

A Qualitative Study to Understand the Factors Impacting Rural Livelihood initiatives: Select Companies in India

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has drawn more attention of scholars, practitioners, and policymakers and has grown to become a significant force in both internal and external company environments. The rise of CSR indicates a dramatic shift in business roles in society, from mere profit generation to a larger commitment to social and environmental stewardship. This research article reveals the factors influencing India's Rural Livelihood programs, focusing on CSR initiatives aimed at rural development. A semi-structured interview was conducted with 18 professionals involved in CSR implementation, utilising qualitative data analysis methods such as word clouds, thematic analysis and matrix analysis. The findings revealed that CSR initiatives significantly enhance the quality of life in rural India by addressing essential needs and implementing programs tailored to local demographics. However, challenges such as long planning cycles, a shortage of skilled personnel, and limited awareness of CSR hinder effective execution. This research article underscores the potential of CSR to improve rural livelihoods and emphasises the need for innovative approaches to overcome implementation barriers. As Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) gains recognition, companies must invest in those initiatives that elevate their brand value and uplift rural communities, fulfilling their social responsibilities.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Rural Livelihood, CSR initiatives, Sustainability

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has drawn more attention from scholars, practitioners, and policymakers and has grown to become a significant force in both internal and external company environments. By incorporating financial, social, and environmental concerns, business operations and firms' interactions with their stakeholders have become stronger than they were before. CSR has been recognised as a unique management concept and process these days (Bhattacharya et al., 2009; Jenkins & Yakovleva, 2006; Amran et al., 2015) and viewed as a way to gauge what a company is doing to improve its performance and reputation (Carroll & Shabana, 2010).

The rise of CSR indicates a dramatic shift in business roles in society, from solely profit generation to a larger commitment to social and environmental stewardship. Several historical, social, and economic reasons have contributed to this transition.

The Company Act 2013, notified on 30th August 2013, became important as an outcome of a working group constituted to bring a comprehensive revision to the Companies Act 1956. Corporate regulations (Business friendly), good corporate governance, and CSR are the key features of this act that sustain Indian economic growth (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, 2015). Section 135 applies to all companies, mandating them to spend at least 2% of their average net profit from the last three financial years on CSR activities annually (CAG, 2020).

CSR awareness and consciousness have grown as part of the CSR mandate and are aligned with national priorities such as public health, education, and livelihood. Achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the corporate sector's potential role and perceived responsibility have generated national interest (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, 2018).

Objectives of the study:

1. To analyse the role of the corporate sector in developing rural India through Corporate Social Responsibility.
2. To evaluate the enhancement of rural livelihood through CSR initiatives.

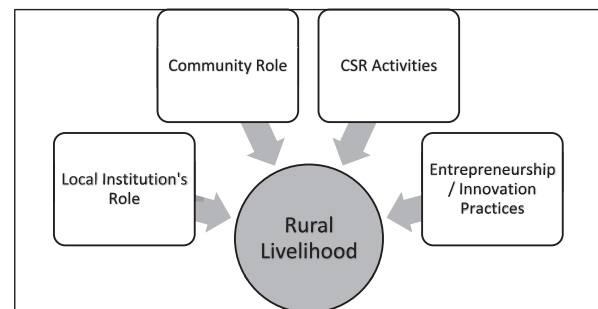
Companies can support societal objectives, especially health, education, and poverty alleviation. CSR activities have the potential to significantly improve economic possibilities in India, a country where a major portion of the population makes their living from agricultural and unorganised sectors and is still struggling for their basic livelihood (food, water, shelter, and clothing). The facts about livelihood funding under CSR receive only ₹1,654.39 crores from ₹29986.92 crores spent. Unemployment and underemployment in rural areas are insufficient to meet basic livelihood.

