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The Influence of Multinational Corporations' Corporate Social Responsibility Programs on Poverty Alleviation

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Master's thesis

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Multinational Corporations are undeniably responsible for returning to society for social welfare and development. Therefore, companies design CSR activities that help improve the stakeholders' living conditions and poverty alleviation. In this regard, the MNCs in Pakistan have made substantial efforts to alleviate poverty and improve the lifestyle of the people. However, such efforts were not properly researched. This study aimed to assess the influence of MNCs' CSR programs on poverty alleviation in Pakistan. The objectives encapsulated the identification of CSR programs in poverty alleviation, CSR activities, and stakeholder engagement and effectiveness of these programs. The study provided extensive discussion from the previous literature on the role of MNCs in poverty alleviation along with the Stakeholders and Institutional theories. The literature review also discussed the CSR programs' environmental, social, and economic impacts and their role in poverty alleviation. The study followed the qualitative methodology which helped to identify rich patterns and themes from the content analysis. The study utilized secondary data from the most authentic sources including the companies' websites and published reports regarding CSR programs and poverty alleviation. The purposive sampling technique was applied and four MNCs were selected for data collection based on the availability and the depth of the data published on their websites. All four MNCs disclosed several CSR practices and strategies to alleviate poverty in the local communities of Pakistan. The results showed that the most commonly adopted programs are related to employment opportunities, educational support, women empowerment, water and sanitation, agricultural support, and food programs. The detailed discussion on each program shows that these measures effectively alleviated poverty. The companies are doing a tremendous job in youth programs and women entrepreneurship development. However, these companies are working on a small scale inside their working communities, which has limited benefits only to those communities and does not expand to other communities hence poverty alleviation is quite isolated and restricted only to those communities. The study provides useful insights that contribute to theoretical development and help in understanding different aspects of stakeholders' theory such as community engagement, trust, and transparency of the CSR programs. The study also presents recommendations for managers to improve the creative aspects of the CSR programs that involve all the community members. The study has outlined a few limitations, including the dependence on the secondary data and the cross-sectional study. Future studies can include more companies and comparisons of the local and international companies on poverty alleviation programs. This study can also benefit policymakers by guiding MNCs in designing and implementing CSR programs for poverty alleviation in Pakistan.

Keywords: Multinational Corporations, Corporate Social Responsibility, Poverty Alleviation, Socioeconomic Landscape, Inclusive Growth, Sustainable Development, Stakeholder Engagement, Qualitative Research, Secondary Data, Pakistan.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Significance of Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is explained as a firm's commitment to carry out its operation in an ethical and socially responsible manner and at the same time contribute towards the welfare of the communities (Hussain et al. 2021, 139-154). CSR pertains to a wide range of activities and initiatives focused on reducing the negative influences on stakeholders such as workers, consumers, the environment, and the communities whilst maximizing positive contributions towards them. CSR's importance relates to its potential to develop a long-term sustainable value for communities and the firm itself, which is completed by incorporating environmental and social concerns into their business activities and improving the firm's reputation (Khan et al. 2020, 1395-1419). The firms incorporating CSR tend to develop and increase the consumers' loyalty, and workers' satisfaction and ensure that they are unique and different from the existing competitors in the market. However, the firms need to ensure that they comprehend the rules and regulations associated with CSR.

Furthermore, CSR can aid in reducing the risks linked with social and environmental concerns such as lawsuits, regulatory fines, and reputational hindering to the firm (Yi et al., 2020). Firms addressing such issues raised by activists can avoid expenses and sustain themselves to operate socially. Moreover, CSR aspects can allow a business to promote the level of innovation and technology by identifying new opportunities in the market, improving the quality of goods, and enhancing the firm's operational effectiveness. Besides, CSR is vital in contributing to worldwide challenges such as poverty, climate change, inequality, and depletion of resources (Hussain et al. 2021, 139-154). By aligning their operations with CSR tactics, businesses can significantly reduce these issues and aid in developing a much more sustainable and equitable environment.

1.2 Global Importance of Poverty

Poverty alleviation is vital for worldwide sustainability, stability, and progression of economies (Yi et al. 2020). Amidst the global economies, millions of inhabitants as well as societies tend to face a lack of basic needs such as clean water, food, healthcare, and education. The outcomes of poverty tend to be extensive which affects the communities as well as the economies completely. Henceforth, addressing poverty is vital for

accomplishing much prosperous and equitable world. One of the primary causes why poverty alleviation is vital on a worldwide scale is its direct relation with security and peace. (Khan et al. 2020, 1395-1419)

Poverty mostly leads towards the implication of conflicts, social unrest as well as instability. However, the aspect of poverty governance and development tends to remain a major problem across the globe. Since the mid-20th century, economic development has been associated with poverty reduction (Hussain et al. 2021, 139-154). The general assumption is that the advantages of economic development tend to be tricked down to poor people automatically and it will lead to poverty reductions.

1.3 Background of the Research

Multinational Corporations (MNCs) tend to have a significant power to operate at a large scale in the world (Medina-Muñoz et al. 2020, 3-19). The MNCs can manage global issues such as poverty since they are equipped with all the necessary resources and management techniques (Gangwar 2023, 267-276). They even can transform the low-income markets as well as help them lift millions or more out of poverty (UNDP, 2019). In the case of developing countries, the proactive participation of MNCs in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives has turned out to be of great importance (Masum et al. 2020, 35-40). Apart from the government, multinational corporations (MNCs) tend to have a lot of power as well as competence for working with many stakeholders on social issues like the eradication of poverty (Ghauri 2022, 1-5). Multinational companies, with their significant power within the complex network of the global economy, have come to play a vital role in determining the fate of countries, especially developing ones. In this context, their proactive participation in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives becomes of greater importance. This section explores the historical background and follows the development of MNCs' participation in CSR activities. As per the study's investigation of the historical background, multinational corporations have played an important role in the economic development of developing countries since they emerged as a business form (Abbasi's 2021). Several distinct phases characterize the development of MNCs and CSR initiatives (Mahmoud et al., 2021).

