



The Role of Corporate Social Responsibility in Enhancing Socio-economic Prosperity of the Third-Gender (Hijra) Community in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept that enables corporations to play an active role in social development beyond their economic goals. This study focuses on how CSR is engendered as a means to increase the socio-economic well-being of the third-gender (hijra) in Bangladesh, which is a minority and socially marginalised group in the country who are constantly excluded from work, health, education and social engagement. The study uses a qualitative doctrinal research approach, focusing on reading the literature and analysing academic, policy, legal, and selected CSR case studies relevant to Bangladesh. It reviews CSR contributions across employment, skills development, health care access, education, and community inclusion, with a focus on the hijra population. The findings suggest that CSR programmes will be of significant value in creating employment, providing vocational training, supporting education, offering healthcare programmes, and integrating supramicrosocietal practices to meet the socio-economic needs of the hijra community. The study also concludes that alliances among corporate, government, and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) actors enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of such interventions. The study concludes by suggesting applying CSR as a tool for inclusive development and social justice in Bangladesh, achieved through a well-informed, participatory, and long-term approach focused on the specific challenges faced by the hijra community.

Keywords: Bangladesh; Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); Hijra; Prosperity; Third-gender.

Introduction

To positively contribute to social development alongside economic activities, corporate social responsibility (CSR) emerged as a major topic as corporations assumed greater responsibility for social issues (Montiel, 2008). According to Marrewijk (2003), CSR encompasses a wide range of duties unrelated to profit, including social, environmental, and economic ones. According to Carroll (1999), CSR is the economic and legal obligations and demands that society imposes on corporations at a given time, including ethical and philanthropic considerations. Therefore, CSR is not just a theoretical concept, but is also a practical guideline for guiding corporate behaviour as a tool to make the corporation behave in a way that benefits consumers both in the corporation's activities and in the larger community, where consumers are vulnerable or disadvantaged (Islam & Huosong, 2016).

The concept of corporate responsibility has become more popular than ever and is now part of corporate citizenship, impacting current business practices (Mehrnaz et al., 2018; Saha et al., 2021). Social justice, environmental sustainability, ethical governance, and inclusive development are the new pillars of CSR initiatives (Marrewijk, 2003). It plays an important role not only in establishing the corporation's goodwill and stakeholder confidence but also in its long-term sustainability (Sarvaiya & Wu, 2014). In addition, CSR helps create shared value that enriches society and simultaneously improves the value created for corporations and communities (Porter & Kramer, 2006).

In this broader context, the third gender (hijra) community in Bangladesh necessitates careful study and action. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) officially counts 12,629 individuals identifying as "third gender" in the country. It is a precise number, but non-governmental organisations and various studies suggest the actual figure is much higher, ranging anywhere from 50,000 to over a lakh

(1,00,000) (Shahreen, 2026). Despite decades of efforts, hijras, who are one of the most marginalised groups in Bangladesh, still face severe socio-economic disadvantage to this day (Haque, 2021). In modern times, the socio-political status of hijras in South Asian societies has undergone significant transformations from centuries ago, despite their historical presence in these societies, during which they were recognised for their social and cultural roles, including in relation to birth, marriage, and religious ceremonies (Nanda, 1999). In the colonial era, hijras became a so-called 'criminal tribe' through various legislations, including the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, through which they were discriminated against and socially excluded (Ahmed, 2013). Such exclusion has persisted even after Bangladesh's independence and remains a very much part of the social fabric (Al-Mamun et al., 2022).

The most important policy change occurred in 2013, when the Government of Bangladesh officially categorised hijras as a third gender and granted legal recognition on the list of State Official documents, such as Passport and National Identity Card (NID) (Ahmed, 2013; Hossain, 2017). It was an important landmark in the legal journey for equality and visibility for third genders. Since this decision, several welfare programmes have been implemented, including welfare protection programmes and education and employment preferences in certain public sectors (Habib, 2013; Hossain, 2017). However, these strides have not been adequately reflected in socio-economic inclusion. Today, the hijras remain subjected to discrimination and marginalisation in various aspects of their lives, such as employment, medical care, housing, education, etc. (Haque, 2021; Abdul & Sameena, 2020).

The situation of the hijra community in Bangladesh is extremely precarious at present in socio-economic aspects. While gaining legal recognition has brought visibility, significant challenges remain to ensure meaningful integration with mainstream society (Akter & Shankha, 2024). Despite efforts, social stigma, discrimination, and institutional exclusion remain barriers to accessing basic services and economic opportunities (Jebin, 2018; Hossain, 2017). This is due to low educational attainment caused by school dropout linked to school bullying, siblings' bullying and absence of support at the school level (Kalam et al., 2024). Thus, many hijras continue to rely on informal jobs (besiping and performing various social events) to survive (Hossain et al., 2024). Lack of access to health care also remains a significant challenge, as many hijras will not access health care because they fear discrimination from health care providers, adding to health vulnerabilities and mental distress (Khanam, 2021; Hossain, 2017). While NGOs and advocacy groups have launched programmes in education, healthcare, and vocational training to enhance the socio-economic situation of hijras, these programmes have limited impact and require greater institutional support (Rubel & Anderson, 2023).

