.3 Performance of workers' and employees' in CSR Companies

Current study assessed performance of workers and employees in terms of absenteeism, retention and capacity to meet production before and after implementation of CSR activities. The study findings are presented in the following figures.

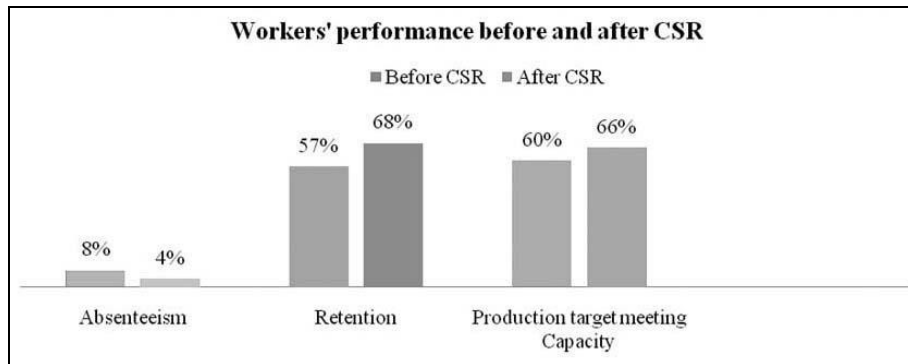


Figure 4: Workers' performance before and after CSR



Figure 5: Employees' performance before and after CSR

On average, after introduction of CSR facilities, absenteeism decreased by 4% and worker and employee retention rate increased by 11%. In addition, capacity to meet production target also increased by 8%. These findings indicate improvement in performance of both workers and employees of the CSR practicing companies. This is consistent with the theory that workers' wellbeing is linked with commitment and loyalty that are reflected in higher productivity.

The above findings have been validated by company management personnel who also indicated that, these improvements can be attributed to the CSR activities undertaken for wellbeing of their workers and employees. The following table presents effectiveness of CSR practices in reducing absenteeism, increasing retention and increasing production target meeting capacity of the employees and workers of the sample factories.

Table 2: Employers' perception of CSR impact on worker and employee performance

Company Perceptions	Mean scale value (worker)	Mean scale value (employee)
CSR is effective in reducing absenteeism	4.2	4.4
CSR is effective in increasing retention	4.4	4.25
CSR is effective in increasing production target meeting capacity	4.2	3.75

It is evident in the above table that the employers strongly feel that, internal CSR made positive impact on performances of their workers and employees.

Perception of the workers and the employees also indicate that internal CSR activities, undertaken for their wellbeing, have contributed to reducing absenteeism and improving their performance in attaining production targets. It also reveals that CSR activities are more effective in motivating the workers than the employees. The responses are measured using mean values of their perceptions for each aspect of performance on 5- point Likert scale.

Table 3: Workers' and Employees' Perception on CSR (Scale values)

Perception	Mean Scale Values (workers)	Mean Scale Values (employees)
CSR can reduce Absenteeism	4.6	4.4
CSR can increase performance to meeting Production Targets	4.6	4.1

Loyalty levels of workers and employees have been taken as indicator for explaining retention rate. Theoretically, loyalty plays a critical role in motivating people to stay longer with a company. Therefore, the study addressed 9 loyalty aspects using 5-point Likert scale. Later, respective scale values are put together to find out the mean value that represents loyalty level of the respective respondent group. The estimated composite loyalty level for each group of respondents is presented in the following table.

Table 4: Loyalty levels of workers (Scale values)

Loyalty Parameters	Loyalty for CSR workers (Mean value)	Loyalty for CSR employees (Mean value)
1. I have opportunities to work in other factories with higher salary and bonus	3.818 \approx 4	4.039
2. I have opportunities to work in other factories with higher incentive		
3. I have opportunities to work in other factories with higher overtime work opportunity		
4. I am satisfied with cash fringe benefit of my factory		
5. I am satisfied with fringe benefits in kind of my factory		
6. I am satisfied with my company's promotion policy and opportunities		
7. My company provides best performance award to its workers		
8. I am satisfied with the number of training opportunities provided by my company		
9. I believe the trainings are effective for my career		

Worker and employee loyalty has been taken as a parameter for 'retention'. The findings indicate that, retention of workers and employees is consistent with a satisfactory level of loyalty in a CSR practicing company.

4.4: CSR Impact on Company Performance

The study findings also indicate that CSR activities have made positive impact on company performance in the areas of production, purchase order, revenue and profit. Changes in company performance have been analyzed based on the average yearly values of the four performance indicators. Findings suggest that, all four indicators improved by 12 % to 16 %. (Figure 6)



Figure 6: Performance of CSR Practicing Companies

Analysis of the views of the sample company management reveals that the dominant factor driving the companies to practice CSR is company performance. They consider company performance in terms of reputation in the international market, product quality and quantity, and workers' productivity. Accordingly, it can be postulated that, the companies believe that CSR will enhance their company performance along with their social responsibilities. Also, the companies perceive that specific CSR activities have impact on their constituents' absenteeism, retention and production capacity separately. This reflects the intention of the companies in targeting particular performance areas of their constituents to achieve specific company performance with specific CSR impetus. It is shown in the following tables.

