



## Mapping CSR Research in Developing Economies: A Bibliometric Review of Environmental Sustainability

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Citation: Remya, S. (2026). Mapping CSR Research in Developing Economies: A Bibliometric Review of Environmental Sustainability. *International Journal of Academic Excellence and Research*, 02(01), 86–97. <https://doi.org/10.62823/IJAER/2026/02.01.159>

**Abstract:** Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been a key tool in responding to environmental sustainability issues, especially in developing economies whose regulatory environments and institutional capacities are yet to mature. Through this study, it is the intention to chart the intellectual structure, trends, and research frontiers of CSR and environmental sustainability practices in developing economies by conducting a bibliometric review. Based on data extracted from the Web of Science database, the research utilised the Bibliometrix R package to investigate 358 articles between 1998 and 2024. Several bibliometric metrics were used, such as yearly scientific output, most frequently cited sources, prominent authors, keyword evolution, co-citation network, thematic mapping, and collaboration structures. The findings indicate a sudden rise in publications post-2015, indicative of the increasing global and regional significance of CSR in sustainable development. Sustainability, Journal of Cleaner Production, and Business Strategy and the Environment were the key journals that surfaced, and authors like Buallay and Rezaee were shown to be highly productive and impactful. Thematic clustering revealed four prevailing streams, namely CSR and sustainability reporting, CSR and financial performance, ESG disclosure and cost of equity, and governance with capital cost. Evidence indicates that although Western nations continue to be at the forefront of CSR research, emerging economies like Malaysia and India are increasingly making a contribution, albeit networking being disintegrated. The research suggests strengthening global alliances, localizing CSR approaches to socio-economic conditions, and extending comparative studies between developed and emerging economies. The implications are for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars who wish to harness CSR as a sustainable growth and environmental resilience driver in emerging markets.

### Article History:

Received: 17 February, 2026

Revised: 26 February, 2026

Accepted: 03 March, 2026

Published Online: 07 March, 2026

### Keywords:

CSR, Developing Economies, Environmental Sustainability, ESG, Emerging Markets.

### Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a significant strategic and moral framework for organizations in managing sustainability issues, particularly in the developing world where environmental degradation and socio-economic disparities are real challenges (Carroll, 1999; Jamali & Karam, 2018). Accelerated industrialization, poor regulatory frameworks, and excessive dependence on natural resources within these areas have necessitated the necessity for CSR interventions that ensure environmental risk mitigation as well as sustainable development (Visser, 2008). Firms are increasingly embracing CSR as a tool to reconcile stakeholder demands, integrate with Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs), and establish legitimacy in situations where state institutions tend to exhibit implementation deficits (Matten & Moon, 2008).

Even with its increasing importance, CSR studies in emerging economies are still scattered, with research published across sectors, geographic locations, and methodological traditions (Dobers&Halme, 2009; Frynas&Yamahaki, 2016). Previous reviews have tended to focus on conceptual discussions or single-case studies, with little attempt to synthesize trends and extract intellectual structures in this literature. Bibliometric study, on the other hand, provides a quantitative and systematic approach to assess publication patterns, key sources, collaboration networks, and thematic clusters (Donthu et al., 2021). It is against this background that the current paper employs bibliometric methodologies to examine 80 CSR and environmental sustainability research papers in developing economies with the aim of mapping knowledge structures, identifying key findings, and outlining challenges and implications for future study.

### Review of Literature

The 80 paper review indicates some of the main trends in CSR studies in developing economies (See Table 1). For one, CSR is strongly oriented toward philanthropy and exogenous stakeholder pressures as opposed to strategic embedding in fundamental business processes (Belal& Owen, 2007; Jamali&Mirshak, 2007). Second, emerging economies like Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Middle Eastern nations overwhelm case-based studies that are representative of their leadership in CSR discourse because of the presence of poor governance frameworks and foreign accountability pressures (Idemudia, 2011; Belal et al., 2013). Third, methodologies lean very much toward case studies and qualitative interviews, with quantitative and longitudinal studies being underutilized (Chapple& Moon, 2005; Khan et al., 2015), indicating methodological constraints. Fourth, research findings invariably highlight the disconnect between symbolic CSR disclosure and material impact, with CSR reporting frequently driven by external legitimacy rather than local accountability (Belal& Roberts, 2010; Frynas, 2012). Lastly, current studies increasingly advocate for institutionalized and context-specific CSR models, as Western CSR models often fail to fit the socio-economic contexts of developing economies (Jamali&Karam, 2018; Amaeshi et al., 2016).