In this context, CSR can be used as an opportunity to help eradicate such persistent inequalities by implementing inclusive corporate-driven projects. The importance of CSR has grown as corporations see it as a viable way to use their resources, power, and social obligations to fight for equality and social benefit (Social Responsibility Asia (SR Asia), 2014). If CSR takes a focused approach to employment generation, vocational training, health, education, and community engagement, it could have a positive socio-economic impact on the hijra community in Bangladesh (Daize & Masnun, 2019). In this financially and socially polarised context, corporations have the potential and the capacity to help fill welfare deficits and help close the divide between philosophy and social reality (Werner 2009; Haldar et al. 2016; Lamia et al. 2024).

Although there is an increasing body of literature on CSR and more talk about the rights of the hijra, so far, little specific research has addressed how CSR can serve as a tool to enhance the socio-economic condition of the marginalised community in Bangladesh, particularly the hijras. This is the foundation of the present study. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question: How can CSR initiatives contribute to the socio-economic empowerment and inclusion of the hijra community in Bangladesh? The main objective of this study is to critically examine whether CSR can serve as an effective mechanism to address the socio-economic challenges faced by the hijra community in Bangladesh and to explore the potential pathways through which CSR initiatives may promote social and economic rehabilitation, empowerment, and inclusion.

Methodology

The current study uses a qualitative research methodology with a doctrinal, literature-based approach to explore the role of CSR in establishing socio-economic prosperity for the hijra community in Bangladesh. Because the study aimed to analyse existing knowledge, changes in law, policy initiatives, and documented CSR practices concerning socially marginalised people, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate.

The use of secondary sources is the mainstay of the study. Some of this literature consists of articles in scholarly journals, books, policy documents, government reports, publications of international organisations and studies related to CSR issues, social inclusion, gender diversity and the socio-economic situation of hijras. Documented CSR initiatives, case studies, and organisational reports were

also examined to identify examples of corporate engagement in Bangladesh related to the welfare of hijras.

The data collection process entailed a systematic literature search on three main themes: literature on CSR conceptualisations, literature on the socio-economic situation of the hijra community, and literature on CSR and the hijra community. Academic databases, institutional publications, government documents and prior published research relevant to CSR and social inclusion were identified. Sources were chosen based on their relevance to the study objectives and their role in understanding the relationship between CSR and socio-economic empowerment.

The analysis was based on the conceptual framework developed in this study, which examines CSR from both economic and social perspectives, as well as a development, health-supporting, and transformative perspective. Literature data were obtained, and documentation of CSR practices was conducted to analyse the data thematically and surface trends, opportunities, obstacles, and impact. This framework served as a structured approach to analyse the potential of CSR activities in the areas of employment creation, social inclusion, education, health care, and the empowerment of hijra people in general.

The study is not of a primary empirical nature and will therefore take advantage of the literature, sources, and documented CSR practices, all available and of satisfactory quality. Though this may limit the scope for examining the broader long-term effects of individual programmes, the methodology is adequate for drawing a picture of the long-term effects of CSR initiatives in creating socio-economic prosperity and inclusion for hijras in Bangladesh.

Results and Discussion

Results

Conceptualising Corporate Social Responsibility

In a broad sense, CSR has evolved from donor-centric fundraising to a more complex strategy that embraces sustainable development, the democratic role of working in partnership with stakeholders, and social justice. In recent times, CSR is associated with a moral or social responsibility to the community as part of a corporation's operations, rather than solely for economic benefits. It also has economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic duties and obligations, and thus goes beyond making money to concern for social obligations (Marrewijk, 2003). According to Carroll (1999), CSR is a way society makes demands on corporations, in terms of economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities, at a particular time. In that light, CSR serves as a normative corporate principle and action that allows corporations to embed a broader "social" platform into their operations.

Over the last few decades, global focus has shifted toward responsible corporate citizenship, and CSR is being integrated as a sound business strategy across sectors (Mehrnaz et al., 2018; Saha et al., 2021). Social justice, ethical governance, environmental sustainability and inclusive social development are all emerging themes in corporate efforts to direct their initiatives in the right direction (Marrewijk, 2003). Besides, it builds stakeholder trust and corporate reputation and also leads to long-term sustainability of the corporation (Sarvaiya & Wu, 2014). Porter and Kramer (2006) also conclude that CSR can create shared value, meaning achieving business success and community development simultaneously. This knowledge has also proved highly relevant for addressing the social inequalities faced by disadvantaged communities, particularly in the context of CSR.

CSR in Bangladesh has become a significant development tool, supplementing the public welfare sector's resources by leveraging corporations' resources to support public welfare spending. Its relevance is enhanced when responding to the needs of communities that are still socially excluded despite having been formally recognised by law. In this context, the hijra community is an important dimension in which CSR can make a significant contribution toward inclusion and socio-economic empowerment (Werner, 2009; Social Responsibility Asia (SR Asia), 2014).

CSR as a Mechanism for Socio-Economic Inclusion of the Third-Gender Community

Socio-economic exclusion against the hijra community in Bangladesh is multidimensional and very structural. While legal recognition has helped create an atmosphere of visibility and rights for hijras, they remain disadvantaged in areas such as employment, healthcare, education, and social participation (Haque, 2021; Al-Mamun et al., 2022). These barriers are exacerbated by stigma and discriminatory practices, limited institutional support, and limited access to resources, which impact their participation in social and economic life.