Table: 1 CSR Expenditure and Projects

Total no. of companies	Total Amount spent on CSR (INR Cr.)	Total No. of CSR Projects	Amount Spent on Livelihood Enhancement Projects (INR Cr.)
24392	29986.92	51966	1654.39

Source: *csr.gov.in*

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



Source: *Researchers' elaboration*

Indian companies are encouraging employee participation in CSR initiatives, particularly in rural development, as noted by Chaturvedi (2013). Comparing HR management practices in Taiwan and China (Warner & Zhu, 2002) demonstrates how different the outcomes of CSR initiatives can be based on the local environment, especially when it comes to rural life. Here, the conceptual model describes how Rural Livelihood (Dependent Variable) was allied with the Local institution's role, CSR activities, Entrepreneurship/Innovation practices, and the Role of the community (Independent variables). The local institutions (Gram Panchayat, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI), local NGOs) were strengthening the relationships from Social contract theory and

Legitimacy theory, as much literature reflected how it supports and strengthening, just as the CSR activities (old programs, new initiatives, one time distributions, solo and group funding, construction works, donation for particular action like camps, awareness etc.) by the institutions impacted a lot in many themes in different ways where these theories support and make stronger. Singh and Sarkar (2017) examined the CSR landscapes in India, communities affected livelihood by utilising things properly and in required ways without wasting them, especially those in rural areas. As a component of larger community engagement, CSR programs supported rural development. Entrepreneurship/innovation practices have had a good impact, and the theories support the model. Agarwal et al. (2013) examined Jharkhand's tribal communities' sustainable livelihood possibilities thanks to Tata Steel's CSR programs—projects like skill development programs for rural artists, digital literacy initiatives and agriculture innovation hubs. Many institutions were promoting sustainable farming practices. Several innovation labs focused on fintech and smart city initiatives in the Maharashtra region. The potential of CSR to generate rural lives in India is the subject of livelihood (Kumar, 2023).

Methodology

The study aims to interpret the viewpoints of Professionals (CSR/HR/Managers) on CSR initiatives and programmes. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents (Devers & Frankel, 2000). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 professionals (CSR/HR/Managers) experts under the CSR investments from financial years 2016-2021.

Companies participating in the research study are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: List of companies

Sl. No.	Public Sector	Non-Public Sector
1	Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited	Reliance Industries
2	Indian Oil Corporation Limited	Housing Development Finance Corporation Bank Limited

3	National Thermal Power Corporation Limited	Indian Tobacco Company
4	Power Grid Corporation of India	Hindustan Computer Limited Technologies Limited
5	Oil India Limited	Bajaj Auto Limited
6	Larson & Toubro	Infosys Limited
7	Gas Authority of India Limited	Tata Steel Limited
8	National Mineral Development Corporation	Tata Consultancy Services
9	Damodar Valley Corporation	WIPRO Limited

Table: 3 Respondents and Designations with Variable Codes

Name of the Corporate	Designation	Variables
Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited	Head, Corporate Communications and CSR	CSR1
Indian Oil Corporation Limited	Assistant Manager	MGR1
National Thermal Power Corporation Limited	Executive (CSR)	CSR2
Power Grid Corporation	Chief Manager HR	HR1
Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited	Assistant manager - HR	HR2
Oil India Limited	DGM (Field Development)	MGR2
Gas Authority of India Limited	Sr. Officer-HR	HR3
Larson & Toubro	Manager (CSR)	CSR3
Damodar Valley Corporation	Assistant Manager CSR	CSR4
Reliance Industries	Field Executive	MGR3
Tata Consultancy Services	Community Engagement Officer	MGR4

Housing Development Finance Corporation Bank Limited	State Head, CSR	CSR5
Infosys Limited	Senior Associate	MGR5
Indian Tobacco Company	H R Manager	HR 4
Tata Steel Limited	Community engagement Officer	MGR6
Hindustan Computers Limited Technologies Ltd.	Field Development Officer	CSR6
WIPRO	Associate	MGR7
Bajaj Auto limited	CSR Head	CSR7

Table 4 Details of respondents Designations in numbers

Name of the Corporate (Company)	Respondents			
	CSR	HR	Manager	Total
Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited	1	0	0	1
Indian Oil Corporation Limited	0	0	1	1
National Thermal Power Corporation Limited	1	0	0	1
Power Grid Corporation	0	1	0	1
Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited	0	1	0	1
Oil India Limited	0	0	1	1
Gas Authority of India Limited	0	1	0	1
Larson & Toubro	1	0	0	1
Damodar Valley Corporation	1	0	0	1
Reliance Industries	0	0	1	1
Tata Consultancy Services	0	0	1	1
Housing Development Finance Corporation Bank Limited	1	0	0	1
Infosys Limited	0	0	1	1
Information Technology	0	1	0	1
Tata Steel Limited	0	0	1	1
WIPRO	0	0	1	1
Bajaj Auto limited	1	0	0	1

Hindustan Computers Technologies Limited	1	0	0	1
Total	7	4	7	18

Source: primary data collected by scholar.