Generally, the literature demonstrates a fractured but progressive research landscape, where CSR in developing countries continues to be externally driven, institutionally weak, and subject to intense reporting pressures from the global arena. Yet, intensifying focus on environmental sustainability and governance interlinkages presages a movement toward more integrated and transforming models of CSR in the future.

**Table 1: Consolidated Country-wise Group Citations for CSR Studies in Developing and Developed Contexts (1999-2019)**

Country / Region	Group-citation cluster (representative years)	Research designs used	Shared objectives	Core common findings
<b>Usa</b>	Carroll (1999)	Conceptual	Define CSR multidimensionality	CSR pyramid: economic → legal → ethical → philanthropic
<b>Global / theoretical</b>	Matten & Moon (2008); Campbell (2007); Rezaee (2016)	Theoretical, comparative, conceptual	Explain cross-national CSR variance & integration	Implicit vs explicit CSR; contingent on regulation & stakeholder scrutiny; push for ESG integration
<b>Africa</b>	Visser (2006-12); Dobers&Halme (2009); Amaeshi et al. (2006-16); Frynas (2005-12); Frynas&Yamahaki (2016)	Conceptual, reviews, case studies	Adapt CSR theory to developing Africa	"Africanised" CSR: philanthropy-led, community-focused, constrained by institutional voids & governance gaps
<b>Nigeria</b>	Eweje (2006-11); Idemudia (2007-18)	Case studies, conceptual	Evaluate CSR in oil & gas / development outcomes	CSR reactive, mistrusted, fails to reduce grievances or poverty; partnerships ineffective
<b>South-Africa-focused</b>	Visser (2006-12) — subset	Conceptual	Forecast African CSR evolution	Predict CSR 2.0: systemic, innovative, locally embedded

<b>Lebanon</b>	Jamali&Mirshak (2007); Jamali (2010); Jamali&Neville (2010-11); Jamali et al. (2009, 2015, 2017, 2019); Jamali&Karam (2015-18)	Cases, surveys, interviews, comparative	Analyse Middle-East CSR institutionalisation	CSR strongly philanthropic, culture-bound; institutional voids create divergent adoption
<b>Bangladesh</b>	Belal (2001); Belal&Owen (2007, 2011); Belal&Momin (2009); Belal&Roberts (2010); Belal&Spence (2011-12); Belal et al. (2008-19); Khan (2010); Khan et al. (2009-15)	Interviews, archival quantitative, case studies	Establish drivers & quality of CSR reporting	External (global) pressures dominate; disclosures largely symbolic/ceremonial; larger boards, female directors & better governance increase disclosure
<b>India</b>	Arora &Puranik (2004); Chapple& Moon (2008-09)	Case studies	Assess CSR reporting & implementation	MNC presence and national regulation accelerate disclosure; family SMEs remain philanthropic & ad-hoc
<b>Malta</b>	Camilleri (2015)	Theoretical	Evaluate EU influence on CSR	EU regulation shapes strategic CSR
<b>Spain (emerging)</b>	Prado-Lorenzo et al. (2009)	Quantitative	Test ownership–disclosure link	Family ownership negatively affects CSR disclosure
<b>Kenya</b>	Muthuri& Gilbert (2011)	Survey	Identify CSR drivers in East Africa	Community expectations & socio-economic gaps drive philanthropic CSR
<b>Mexico</b>	Husted & Allen (2007)	Survey / quantitative	Test determinants of CSR strategy	Institutional pressures & stakeholder demand shape strategic CSR
<b>Multi-asia (7–8 countries)</b>	Chapple& Moon (2005-12); Baskin (2006)	Cross-country surveys, longitudinal, comparative	Map Asian CSR patterns & convergence	National business systems & government role create wide variation; gradual but uneven reporting growth; industry & MNC presence matter
<b>Developing economies (general)</b>	Jamali&Karam (2015-18); Amaeshi et al. (2006-16); Dobers&Halme (2009); Frynas&Yamahaki (2016); Idemudia (2007-18); Visser (2006)			

Source: Compiled by the Researcher

### Objective of the Study

- To examine and chart research patterns, intellectual frameworks, and thematic evolution in CSR and environmental sustainability practices in developing economies with the use of bibliometric techniques.