CSR can be an effective institutional channel for corporations to help address these inequalities. CSR can mobilise financial resources, organisational capacity, and social influence, helping corporations make direct contributions to inclusive development and community welfare (Daize & Masnun, 2019). CSR provides a more systematic approach than general philanthropic aid and can

address both people's immediate needs and their long-term socio-economic difficulties (Raharjo et al., 2024). For the hijra community, this may encompass employment accommodations, educational support, vocational education, access to healthcare and social inclusion programs.

In the context of this study, CSR is defined as a practical means by which corporations can contribute to the socio-economic empowerment and inclusion of Bangladesh's hijra population. It is more than a campaign for charitable giving; it carries wider responsibilities related to justice, equality, dignity, and sustainable development. The support that CSR can provide for the welfare of hijras can thus be considered across various interconnected aspects.

Economic Role of CSR

The economic aspect is one of the aesthetically significant contributions of CSR. Loss of rights is one of the aspects that continues to be an issue for the hijra community in Bangladesh, which is economic exclusion. Many hijras are unable to take up formal employment or engage in stable income-generating activities as a result of discrimination, lack of education and social marginalisation (Hossain, 2017; Stenqvist, 2015). Thus, many continue to rely on informal job opportunities, such as begging, acting on social occasions, etc., to sustain their livelihoods (Hossain et al., 2024).

CSR can largely mitigate this by generating jobs, providing vocational assistance, promoting inclusive recruitment, and fostering entrepreneurship development (Daize & Masnun, 2019). Through CSR, access to formal work and sustainable incomes can be improved, helping strengthen financial independence and reduce economic vulnerability. Since economic empowerment is a constituent factor of socio-economic development, it is important in the domains of resource access, individual autonomy, and broader societal participation (Raharjo et al., 2024). Thus, the economic dimension of CSR serves its the basis for greater inclusion and development of the hijra community.

Social Role of CSR

CSR also makes an important social contribution by promoting inclusion, dignity, and social acceptance. Authorities are not only facing poverty challenges, but also social stigma and exclusion in Bangladesh. There is also prejudice against hijras in everyday life across families, communities, educational institutions, and workplaces, as mentioned by Haque (2021) and Al-Mamun et al. (2022). These experiences impact their social awareness, involvement and belonging.

For social responsibility, CSR can play a role in changing social attitudes and reducing prejudicial attitudes associated with inclusive policies, awareness-building programmes, community engagement, and anti-discrimination practices (Social Responsibility Asia (SR Asia), 2014). The inclusion of the hijra within institutional and professional settings is also normalised through corporate involvement in fostering diversity and inclusion. Through this, CSR helps provide for material welfare and also promotes social recognition and dignity. This social inclusion is crucial, as there can be no sustainable socio-economic investment without inclusion and equal participation in broader society (Raharjo et al., 2024).

Developmental Role of CSR

A key component of CSR is its developmental aspect, such as through education, skills development and capacity building. Educational exclusion is a significant challenge for hijra people in Bangladesh. Bullying and social rejection in school, and Institutions' lack of support for the hijras, reduce the chances for them to get formal jobs and access higher education (Kalam et al., 2024).

Education- and career-oriented CSR activities can help address these structural challenges by enhancing learning, training, and career development opportunities. Human capability and employability are built through scholarship support, skills development, mentorship, and educational support. They are vital interventions because they provide long-term opportunities rather than short-term support. Caring for development in CSR increases confidence, independence and resilience, contributing to social mobility and economic participation (Raharjo et al., 2024). For this reason, it is an important factor in promoting the long-term socio-economic condition of the hijra community.

Health-Supportive Role of CSR

Nevertheless, another barrier to healthcare access is affecting the welfare of hijras in Bangladesh. Another factor which influences access to healthcare and impacts the well-being of Bangladeshi hijras is their residence. Hijras may also feel reluctant to access medical care due to the social stigma attached to it and fear of discrimination and poor treatment by both health professionals and society (Khanam, 2021; Hossain, 2017). Restrictions on access to healthcare services, in addition to exacerbating overall socio-economic inequity, affect both the quality of life and the capacity to work, thereby lowering people's well-being.

CSR can play an impactful role here by sponsoring medical outreach programs, awareness campaigns, counselling services and collaborations with hospitals. CSR helps enhance access to health-related services, realise more inclusive practices and support systems, and benefit not just the individual but also members of the wider community. As health and socio-economic participation are closely linked, financial participation through health-related CSR is an important part of the broader process of empowerment and inclusion (Raharjo et al., 2024).

Transformative Role of CSR

In addition to the direct provision of services, CSR is also transformative insofar as it has a long-term impact on structural change. The sustainability of inclusion needs to be embedded in broader systems and attitudes that block it, and this is necessary in areas beyond employment, education, and health care. Such social change needs can be facilitated by CSR, which can impact workplace culture and institutional inclusion, build partnerships with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and reduce discrimination and inequality (Werner, 2009; Haldar et al., 2016; Lamia et al., 2024).

This expanded scope transforms CSR from a concept of corporate philanthropy into something more. It is a means to an end for a movement of social change to bridge the divide between legal inclusion and lived inclusion for the hijra community. In the interest of securing conditions for a hijra to live with dignity, equality, and opportunity in the economic and social arenas, corporations can contribute through their commitments and policies. When combined, these dimensions give this study a conceptual underpinning. They then direct the discussion to the impact of the hijra community's CSR activities on its socio-economic welfare in Bangladesh and emphasise the need for the existing practices to be discussed in the next section.