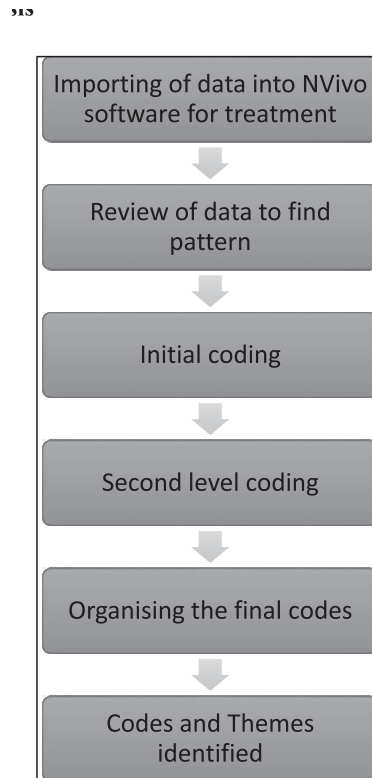
Data Analysis

The research study processed the qualitative data using word, matrix and thematic analysis. Themes were identified based on respondents' answers to questions about specific events or issues, analysed thematically. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that categorising diverse material and assigning codes to them is necessary to perform a thematic investigation.

The matrix analysis method was used to support the thematic analysis results. The data were analysed using NVivo software. Figure 2 shows the steps that were part of the thematic analysis process.

Steps for thematic and matrix analysis:

- Data were loaded into the NVivo program for treatment.
- A pattern was found in the data after that thoroughly studied and examined.
- After the trends were noted, the responses were coded to view them all at once.
- Similar codes were combined to complete the second level of coding.
- Depending on their shared characteristics, the final codes were arranged to reveal themes and codes.
- The themes and codes were subsequently examined.
- Matric tables, comparison codes, code frequencies, code charts, word frequencies and other analyses were imported from the software to achieve results.

Figure 2: Thematic Analysis

Thematic Analysis of RQ1

The specific objective of RQ 1 – What are perceptions about the corporate sector role in developing rural India through Corporate Social Responsibility? – was to understand professionals’ perceptions about the corporate sector’s role in developing rural India through Corporate Social Responsibility.

Table 5 RQ1 Themes and codes developed from RQ1 interview transcripts

Research Question	Theme	Code
What are the major assessment tools to identify the impact of CSR initiatives on skills imparted through CSR, rural livelihood, Entrepreneurship and innovation?	Rural Livelihood, Community welfare,	Livelihood, Agriculture, Community Development, Community Participation,
	Employpreneurship, Enterprise,	Employment, Entrepreneurship, Training Institutions, New projects, Organic Farming centres
What is the impact of CSR initiatives on livelihood development in the study area?	Skilling, Expertise, Modernize, Models, Personality Development, Belief	Education, Women Empowerment, Skill Development, Carroll’s model, CSR model, Ethical and human rights, eco-friendly initiatives, Self-independent, Skill enhancement, Society impactful, training centres, Skill development courses, training programmes, Cultural Tradition, Trust issue.
What are the successful and effective CSR strategies of various corporations which can be replicated and scaled up in the promotion of rural livelihood and development?	Health Infrastructure	Health, Infrastructure

Matrix Analysis of RQ1

Table 4 displays the matrix evaluation of the themes and codes of RQ1 and RQ2, containing the results of the matrix analysis of RQ1. Professionals shared their views on assessment tools to measure the impact of CSR on skill development, rural livelihoods, entrepreneurship, and innovation. Themes were identified during the analysis: Rural Livelihood, Community welfare, Entrepreneurship, Enterprise, Skilling, Expertise, Modernize, Models, Personality Development, Belief, and Health Infrastructure.

Based on the first, second, and final coding, codes for RQ1 and RQ2 were identified according to theme in Table 6.