Table 5: Factors contributed to the performances of workers and employees (company perceptions)

Factors contributed	Workers and employees performances
Medical treatment, work environment, attendance bonus and transport facility	Average absenteeism
6 months bonus, work environment, medical facility	Average retention
Work environment, target bonus, electric safety, training, promotion, appropriate work hour and reward	Average production target meeting capacity

Perception of company management on the role of CSR in influencing company performance has been analyzed in the study as well. The average scale values for each of the four indicators of company performance demonstrate effectiveness of CSR in enhancing company performance. Though company performance may be affected by some exogenous variables, company management perceives existence of a strong connection between CSR and company performance in (Table 6).

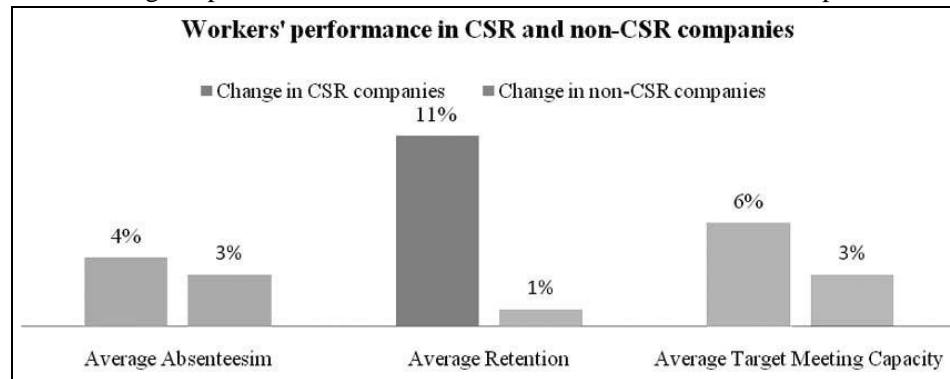
Table 6: Company Perceptions Regarding the Role of CSR (Mean scale value)

Company Perceptions	Mean scale value
Role of CSR in company production growth	4.2
Role of CSR in company purchasing order growth	3.4
Role of CSR in company revenue growth	3.5
Role of CSR in company profit growth	4

The following section presents comparison of performance between CSR and non-CSR companies. It also includes validation, analysis, and triangulation.

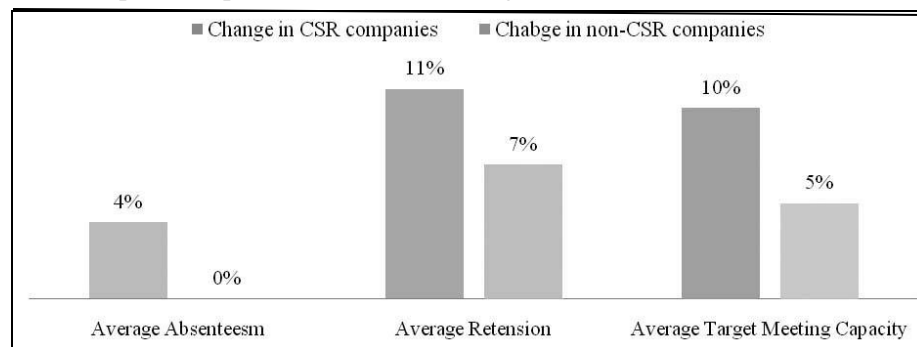
4.5 Comparative Analysis: CSR vs. Non CSR companies' Workers

This section reports comparison of workers' performance between CSR and Non-CSR practicing companies. The following figure presents comparison of average annual change in performance of the workers of CSR and non-CSR companies.

**Figure 7: Workers' Performance in CSR and non-CSR Companies**

It is observed that in all three indicators, the CSR company workers are doing better than the workers of the non-CSR companies. The most significant difference between the two categories is found in the case of workers' retention.

Similarly, a comparative picture of employee performances of the CSR and non-CSR companies is presented in the following.

**Figure 8: Employees' Performance in CSR and non-CSR Companies**

The study reveals that in all three indicators the CSR company employees are performing better than the non-CSR company employees. The most significant difference between the two categories of employees was found in the area of production target meeting capacity.

The study also found that in all four indicators the CSR companies are performing better than the non-CSR companies. The difference between the two categories of companies was found more than 10 % for all the performance indicators.