CSR Initiatives Supporting the Third-Gender (Hijra) Community in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, CSR activities are not confined to charity for people in need but have also expanded into broader social development programmes focusing on social inclusion and empowering the broader community (Stenqvist, 2015). In recent years, CSR has gone beyond a theoretical concept and has become a practical means to address socio-economic issues and inequalities faced by vulnerable groups (Sharma, 2013). This broader picture, however, has led to the growth of an important and sometimes overlooked group benefiting from inclusive CSR interventions—namely, the hijra community. While there are very few targeted CSR programmes for hijra compared with development programmes, current practice shows significant potential to improve hijra's socio-economic conditions through CSR (Stenqvist, 2015).

CSR plays a vital role in improving the welfare of hijras by focusing on one of its most crucial sectors: employment generation and economic inclusion. One of the significant problems that affects the lives of hijras in Bangladesh is discrimination in employment, and they are getting less recognition in formal employment, even though they have fewer educational qualifications. This has created a situation in which most community members are engaged in informal jobs that provide unsustainable sources of income and inadequate social protection (Hossain et al., 2024). Corporations can also be instrumental in achieving financial independence and dignity through their CSR initiatives, including inclusive employment practices. In enabling corporations to participate, opportunities may be created to minimise economic vulnerability and thus foster greater social acceptance. In this respect, the employment initiatives driven by CSR are not only about generating income but also about boosting the hijra community's confidence, their presence in the workplace, and support within institutions and structures (Daize & Masnun, 2019).

There is also a strong connection between CSR and vocational training and skills development. A lack of formal education among many hijras and structural exclusion from formal institutions pose challenges in accessing professional opportunities which demand specific skills and qualifications (Kalam et al., 2024). CSR programmes oriented towards capacity building can thus have a transformative effect by equipping members of the hijra group with practical skills relevant to the labour market. These may include vocational training, entrepreneurship, support, Digital literacy, tailoring, beauty services, etc. or small business development. CSR enhances employability and creates greater potential for sustainable livelihoods, helping ensure long-term economic resilience and self-reliance. The programmes are of great value, as they are not just short-term solutions but also provide opportunities for permanent socio-economic mobility (Widhagdha et al., 2022).

CSR initiatives are also a pivotal element in enhancing access to healthcare and the well-being of the hijra community. Despite Bangladesh failing to provide meaningful legal protection to them, healthcare is a significant space where hijras continue to face exclusion due to a variety of reasons. Fear of stigma, discrimination and lack of inclusive healthcare treatment often deters people from seeking medical assistance for hijras (Khanam, 2021). Such obstacles are linked to adverse health

outcomes and contribute to socio-economic fragility. On the other hand, CSR-related health programmes can be effectively supported through medical outreach, awareness-raising, healthcare services, and counselling. These interventions can be seen as part of physical and mental health, dignity, and quality of life. Very often, CSR's involvement in healthcare is considered part of broader socio-economic empowerment (Hossain, 2017), as it directly impacts economic productivity and social participation.

There is also a need for CSR in education to enhance the socio-economic situation of the hijra community. Many hijras are facing discrimination and exclusion from the education system as they are being taunted, rejected by their families, cannot afford fees, and are not accepted in institutions (Kalam et al., 2024). Therefore, further education and professional development through skill training are still not available. Scholarships, education, and support interventions may help overcome some of these obstacles, such as learning materials and academic support. These may be addressed through CSR interventions, for instance, in the form of scholarships, learning materials, education or academic support. These initiatives enhance access to knowledge, create more employment opportunities, and support long-term social mobility. Educational support is particularly crucial as this is at the heart of structural inequality and will empower sustainably, far beyond the immediate need for financial assistance (Widhagha et al., 2022).

In addition to interventions in employment, education, and healthcare, CSR also fosters social awareness and inclusion. Socio-economic marginalisation of the hijra is intricately linked to negative social attitudes, prejudice and discrimination (Jebin & Farhana, 2015). When economic and legal development has a limited impact, it is because it is not generally accepted in the social sphere. Awareness, diversity, inclusion, and community-engagement-oriented CSR programmes can help eradicate social stigma and make workplaces and societies more supportive of hijras. This could help build acceptance, mitigate discrimination, and increase representation of the hijra in society (Social Responsibility Asia (SR Asia), 2014). Hence, the importance of CSR is not only for material welfare but also for social transformation and for dignity.

A key aspect of CSR activities in Bangladesh is the growing participation of cluster organisations in collaboration between the business sector, NGOs, and public institutions (Haque, 2021). Issues impacting the hijra community are multifaceted and can not be solved by a system that focuses on a single aspect. Institutional-plus-financial collaboration through complementary CSR programmes enables corporations to pool their financial and institutional resources, the NGO's field expertise, and the policy, administrative, and institutional support of government agencies. Loose links between partners enhance the outreach aspect of a project, contributing to its implementation and sustainability by working on behalf of marginalised communities (Werner, 2009). For the hijra population, the collaborative approach is especially applicable in programme delivery, where a strong sense of trust is needed, accessibility is essential, and cultural sensitivity is essential.

In general, CSR programmes in Bangladesh have shown positive trends, making significant contributions towards strengthening the socio-economic empowerment of the hijra community (Habib, 2013). CSR-driven solutions offer real-world strategies to offset inequality and enhance the quality of life through opportunities for employment creation, skills building, health care provision, education and social inclusion. While innovative and existing programs are small in scope and their institutionalisation needs remain weak, they indicate a positive trend in companies' engagement in social development in a more inclusive way. In addition, the interventions highlight how CSR extends beyond the traditional image of philanthropy and demonstrate how it can empower, include, and engage hijras in Bangladesh through a sustainable community development lens (Stenqvist, 2015).