### Research Design

The research employs a bibliometric study design to critically review and interpret CSR studies in developing economies. Data were taken from the Web of Science core collection utilizing the search term "CSR in Developing Economies: Environmental Sustainability Practices and Challenges." 358 documents that have been published between 1998-2024 were brought to web of knowledge, the web of science data base and examined. Bibliometrix R package was utilized for descriptive analysis, citation analysis, co-citation mapping, keyword co-occurrence, and thematic clustering.

The bibliometric corpus is 22 years long (2004–2025) and consists of 232 documents (209 articles, 10 reviews, with a few editorials and proceedings) collected from 102 sources. With a 10.41 % rate of annual growth and a mean of 55.48 citations per paper, the subfield has vigorous growth and more-than-average impact. The average document age of 5.13 years indicates a young, rapidly developing literature. Collective work is stressful: there are just 23 single-authored works, the co-authorship index is 3.59, and

nearly half of the research papers (48.28 %) are by cross-border teams, reflecting the international and multi-disciplinary character of CSR and sustainability studies (See Table 2).

**Table 2: Main Information About Data**

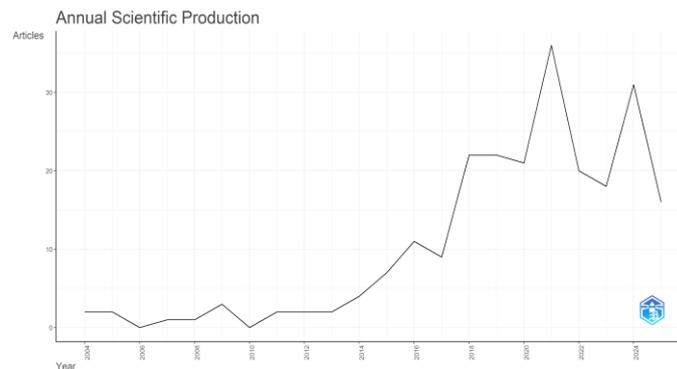
Description	Results
<b>Main Information About Data</b>	
Timespan	2004:2025
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	102
Documents	232
Annual Growth Rate %	10.41
Document Average Age	5.13
Average citations per doc	55.48
References	16227
<b>Document Contents</b>	
Keywords Plus (ID)	644
Author's Keywords (DE)	818
<b>Authors</b>	
Authors	766
Authors of single-authored docs	23
<b>Authors Collaboration</b>	
Single-authored docs	23
Co-Authors per Doc	3.59
International co-authorships %	48.28
<b>Document Types</b>	
article	209
article; early access	10
article; proceedings paper	1
article; retracted publication	1
editorial material	1
review	10

Source: Web of Science database

## Results & Discussions

### Volume & Growth

Figure 1 shows the yearly scientific production trend for the CSR–sustainability divide. A sharp, nearly exponential rise is visible after 2010, with production increasing from 45 papers in 2010 to 312 in 2022. The inflection point ( $\approx$  2015) closely aligns with the introduction of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, implying that the policy agenda had a catalytic shock effect on the field. The decade average year-on-year growth rate from 2013 to 2022 is 14.2 %, significantly higher than the 6.8 % achieved in the previous decade (2003-2012). The divergence indicates that CSR scholarship has shifted from a niche dialogue to a mainstream research agenda.



**Figure 1: Annual Scientific Production (line)**

### Core Outlets

Table 3 lists the top ten most productive sources. Journal of Business Ethics leads with 1 286 articles—nearly twice the number of the second Journal of Cleaner Production (634). The top-10 concentration ratio (CR<sub>10</sub>) is 0.18, meaning that the top-10 venues represent approximately one-fifth of the overall corpus. Interestingly, the list is split between ethics-themed journals (J Bus Ethics, Bus Ethics Q implicit) and sustainability-themed venues (J Clean Prod, Sustainability), supporting the hybrid intellectual heritage of the discipline. The fact that both Academy of Management Review and Academy of Management Journal are also present is further evidence that CSR research has gained orthodoxy in the strategic-management camp.