No.	Codes	Theme for RQ1				Theme for RQ2		
		Rural Livelihood, Community welfare,	Entrepreneurship, Enterprise,	Skilling, Expertise, Modernize, Models, Personality development, belief	Health Infrastructure	Innovapreneurs, Pedagogy, Consort, Sustainable,	Financial memorandum, Financial Aid, Demand, Testimony, investments, Support,	Authority, Physical Aid, Administration, Aid Team, Commute,
1	Livelihood, Agriculture, Community Development, Community Participation	27	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	Employment, Entrepreneurship, Training Institutions, New projects, Organic Farming centres	0	24	0	0	0	0	0
3	Education, Women Empowerment, Skill Development, Carroll's model, CSR model, Ethical and human rights, eco-friendly initiatives, Self-independent, Skill enhancement, Society impactful, training centres, Skill development courses, training programmes, Cultural Tradition, Trust issue	0	0	55	0	0	0	0

4	Health, Infrastructure	0	0	0	6	0	0	0
5	Innovation centre, Entrepreneurs, Training (current), educational institution, PRIs, RSETIs, Expert support, our team support, Regular training	0	0	0	0	25	0	0
6	Financial support, MoU, Funding, solo financial support, Govt request, Local bodies, Special request, Annual report, R&D, RoI, Turn over, Stakeholder support, Institutional liasoning.	0	0	0	0	0	45	0
7	Committee, CSR team, Staff, NGO partners, Institutions, Infrastructure, Central & state dept., Local administration, Local panchayat, NGO & social workers, Asha workers, success stories, Program implemented.	0	0	0	0	0	0	43
Total		27	24	55	6	25	45	43

Source: Researcher analysis from NVivo

The analysis found that “Skilling, Expertise, Modernize, Models, Personality Development, Belief” was the essential and significant theme for RQ1. Various codes were learnt from the above themes, i.e. “Education, Women Empowerment, Skill Development, Carroll’s model, CSR model, Ethical and human rights, eco-friendly initiatives, Self-independent, Skill enhancement, Society impactful, training centres, Skill development courses, training programmes, Cultural Tradition, Trust issue” identified by of the professionals, but strongest code under these themes was “eco-friendly initiatives” (as indicated by 08 references). The professionals believe that eco-friendly initiatives and their applications enhance livelihood development.

The theme “Financial memorandum, Financial Aid, Demand, Testimony, investments, Support” was also identified, emerging as the second most important theme. The strongest code under this theme was “Annual report” (as indicated by 15 references). Professionals believe that investment in any initiative is the most prominent and key factor in livelihood enhancement.

The least talked about theme was “Health and Infrastructure.” Professionals discussed the theme, and then a vital code was identified as “health” (as indicated by four references).

Thematic Analysis of RQ2

The specific objective of RQ2 (What is the role and potential of CSR funding on Rural livelihood in India?) was to evaluate the rural livelihood enhancement through CSR initiatives. Themes emerged from the study: Financial Aid (RQ5), Financial Memorandum (RQ4), Investments (RQ13), Pedagogy (RQ5), Physical Aid (RQ5), Support (RQ15) Sustainable (RQ15), Testimony (RQ6), Administration (RQ12), Commute (RQ13), Authority (RQ6), Consort (RQ12), Demand (RQ6), Aid team (RQ12), Innovapreneurs (RQ4). Table 7 shows the themes and codes developed from RQ2 interviews and how the professionals shared their views and perceptions on the above objective.

Matrix analysis of RQ2

The matrix analysis of RQ2 is presented in Table 7. The professionals were asked to share their perceptions and viewpoints on the major assessment tools to identify the role and potential of CSR funding on Rural

livelihood in India. Themes were identified during the analysis: “Innovapreneurs, Pedagogy, Consort, Sustainable,” “Financial memorandum, Financial Aid, Demand, Testimony, investments, Support”, Authority Physical Aid, Administration, Aid Team and Commute.”

Table 7 RQ2 Themes and codes developed from RQ2 interview transcripts

Research Question	Theme	Code
What is the role and potential of CSR funding on Rural livelihood in India?	Innovapreneurs, Pedagogy, Consort, Sustainable,	Innovation Centre, Entrepreneurs, Training (current), educational institution, PRIs, RSETIs, Expert support, our team support, Regular training
	Financial memorandum, Financial Aid, Demand, Testimony, investments, Support,	Financial support, MoU, Funding, solo financial support, Govt requests, Local bodies, Special requests, Annual report, R&D, RoI, Turnover, Stakeholder support, Institutional liasoning.
	Authority, Physical Aid, Administration, Aid Team, Commute,	Committee, CSR team, Staff, NGO partners, Institutions, Infrastructure, Central & state dept., Local administration, Local panchayat, NGO & social workers, Asha workers, success stories, Program implemented.