Case Studies

Successful CSR Projects

Successful projects in the field of CSR have demonstrated that the socio-economic prosperity of the hijra community in Bangladesh can be significantly improved. For this reason, a remarkable case of this effort has been made by Grameenphone, a leading telecom in Bangladesh. As part of a larger CSR initiative aiming to create job opportunities and vocational training for hijras, Grameenphone has taken a step forward. This program teaches them different trades, such as mobile phone repair, tailoring, and beauty services. The 2018 efforts resulted in many hijras successfully securing permanent jobs and leading to an improved financial status (Hossain, 2017). A highly successful CSR project has been jointly initiated by BRAC, one of the largest NGOs globally, with several corporate entities. This association may focus on delivering medical services and care, as well as on the welfare of the hijra community. The initiative will include free medical check-ups, counselling for mental health issues, and sessions on health awareness. This is done through mobile health clinics and community health

workers. Creating access to healthcare services addressing both the physical and mental health needs of hijras through this program has been a phenomenal improvement (Khan et al., 2020).

Standard Chartered Bank has set up a scholarship scheme specifically for hijra students. This program helps cover educational costs like tuition in part or in whole. Along with providing financial support to students through various means, this program also provides counselling and mentoring to students to ensure they can flourish in their various academic undertakings. Investing in the education of hijras (Hossain, 2017), Standard Chartered Bank is committed to ensuring long-term socio-economic empowerment of hijras while improving the levels of social inclusion for the hijra community. The presented case studies highlight the transformative power of CSR activities on the socio-economic development of hijras in Bangladesh. These measures respond to hijras' specific challenges, focusing on vocational training, health care, and education. These projects also provide a ladder for hijras to claim agency and feel included in society.

Corporate Partnerships

The hijra community in Bangladesh has reportedly benefited tremendously from corporate partnerships with NGOs and government authorities, which have been highly beneficial initiatives. Such collaborations leverage the capabilities and resources of each partner to create impactful and substantial CSR projects. A relevant example is Unilever Bangladesh and the non-governmental organisation Bandhu Social Welfare Society. This collaboration focuses on providing medical treatment and vocational training to the hijra community. To support Bandhu's work, Unilever contributes financially to health camps that offer free health check-ups, counselling, and health education. Vocational training institutions would enable hijras to learn tailoring, beauty services, and information technology skills. As stated by Hossain (2017), there has been improved access to work and healthcare opportunities for the hijra group, which has also increased socio-economic empowerment in the community owing to this association.

This is another example of a successful partnership, as the country has successfully partnered with the global firm Standard Chartered Bank and Bangladesh's Ministry of Social Welfare. Through their joint endeavours, they founded a hijra scholarship program that covers tuition, books, and other educational costs. This programme also includes academic counselling and guides students to achieve their academic goals, in addition to supporting people in need, according to Khan et al. Standard Chartered Bank notes that by partnering with the government, this program is aligned with national policies and targets the individuals in the most need (Kew, 2020).

Other than that, the Grameenphone-BRAC partnership has been instrumental in bringing social awareness to the hijra community. Grameenphone funds BRAC's initiatives to give hijras access to healthcare services, vocational training and microloans. As a result of this affiliation, BRAC has expanded its areas of operation and extended further support to the community of people who identify as hijra. Specific to the microloan program, this has spurred many hijras to start their businesses, creating greater economic independence and reducing dependency on traditional, often stigmatised forms of income (Hossain, 2017). In Bangladesh, these case studies focus on enhancing the socio-economic prosperity of the hijra group, recognising the role of corporate partnerships. By developing CSR initiatives that acknowledge the challenges that hijras face and promote their inclusion and empowerment within society, organisations can promote these initiatives through collaboration among corporations, NGOs, and government agencies, leading to more effective and sustainable projects.

This study is based on a literature review, policy analysis, and documented CSR practices regarding hijra in Bangladesh. These findings suggest that CSR plays a role in multiple interconnected aspects related to the socio-economic welfare of the third gender, which include economic empowerment, social acceptance, education and skills development, health assistance and social transformation in general. The results are reported using the conceptual matrix developed in this study.

Economic Role of CSR

The findings of the literature search revealed that poverty is still a major issue among the hijra community in Bangladesh. Even after they were legally recognised, hijras face challenges on the formal job market, as they lack access to education and are subject to social stigma and discrimination (Hossain, 2017; Stenqvist, 2015). As a result, many people in the community continue to rely on informal jobs and precarious livelihoods (Hossain et al., 2024).

Findings indicate that CSR efforts can be effective in promoting economic empowerment through measures such as vocational training, employment, entrepreneurship development and workplace inclusion. These are all efforts to increase employability and income generation opportunities, which can enhance economic vulnerability (Daize & Masnun, 2019). The literature also indicates that

economic participation leads to financial independence among hijras and enhances their active participation in social and economic life.

Social Role of CSR

The findings show that CSR efforts play a role in social inclusion and in minimising social stigma for the hijra community. Social exclusion is a significant constraint on the well-being of hijras, limiting their ability to access employment, education, health care and other social spaces (Haque, 2021; Al-Mamun et al., 2022).