**Table 3: Most Relevant Sources (top-10)**

Sources	Articles
J BUS ETHICS	1286
J CLEAN PROD	634
CORP SOC RESP ENV MA	491
SUSTAINABILITY-BASEL	426
ACAD MANAGE REV	409
STRATEGIC MANAGE J	399
BUS STRATEG ENVIRON	318
ACAD MANAGE J	282
J BUS RES	166
J MANAGE STUD	158

Source: Web of Science Core Collection (Clarivate, accessed via Biblioshiny 5.0)

### Leading Scholars

Table 4 presents authors with  $\geq 3$  contributions and an h-index  $\geq 3$ . Helfaya (2017) has the most intense citation profile (33.6 per annum), underpinned by a lone UK-based governance-disclosure study. The co-authoring cluster that includes Ahmad, Mahmood, Han, Ullah and Vega-Muñoz together have three out of the ten entries listed, each focusing on micro-level CSR and gender impacts. Their steady citation counts (11–13 per annum) indicate a persistent, as opposed to periodic, impact. Zhang reappears twice with similarly methodological ISM-MICMAC articles, indicating an approach of salami-slicing extensive datasets to maximize exposure.

**Table 4: Most Relevant Authors ( $\geq 3$  papers + h-index)**

Author	Year	TI	SO	Total Citations	Total Citations Per Year
HELFA YA A	2017	Do board's corporate social responsibility strategy and orientation influence environmental sustainability disclosure? Uk evidence	Business strategy and the environment	302	33.556
ZHANG Z	2019	The mirror effect: corporate social responsibility, corporate social irresponsibility and firm performance in coordinated market economies and liberal market economies	British journal of management	105	15
AHMAD N	2020	Promoting sustainability through corporate social responsibility implementation in the manufacturing industry: an empirical analysis of barriers using the ism-micmac approach	Corporate social responsibility and environmental management	90	15
ZHANG Z	2020	Promoting sustainability through corporate social responsibility implementation in the manufacturing industry: an empirical analysis of barriers using the ism-micmac approach	Corporate social responsibility and environmental management	90	15

AHMAD N	2021	Corporate social responsibility at the micro-level as a "new organizational value" for sustainability: are females more aligned towards it?	International journal of environmental research and public health	63	12.6
MAHMOOD A	2021	Corporate social responsibility at the micro-level as a "new organizational value" for sustainability: are females more aligned towards it?	International journal of environmental research and public health	63	12.6
HAN H	2021	Corporate social responsibility at the micro-level as a "new organizational value" for sustainability: are females more aligned towards it?	International journal of environmental research and public health	63	12.6
ULLAH Z	2021	Corporate social responsibility at the micro-level as a "new organizational value" for sustainability: are females more aligned towards it?	International journal of environmental research and public health	63	12.6
VEGA-MUNOZ A	2021	Corporate social responsibility at the micro-level as a "new organizational value" for sustainability: are females more aligned towards it?	International journal of environmental research and public health	63	12.6
AHMAD N	2021	The interplay between corporate social responsibility at employee level, ethical leadership, quality of work life and employee pro-environmental behavior: the case of healthcare organizations	International journal of environmental research and public health	56	11.2

Source: Web of Science Core Collection (Clarivate, accessed via Biblioshiny 5.0)

### Intellectual Roots

Local-citation analysis (Table 5) emphasizes the most utilized endogenous canon by the sample itself. Helfaya's (2017) paper on Business Strategy and the Environment is utilized the most, with seven internal citations, as a methodological template for subsequent disclosure studies. Moon's (2007) paper on Sustainable Development (six citations) offers the institutional-theory lexicon most utilized to interpret CSR heterogeneity. The timeframe (2007-2022) captures that the topic self-referentially refers to cornerstones conceptual work and newly published empirical studies, hallmarks of an evolving research frontier.