Word-tree Analysis

The word tree briefed many things about the objective of the research questions in alignment

with the words CSR (image 4.1), Skill (image 4.2) and Livelihood (image 4.3). Word tree analysis in NVivo provides various benefits for analysing themes connected to CSR, skill development, and livelihoods. Data Visualization provides a clear visual depiction of word frequency and context, which aids theme discovery.

Word cloud

Word Cloud Analysis creates word clouds based on the frequency (100) queries the professionals (CSR/HR/Managers) responded to during data collection based on their experiences, fulfilling my objective towards livelihood and rural development with their initiatives.



Fig. 3 Source: word cloud by author from NVivo

Word Comparison Analysis

Here are some comparisons with theme words for better understanding for analysis (images 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6):

- 1. Skilling and Rural Development:** Rural development and skills aid communities by improving capacity and encouraging innovative uptake, resulting in higher production. It promotes social inclusion by providing marginalised populations with essential skills. NVivo Application identifies skill gaps and training requirements using thematic qualitative data analysis.
- 2. Innovapreneurship:** It encourages economic diversification beyond traditional agriculture in rural development. It encourages environment-friendly activities, leads to job growth and reduces rural unemployment. The NVivo

application analyses entrepreneurial tales to find elements of success and obstacles in rural business endeavours.

3. **Enterprise and Livelihood:** The benefits of economic stability with enterprises include employment creation and support for local economies, which improves community resilience. Skill development through enterprise activities builds essential skills, increasing employability among community members. NVivo Application allows us to find themes related to the influence of enterprises on livelihoods.
4. **Innovapreneurship and Employpreneurship:** Innovapreneurs create new products or services, promoting local economic growth and diversification. Startups managed by Innovapreneurs create job possibilities, contributing to general economic growth. Innovapreneurs frequently interact with local communities, encouraging collaboration and building support networks that strengthen community bonds. Employpreneurship enables people to maintain stable occupations while pursuing entrepreneurial initiatives, resulting in multiple revenue sources. NVivo shows the relationship between innovation and entrepreneurs and employment and entrepreneurship.
5. **Local team and Rural Development:** It encourages community members to collaborate and to implement projects more effectively. It allows for tailored solutions relevant to the local situation and improves community engagement and ownership of activities. NVivo Application assesses team dynamics and project outcomes by coding discussions from community meetings.

Results

Agarwal et al. (2013) highlight how Tata Steel's CSR initiatives have supported sustainable livelihoods for Jharkhand's tribal communities, demonstrating the positive economic impact of corporate actions on disadvantaged groups. Indian Oil's CSR efforts in FY 2020-21 benefited over 1,000 individuals in Patna, Bihar, by enhancing local income through ghat

beautification. Powergrid's initiatives in Gorakhpur empowered self-help group (SHG) members to start small businesses. Singh and Sarkar (2017) discuss CSR's role in rural development, emphasising its importance in community engagement. HCL Technologies and NTPC have also contributed by providing training for SHG women in Uttar Pradesh. Infosys improved digital literacy in rural areas through its foundation, while the Mahindra Group's "Mahindra Rise" initiative aimed to enhance rural quality of life through education, healthcare, and infrastructure programs. These CSR activities significantly impact rural livelihoods and community well-being across India.

The analysis revealed that the theme of *"Skilling, Expertise, Modernize, Models, Personality Development, Belief"* was essential for enhancing livelihoods, with eco-friendly initiatives emerging as the strongest code, supported by eight references. Professionals emphasised the importance of education, women empowerment, and skill development within this context. The second most significant theme was *"Financial Memorandum, Financial Aid, Demand, Testimony, Investments, Support,"* where the *"Annual Report"* was identified as the strongest code with 15 references, highlighting that investment is crucial for livelihood enhancement. In contrast, the *"Health and Infrastructure"* theme received less attention, with "health" being the primary focus but only noted in four references. The findings suggest that eco-friendly initiatives and financial investments are vital for improving livelihoods, while health infrastructure requires greater focus.