The literature reviewed highlights that CSR through awareness programmes, diversity programmes, inclusion in the workplace and community engagement is significantly linked to an increase in social acceptance and a decrease in discriminatory attitudes (Social Responsibility Asia (SR Asia), 2014). These are the programs that assist in making the world in which they can live a better place for "the third gender".

Developmental Role of CSR

The results reveal that education and skills development are crucial areas in which CSR contributes to empowerment measures in the medium to long term. In the field of education, we are seeing a high prevalence of educational exclusion in the case of hijras, because of school dropout, bullying and lack of support from school (Kalam et al., 2024). All these contribute to restricting access to skilled employment and social mobility.

CSR's educational support, scholarship programs, vocational training and capacity building initiatives are recommended to have a positive impact on the human capital development of those in the hijra community and aimed to improve access to learning opportunities and boost employability, supporting the long-term socio-economic development.

Health-Supportive Role of CSR

The results revealed that providing access to health services is still problematic for a considerable number of hijras in Bangladesh. Members of the community may not seek medical assistance due to fear of discrimination and social stigma or due to a lack of easy access to health care services for inclusive health care services (Khanam, 2021; Hossain, 2017).

The analysed literature highlights that CSR interventions can contribute to enhancing access to healthcare through medical outreach programs, healthcare awareness activities, counselling and engaging with healthcare providers. The activities measure up both physical and psychological health and well-being and lessen socio-economic participation obstacles related to health.

Transformative Role of CSR

The findings also suggest that, by fostering inclusion, equality and community participation, CSR can have a significant impact on overall social change. In addition to providing direct support or services, CSR can also lead to changes in institutional practices, the workplace climate, and public attitudes regarding the LGBTQIA+ community (Werner, 2009; Haldar et al., 2016).

Literature supports that CSR engagement can help close the legal-real life divide by facilitating more involvement of hijras in economic, educational and community life in the long run. This is an example of a transformative role that underscores the potential of CSR contributions not only for people's well-being but also for societal change.

The study's findings suggest that CSR can play an important role in the socio-economic development of hijras in Bangladesh. However, there is a body of evidence that it not only provides financial support but also has a positive impact on employment, education, health, social cohesion and empowerment. However, the research findings also show that the success of CSR programmes lies in the continued application of CSR, the inclusiveness of the implementation process, and interinstitutional linkages between the three parties: civil society organisations, government institutions and the CSR implementer: the corporation.

Discussion

These results demonstrate that the CSR has substantial potential to contribute to the socio-economic prosperity of the hijra community in Bangladesh. The evidence reviewed suggests that CSR interventions can contribute to economic empowerment, social inclusion, educational development, health provision, and social transformation. The impact of these results is not limited to what programmes achieve on an individual basis. However, upon closer examination, CSR can be seen as a complementary means to state-led welfare support, helping overcome structural barriers and continuing to constrain hijras' socio-economic status, even though they are legally recognised.

The most important finding concerns the economic role of CSR. The literature has consistently shown that economic exclusion is one of the most significant issues for third genders in Bangladesh (Hossain, 2017; Stenqvist, 2015). While formal recognition by the government has given rise to legal recognition, this does not necessarily equalise access to jobs and economic opportunities. The results indicate that vocational education, employment creation, and entrepreneurship support are priorities for CSR programs and could be used to help promote a narrowing of the divide. In a wider landscape, these efforts represent an evolving «new sense of corporate responsibility, not just for profitability but also for society-making and the welfare of stakeholders (Carroll, 1999). In addition to benefiting beneficiaries of economic empowerment through CSR, the program itself also supports greater economic participation and social stability.

The results on social inclusion also point to CSR as a tool for addressing societal discrimination. Although the legal landscape allows hijras to engage in public spaces, the issues they experience are embedded in social stigma and prejudice (Haque, 2021; Al-Mamun et al., 2022). The results of this analysis indicate that employment programmes and awareness-building campaigns work best when combined with general advocacy to shift the attitudes of discriminators and to create acceptance. This observation underlines the fact that socio-economic growth cannot be realised using monetary means only. Instead, sustainable empowerment needs social recognition, dignity and [societal] equal participation. Consequently, CSR programs which support diversity and inclusion efforts also help to advance social justice and economic development.

The results also show that long-term empowerment is achieved through educational and developmental means. Due to social exclusion and inadequate institutional support, there are educational disadvantages for many members of the hijra community (Kalam et al., 2024). This has hindered opportunities for formal employment and for training in subject areas relevant to the professional world. The evidence indicates that CSR programming in scholarship, vocational training, and capacity building can play a major role in tackling these obstacles. These programs are especially significant for analysing socio-economic disadvantage by tackling its root causes instead of just its symptoms. Taking measures to build human capital helps engage in sustainable empowerment and socio-economic mobility that is sustainable in future.

Findings are also reflected in healthcare research, which highlights the overarching developmental importance of CSR. Because of social stigma, lack of support system, and discrimination, access to healthcare services is limited (Khanam, 2021; Hossain, 2017). The results show that CSR can increase access to health services and help to promote good physical health and mental well-being. This is of key importance, as health status is strongly associated with economic productivity, educational involvement, and overall quality of life. Therefore, healthcare-related CSR initiatives should be regarded not only as welfare projects but also as investments in human development and social inclusion.