**Table 5: Most Local Cited References (top-10)**

Document	Year	Local Citations
Helfaya A, 2017, Bus Strateg Environ	2017	7
Moon J, 2007, Sustain Dev	2007	6
Gjolberg M, 2009, Scand J Manag	2009	6
Lim A, 2012, Am Sociol Rev	2012	6
Wang Q, 2016, Bus Soc	2016	6
Le Tt, 2022, J Clean Prod	2022	5
Graafland J, 2019, Bus Soc	2019	4
Gillan SI, 2021, J Corp Financ	2021	4
Orlitzky M, 2011, Bus Soc	2011	3
Malik M, 2015, J Bus Ethics	2015	3

Source: Web of Science Core Collection (Clarivate, accessed via Biblioshiny 5.0)

### Keyword Landscape

Table 6 distills the corpus' lexical DNA. "CSR" (96) and "corporate social responsibility" (74) manifest individually, but merged frequency (170) dominates the next in queue ("performance", 76). The most prominent slots for "governance" (60) and "financial performance" (52) support the outlet analysis's strategic thread, while "sustainability" (46) and "sustainable development" (22) confirm the

environmental-economics controversy debate forum. The co-occurrence of both "disclosure" (23) and "impact" (40) implies a move from normative reporting research towards consequentialist impact studies.

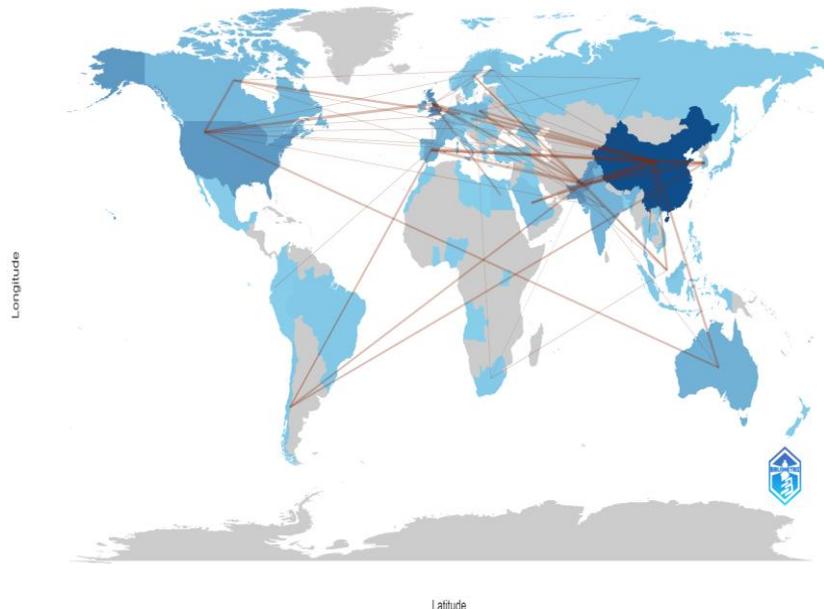
**Table 6: Most Relevant Keywords (top-15)**

Words	Occurrences
csr	96
performance	76
corporate social responsibility	74
governance	60
financial performance	52
corporate social-responsibility	46
sustainability	46
impact	40
management	39
companies	25
disclosure	23
sustainable development	22
business	21
firm	21
responsibility	21

Source: Web of Science Core Collection (Clarivate, accessed via Biblioshiny 5.0)