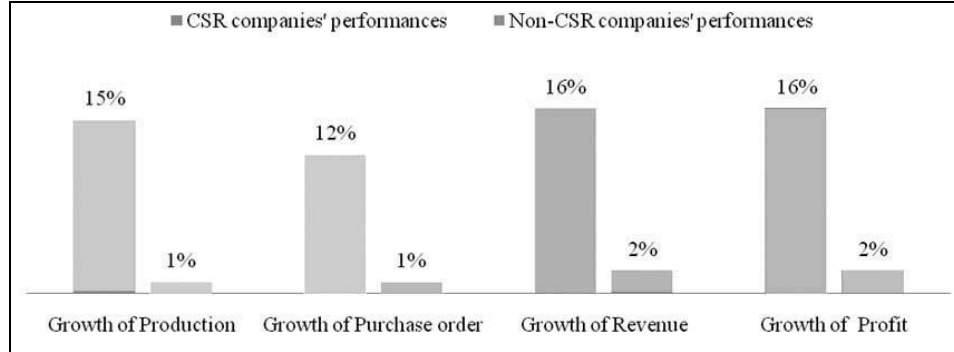


Figure 9: Performance of CSR and Non-CSR Companies

The significant contributions of CSR in boosting business performance work as a great source of motivation for the companies to continue their CSR activities in future. This is because of their strong belief that, their company has become capable to achieve expected results due to CSR activities.

Finally, the study also compares future CSR plans for both currently CSR practicing companies and the non-CSR practicing companies (Table 7)

Table 7: Planned future activities CSR

Future CSR activities by CSR companies	Future CSR activities by Non-CSR companies
Eliminate social inequality of the workers Ensure health status of female employee and workers Ensure security and proper human rights for the female workers and employees Provide workshop to enhance capability of the workers and employees Provide housing and transportation facility to the workers	Fair shop, Housing Efficiency wage, Yearly 5 % increment Family planning accessories, Establish own clinic Financial support for academic purpose to the talented family members, Bare marriage expense to the worker/employee daughters, Free hajj

The study findings indicate that, the employers of the CSR companies planned alternative ways for making the CSR activities more effective. For example, they planned to emphasize long term CSR initiatives rather than short term ones. They also mentioned that, a friendly and cooperative worker- management relationship can bring sustainable positive changes in the living standards of the workers and employees. Their CSR agendas also reflect the needs of their workers and employees. Finally, most of the employers under the study are found positive

regarding their role in CSR practices. They believe in contributions of CSR and feel good for participating in CSR activities. They believe that it is beneficial for both employees and owners. It is a win-win solution and can reduce inequality among the workers and employees.

In contrast, the non-CSR companies are also found positive regarding CSR activities. In this regard, the study focused on the future plan for undertaking CSR by the non-CSR companies by linking them with the demand of the company workers and employees. It is observed that, many of the expectations of the workers and the employees are not portrayed in the future CSR plan of the non-CSR companies. Therefore, a gap in the maturity level of the CSR and Non-CSR company planning is evident. It is postulated that the companies already practicing CSR activities are more seasoned and can understand the need of their constituents better. On the other hand, the non-CSR companies may still need some time to reach to that level. The study compares performances of workers and employees of CSR and non-CSR companies which are further triangulating the performance of the CSR companies.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study suggests that, internal CSR should be a common practice for the entrepreneurs to not only boosting social harmony but also addressing their individual potentiality. CSR practices should reflect the very demand of the constituents of the companies, mainly workers and employees. Government should inspire entrepreneurs to practice CSR by providing a standard guideline mentioning the definition of CSR. The entrepreneurs can mention CSR activities in their annual report showing the amount and the areas of CSR contribution. This may inspire the non-CSR practicing companies to lean toward CSR activities.

The study further suggests that, to obtain significant impact entrepreneurs may start with regular CSR activities instead of irregular ones. Internal CSR may make the entrepreneurs better prepared for practicing external CSR activities and thus can help them making meaningful changes in the society. CSR should not be mingled with compliance of the foreign buyers and the contributions to the society should not be against any expectation of return from it.

The study finally examined the impact of internal CSR on company performance. It is hypothesized in the study that company performance can be instigated through the performance of workers and employees who are receiving CSR benefits from the companies. It is revealed that CSR may create positive impact on company performance through improving performance of workers and employees. The findings were confirmed by a perception study where the key stakeholders of the companies were interviewed. The stakeholders consist of company management, workers and employees. For cross verification the performances of the CSR practicing companies and the non-CSR companies were also analyzed. It was found that the CSR practicing companies perform better than the non-CSR companies. Also the CSR practicing companies are having better quality workers and employees in terms of absenteeism, retention, and capacity of meeting production targets. These are also reflected in company performances in terms of the volume of production, purchase order, revenue and profit. In each of these attributes the non-CSR companies are lagging behind the CSR companies.

Based on the study findings it is recommended that CSR activities of the entrepreneurs should not be confined at the micro level, it should be extended to the macro level and also spread in the society. The government should take necessary steps to encourage CSR practices by demonstrating its positive impacts to those who are not aware of its benefits. This may help to flourish the apparel export sector further by creating a good image in the international markets while also making meaningful contributions to reducing inequality and eradicating poverty. The findings may inspire the stakeholders to participate more in CSR activities and see it a win-win solution.

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