In this study, CSR as an enabler of change has emerged as a key theme. The results suggest that CSR can contribute to overall institutional and societal transformation by shaping institutional practices, public perceptions, and community engagement (Werner 2009). This aligns with modern thinking about CSR, focusing on shared value creation and sustainable development rather than philanthropic approaches (Porter & Kramer, 2006). With regard to the hijra community, transformative CSR represents a paradigm shift from short-term, charity-based support to a range of activities that enable structural inclusion and equal opportunity. A method like this would build on CSR's ability to contribute to sustainable development and social justice.

While this is all good, the analysis has some drawbacks. In most cases, CSR initiatives are limited to small actions and take place in restricted areas of the organisations; these initiatives are too small to have a large impact. Second, corporations lack knowledge of the problems and issues faced by the hijra community, which can affect the efficacy of programmes (Khan et al., 2020). Thirdly, there is insufficient empirical evidence on the long-term impact of a large number of CSR interventions. These restrictions imply that, although CSR has a very large potential to be effective, it can only be effective if implemented with care in programme design, if it is genuinely committed to the long-term and if there is a genuine commitment from beneficiaries and the wider community to making it work.

It indicates a need for a collaborative approach among corporations, government, and civil society organisations in the analysis. The socio-economic problems faced by hijras are complex and require comprehensive interventions. Partnerships enable the merging of the corporation's financial and institutional resources with NGOs' expertise and networks, and the adaptation of programmes and activities to complement other policy goals. It improves programmes' effectiveness and sustainability and ensures they are responsive to the community's needs.

In conclusion, CSR can be a valuable tool for promoting socio-economic development among the hijra in Bangladesh. One of its strengths is that it is not only a source of direct assistance, but also of processes of inclusion, empowerment and social transformation. However, this means that it takes time,

programme design based on evidence, and more concerted efforts from all concerned actors to get a good long-term result.

Challenges in Implementing CSR Initiatives for the Third-Gender Community

Although CSR has now come to be seen as a means of social development, there are still many problems in making CSR effective in socio-economic marginalisation of the hijra community in Bangladesh. The results and analysis of this study showed that these issues take place at three levels: institutional, social and policy and impact the intermediation and the sustainability of CSR work.

Social stigma and discrimination towards the hijra community are one of the biggest issues. Despite the legal acceptance of the hijras as a third gender status, the attitude of society towards the hijras has not changed significantly in many places in Pakistan (Haque, 2021; Al-Mamun et al., 2022). There are ongoing negative stereotypes and prejudice against children of certain ethnic and religious groups in the areas of employment, schooling, health care, and public sphere participation. Accordingly, although CSR programmes may be in place in certain locations, beneficiaries or implementing organisations may still face obstacles that can undermine their effectiveness. However, although some discriminatory attitudes persisted, this shows that legal definitions of social inclusion do not guarantee social inclusion.

Another issue concerns the limited size and scope of CSR efforts specifically targeted at the hijra community. Though many companies have CSR initiatives, few are specifically targeted to the socio-economic problems faced by hijras. There are often small-scale, project-specific schemes, or schemes which are part of a larger scheme for a vulnerable population in general. Therefore, the needs and experiences of the transsexual community may not be effectively addressed. This restriction limits the project's longer-term impact on empowerment and inclusion.

One of the greater challenges is the lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. There is a lack of indicators to measure long-term outcomes of many CSR programmes, which focus on implementation rather than outcomes. As such, it is difficult to find empirical evidence of sustainable and effective CSR interventions within the hijra community. If there are no accurate statistics, it is harder to evaluate whether the programmes are making a difference in employment, education, access to health care, or social integration. Likewise, no evidence-based assessment creates opportunities for organisational learning and programme improvements.

Resource limitations and organisation priorities could further influence inclusive CSR projects. Smaller organisations might not have the financial and operational capacity to offer a wide range of social programmes due to insufficient resources. However, sometimes CSR initiatives focus only on short-term philanthropic projects rather than on development. These can sometimes be effective in the short term, but they do not address the structural aspects of socio-economic inclusion.

The results also suggest that the use of technology remains a challenge due to limited cooperation among corporations, government agencies and civil society organisations. Socio-economic issues faced by the hijra are multifaceted and complex, and therefore, require a coordinated response across different sectors. The effectiveness and sustainability of CSR interventions, however, are often undermined by fragmented implementation and inadequate stakeholder involvement. Coordinated responses are needed to ensure programmes are responsive to the community's needs and are tied to broader development activities.

Last but not least, the low involvement of the hijra (transvestite, transsexual, and transgender) in programme design and application is a significant challenge. Numerous development projects, from an institutional standpoint, fail to engage those they seek to address adequately. This can mean that programmes do not reflect hijras' concerns and life experiences. The promotion of sustainable empowerment strategies must take participatory methods that acknowledge community members' agency, knowledge and views.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Conclusion

This study explored the effect of CSR on the socio-economic welfare of the hijra community in Bangladesh. Despite the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh recognising hijras in 2013, there remain significant barriers to their inclusion in areas such as employment, education, health, and broader social participation. There is a long tradition of social stigma and discrimination, as well as structural exclusion, which can also affect the benefits of legal recognition and can be seen to be a brake on the socio-economic development of the community. In this context, the study examined the potential of CSR as an effective instrument for empowering hijra people, promoting inclusion, and advancing sustainable development.