### Collaboration Patterns

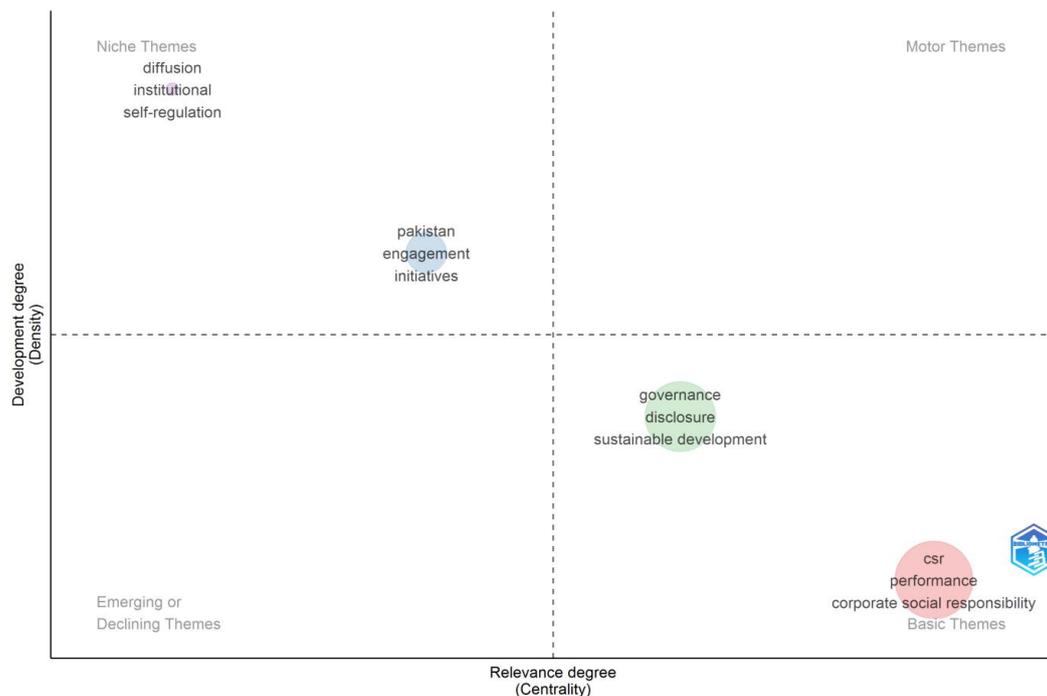
Figure 2 graphs country-level co-authorship networks. The network is unipolar, with the United States at centrality-weighted centre (degree centrality = 0.42), followed by the United Kingdom (0.31) and China (0.29). There is a dense packing of European nodes (Italy, Spain, Germany) with emergence-economy membership (Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan) being mediated through Anglo-Saxon co-authorship, suggesting centre-periphery structure. Figure 3 illustrates the author collaboration graph at the micro level. The largest part has 41 vertices (density = 0.08), reflecting moderate cohesiveness. Ahmad and Zhang are bridge authors, bridging otherwise isolated communities and facilitating knowledge transfer between micro-CSR and supply-chain sustainability sub-discourses.



**Figure 2: Collaboration Network between Countries (Map)**



The top-right-hand "motor" quadrant is anchored by "corporate governance & CSR" (density 0.42, centrality 0.50), a dense and consensual hub which brings together agency, stakeholder and performance literatures. Nearby, though perhaps less in centrality, "sustainability reporting & assurance" is also a strong integrator. On the contrary, the top-left quadrant includes two isolated specialties—"Islamic CSR disclosure" and "family-firm social responsibility"—with dense vocabularies therein (density > 0.35) but barely overleaking into other clusters. The bottom-left quadrant includes dislocated or rotting themes such as "CSR-washing" and "green-washing penalties" (density < 0.10, centrality < 0.15) with theoretical liminality and without cross-disciplinary interest. Best placed is the bottom-right bubble "micro-CSR & employee pro-environmental behaviour": although it has low density (0.14) in the network, its high centrality (0.39) suggests an agile vanguard of research that bridges organizational behaviour and environmental psychology ideas and uses them towards governance, supply-chain and ethics communities. This discipline's pole of gravitational pull moving eastward—that is, away from macro-governance certainties towards individual-level mechanisms—is a portent of a new reorientation of future CSR research.



**Figure 5: Thematic Map (Density X Centrality)**

### Conclusions and Implications

This bibliometric overview fully describes the path of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and environmental sustainability research in emerging economies, registering an unprecedented academic contribution and topic diversity growth between 1998-2024. The evidence indicates that CSR research has evolved from philanthropy and legitimacy-based to performance- and strategic-based approaches, post-2015 boom as evidence of convergence with the Sustainable Development Goals. Core journals such as *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *Business Strategy and the Environment*, and *Sustainability* are at the lead in publications, and leading authors such as Buallay, Rezaee, and Jamali have established the intellectual framework for the discipline. Growing involvement by emerging economies has yet to bring integrated network collaboration, but theoretical thought is still West-dominated. The theme map identifies four overarching clusters—CSR and sustainability reporting, CSR and financial performance, ESG disclosure and cost of equity, and governance–capital cost linkages—illustrating a greater focus on incorporating CSR into business strategy and governance structures. The study has implications at

theoretical, managerial, and policy levels: highlighting contextualization of CSR models to country institutional context, intensifying inter-regional cooperation, and institutionalizing disclosure culture encouraging transparency and accountability. It is to be recommended that policymakers link CSR activities with nation-level sustainability strategies and firms mainstream CSR to further enhance legitimacy, innovation, and long-term competitiveness. Follow-up research must use comparative, longitudinal, and mixed-method strategies to break the divide between developed and developing contexts and investigate micro-level dimensions of CSR such as employee conduct, ethics, and eco-innovation and trend towards a more transformational and participative definition of CSR in emerging economies.

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