Discussion

The study was conducted to ascertain the measures for improving lives in northern states, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, and Arunachal Pradesh. Professionals' opinions were considered in investigating the role of CSR in establishing innovation centres and assisting more entrepreneurs. By directing, coordinating, and implementing training programs at the grassroots level, professionals also had a direct role in improving livelihood and making it more sustainable. Additionally, it was noted that many previous studies

had concentrated more on analysing and interpreting these perceptions of the subject.

As a result, it gave the Innovation Centre room to grow and helped more entrepreneurs understand experts' opinions. The professional perspectives were examined to thoroughly understand the contribution of current CSR domains and their usefulness in changing livelihood and rural development, which views CSR as a crucial component.

Key evaluation instruments influenced CSR programs based on skills taught through rural innovation, entrepreneurship, and livelihood. The concepts of community participation and development have influenced livelihood enhancement projects. When executed strategically, CSR programs have gone beyond altruism and gifts to foster the growth and improvement of rural areas. Promoting rural livelihood and development can benefit from replicating and scaling up various corporations' successful and effective CSR programs. Numerous concepts and establishments have successfully contributed to its improved implementation.

Conclusion

In India, the CSR investment is not uniform. Their beliefs, thinking, and perceptions differ from company to company and region to region. More specifically, CSR investment in Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh is insufficient compared to Maharashtra, Telangana and Gujarat. So, CSR development also varies from region to region. Today, CSR investment and its bearing on initiatives, programmes, and ethical and social enhancement is questionable. As a result, pertinent questions concerning the efficacy of CSR funding and administration were raised. Lack of knowledge about CSR has no beneficial effect on selecting a livelihood and rural area program that is morally and socially acceptable. This has also sparked interest in further research and analysis.

Implication

This article evaluates the elements influencing India's Rural Livelihood programs and initiatives for rural development. This article also investigated the issues of CSR initiatives from the perspective of professionals directly involved in implementing or managing the initiatives at the ground level. The

results presented some insights on the current CSR initiatives and projects practised in rural livelihood in the regions selected for study, i.e. Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. The study also provides financial status and their understanding of how it is processed for programmes that significantly impact livelihood initiatives. The study indicated the need for immediate attention on how the committee approves the initiatives and projects based on requests for Annual reports or RoI (return on investment) issues. Another issue for the CSR team was how to handle the requirements at particular places and the mismatch of the programmes. Financial aid, memorandum, demand, testimony, investment, and support themes reflected the structure towards the rural livelihood and development. The abilities will practically assist the community, institutions, training partners, and non-governmental organisations determine which areas need improvement to sustain and expand CSR activities and programs. Regarding initiatives and implementation, the results also highlight the significance of expertise, skilling, modernisation, models, beliefs, and personality development. Thus, all CSR teams, committees, and aid teams must enhance CSR requirements to be an effective weapon for rural livelihood and development.

Therefore, the dynamic involvement of multiple teams and institutions is crucial when it is necessary to redesign the current structure by including novel learning methodology and practical components. As a result, they can embrace a responsive pedagogical approach in the CSR sector and consider broader CSR implications for livelihood development and efforts.

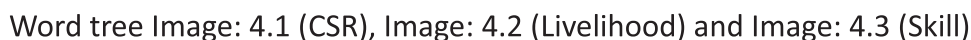
Limitations and Future Recommendations

The research paper uses keywords from selected research papers based on Google Scholar. Future researchers can use different search keywords, locations, companies and years to arrive at a research paper and conduct this study. This might arrive at a new theme, and accordingly, the conceptual model used (Fig 1) can be revised to understand more patterns.

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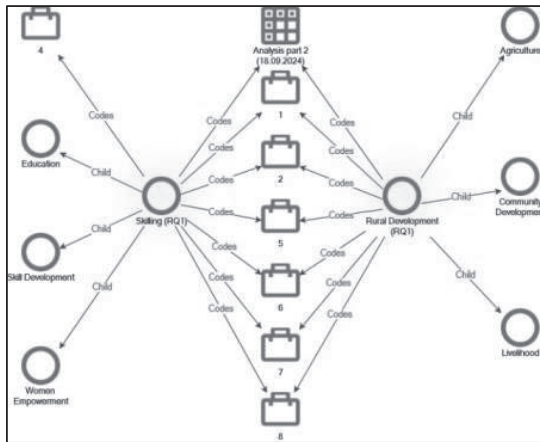