Following a qualitative study of literature, policy documents, scholarly works, and documented CSR literature, the study identified the potential of CSR to be significant for the socio-economic welfare of the hijra community, with multiple interconnected pathways. The results suggest that CSR can contribute to economic empowerment through employment opportunities, vocational training, and entrepreneurship. The study also revealed that CSR can be a tool for social inclusion, fostering diversity, reducing discriminatory attitudes, and opening opportunities for wider participation in social and economic life. Another important aspect in which CSR can contribute to empowerment and enhance the quality of life in the long term is the provision of educational support, skill development programmes, and healthcare interventions.

The analysis found that CSR's importance goes beyond simply providing charitable aid. Inclusive development is as much a strategic tool of CSR as it is a philanthropic act, and it encompasses a wide range of structural inequalities that it can help address. Incorporating equality, participation and the welfare of stakeholders into corporate practice can help organisations help bridge the formal-legal and social inclusion divide. The study therefore concurred with modern perspectives on CSR that emphasise both creating shared value and the goal of sustainable development, in which corporate achievement and social development are continually pursued.

Meanwhile, the study identified challenges that could hinder the success of any CSR campaign. These include social stigma, a lack of targeted programmes, a lack of monitoring and evaluation systems, and limited collaboration between corporations, government institutions, and civil society organisations. The results indicate that overcoming these challenges is key to ensuring that CSR can have meaningful and sustainable impact on the hijra community.

The unique contribution of this study is its focus on CSR through the perspective of hijra inclusion in Bangladesh – an aspect which has been the subject of a rather less explored academic discourse. The study recommends a conceptual framework for the economic, social, developmental, health-supportive, and transformative functions of CSR, providing a systematic approach to understanding its role in the welfare of marginalised communities. The results also show that CSR can be used in tandem with governmental social welfare programs to facilitate and magnify a corporation's contribution in terms of human resources, skills, and institutions.

Finally, the study suggests that CSR can play a positive, meaningful role in supporting the socio-economic viability of hijras in Bangladesh when applied in an inclusive, participatory, and long-term manner. Structural inclusion, capacity-building, and equal-opportunity efforts are needed from corporations to move beyond quick-fix philanthropic programs toward sustainable progress. This study can be expanded in the future by conducting empirical investigations with CSR practitioners, corporate stakeholders, and members of the hijra community to understand the actual impact of an individual CSR intervention. It would further enhance the understanding of the role of CSR in socio-economic development, inclusive growth and social justice in Bangladesh and beyond.

Suggestion

Given the problems discussed above, the following steps can be taken to enhance CSR's impact on the socio-economic development of hijra in Bangladesh.

First, to promote and normalise the participation of hijra community members in the workplace, corporations must adopt more inclusive employment practices. Labour market formalisation is one of the most important factors for socio-economic empowerment, and corporations are particularly well placed to provide access to formal work. Economic exclusion and greater social integration can be advanced significantly through inclusive policies in recruitment, the workplace, and anti-discrimination.

Second, emphasis should be placed on CSR programmes in education, skills development, and support for entrepreneurship. The results of this research show that the lack of education and professional opportunities remains a significant impediment to socio-economic development. The needs of the hijra community are therefore to be addressed by developing a gender-specific curriculum for a scholarship programme, vocational skilling, developing digital skills and providing entrepreneurship support. These investments benefit people and help build their capacity for long-term empowerment through working and economic autonomy.

Third, healthcare should play a more prominent role in the CSR approach for marginalised populations. Corporations can contribute to healthcare access through medical outreach programs, awareness initiatives, mental health services, and collaborations with healthcare providers. As the documented barriers to health care services for hijras, interventions in this area can play a major role in overall well-being and quality of life.

Fourth, there should be enhanced collaboration between corporations and governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as with community-based organisations working with the hijra population. This collaboration helps share knowledge, execute programmes, and promote

sustainability. NGOs can bring complementary skills and trust with the people that corporations lack and cannot demonstrate or establish in their own communities. These mutually beneficial arrangements can lead to CSR programs that are more responsive to local circumstances and community needs.

Fifthly, a robust monitoring and evaluation system should be put in place to assess the effectiveness of organisations' CSR interventions. The outcomes in terms of employment, educational opportunities, access to healthcare, social inclusion and quality of life should be measured through clear performance indicators. Evidence-based evaluation will assist corporations in pinpointing successful practices, confronting implementation obstacles, and refining future programmes.

Sixth, CSR programs ought to be participatory, such that members of the hijra community are engaged in the design, implementation and evaluation of the program. This depends on active community involvement, which leads to ownership, programme relevance, and a greater likelihood of sustainable results. Involving beneficiaries in policy development increases the likelihood that policies address actual needs rather than pseudoneeds and lead to real improvements.

Last, businesses should go beyond philanthropy to long-term development plans and strategies that foster structural inclusion and social justice. Generosity is good, but if the fundamental root causes of exclusion are not tackled, sustainable socio-economic well-being cannot be achieved. Incorporating inclusion and equality into the basic concept of CSR is helping corporations play a more active role in realising a society in which people in the hijra community can participate with dignity, opportunity and equality.

Adopting the recommendations would improve CSR's ability to serve as a meaningful tool to support the socio-economic prosperity and social inclusion of the hijra community in Bangladesh. Sustained commitment and collaborative engagement, coupled with evidence-based practices, represent a powerful means for companies to make meaningful contributions to fostering inclusive development and eradicating long-standing inequalities.

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