Image 4.4

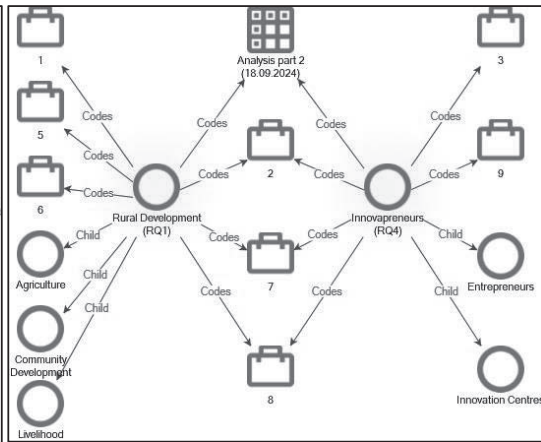


Image 4.5

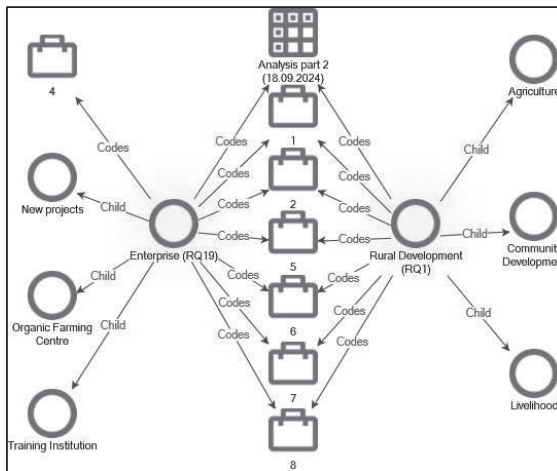


Image 4.6

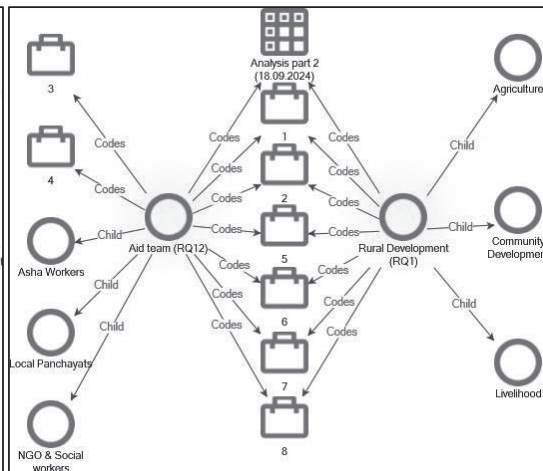


Image 4.7

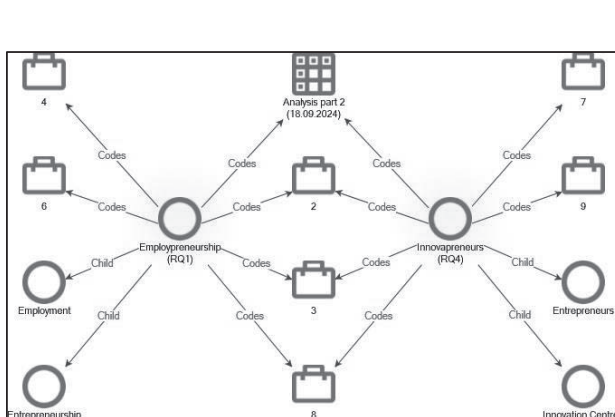


Image 4.8

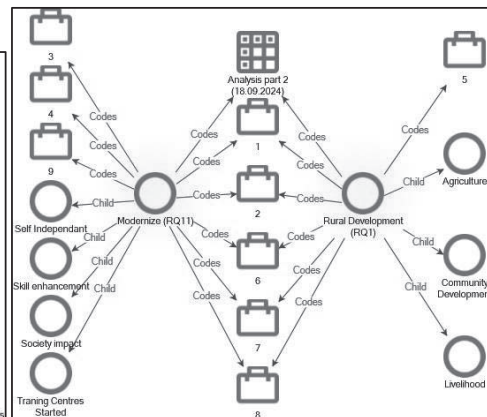


Image 4.9

Source: NVivo by Research scholar