At initial, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives were frequently charitable gifts to regional charities (Stanislavská et al. 2020). However, the relief and complexity of CSR programs increased as corporate awareness increased (Popkova et al. 2021). The

Multinational corporations that are operating have adopted more inclusive methods in recent decades, which extend beyond charity and include social welfare, the conservation of the environment, and sustainable development (Khan et al. 2021, 205-223).

Corporate Social Responsibility programs help in addressing various issues such as inequality, and lack of accessibility to necessary services, and assert the significance of CSR programs (Anser et al. 2023, 15). CSR initiatives have become useful instruments, encouraging inclusive increased, and advanced sustainable practices in addition to their proper duties (Di Vaio et al. 2022). These initiatives are important because of the socioeconomic environment, which is marked by problems including poverty, inequality, and limited access to basic services. Multinational corporations are powerful economic entities that have the potential to significantly advance the nation's socioeconomic status. In addition to their primary responsibilities, CSR initiatives are useful tools for addressing urgent social issues, encouraging inclusive growth, and advancing sustainable practices (Lu et al. 2020). The value of CSR initiatives highlights that issues including poverty, inequality, and insufficient access to basic services continue to exist. As strong economic entities, multinational corporations can significantly contribute to the nation's socioeconomic development. Beyond their traditional business responsibilities, CSR initiatives have become crucial in addressing pressing social concerns, fostering inclusive growth, and advancing advanced sustainable practices (Kumar & Dwivedy 2023).

There is substantial extent literature that explains the connection between MNCs and their CSR initiatives, yet every context presents different socioeconomic circumstances. Therefore it is important to understand this connection in a particular context (Zou et al. 2021, 952). Since global CSR trends focus on environmental sustainability and ethical practices, the differences include the emphasis on local development of the community, tailored educational programs, and initiatives for well-being to address particular challenges and differences. The core purpose of this study is to close the current information gap by offering a full overview of how MNCs' CSR initiatives have changed and impacted national efforts to reduce poverty. A comprehensive investigation of the effects of CSR initiatives on poverty alleviation is necessary because poverty has many facets and multinational corporations (MNCs) engage in a wide range of CSR initiatives (Afshan et al. 2021). Prior international research may provide valuable perspectives, but an in-depth study is necessary to fully comprehend the distinct dynamics at work due to particular socioeconomic circumstances.

1.4 Research Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to explore how CSR programs of MNCs in developing countries can help alleviate poverty. To attain the purpose of the study, the contextual focus is on Pakistan - a developing country that suffers from poverty due to numerous reasons such as lack of resources, political will to bring change, higher population density, etc. (Hussain et al. 2021, 139-154). MNCs have the power to bring a change as they are influential and dominant having resources. However, it is important to use them wisely that facilitate the poor people instead of the bureaucracy. Having poor bonding with the stakeholders at the local level also creates issues in understanding the problems faced by the people on the ground (Khan et al. 2020, 1395-1419).

There is a gap that exists between corporate social responsibility as well as the needed efforts for reducing poverty (Ordonez-Ponce & Weber 2022, 975-1000). Such a gap becomes more challenging due to socioeconomic variables, political influence, or cultural singularity (Ullah et al. 2021, 280). Social inequality and poverty continue to be an issue despite growth in the economy and advances in politics. The study further highlighted other issues where political changes were undertaken determining the process of democratization and its impact (Schlipfenbacher 2021). Emphasizing CSR, several types of research focus on how institutional pressure influences CSR reporting. At times, the CSR initiatives are well-defined at the high-quality levels but do not involve the local views. Thus, it is important to pay heed to this topic which is situated in the case of a specific developing economy.

Considering the impact of CSR on poverty alleviation, questions are raised based on the effectiveness as well as aptitude of MNCs for constructively aligning with the needs of individuals to alleviate poverty (Khan et al. 2021, 265). Some of the local stakeholders face challenges in establishing a connection with MNCs to work on CSR activities (Gyane et al. 2021, 1-12). In various situations, CSR activities are considered a threat to local power when MNCs do not succeed in managing the relationship with the government or the other social stakeholders effectively (Bondy & Starkey 2014, 4-22). When CSR activities by MNCs threaten local power because of inefficient relationship management with governments or social stakeholders, consequences could range from regulatory backlash to social unrest situations (Brammer, Nardella, & Surdu 2021, 301-320). Loss

of operational licenses, harm to reputations, and diminished market access are the potential outcomes that hinder the firm's long-term sustainability and profitability.

Some studies discuss the role of MNCs in conducting CSR activities for the welfare of the society however the discussion lacks engaging the people who are affected by the CSR initiatives in decision-making where the perspective of individuals matter (Bondy, Moon, & Matten 2012, 4-22; Kim, et al. 2018, 40-47). These refer to the suffering ones who need or demand help (Gangwar 2023, 267-276). There are constraint researches that have been carried out regarding the dynamics among MNCs CSR initiatives and reduction in poverty specifically on diverse socio-economic aspects. However, there is an efficient need to assess the inadvertent consequences and potential disputes that might arise among CSR goals and wider socio-economic development goals that require further exploration for informing policies and other business practices. The study by Medina-Muñoz and Medina-Muñoz (2020, 3-19) contributes to the understanding of the core complexities of MNCs as well as their relationship with the local stakeholders in the case of poverty alleviation. Many determinants of CSR strategies including activities by MNCs are there which involve the host government strategies with the shareholder demands (Goralski & Tan 2022, 20). Such institutions create the policy requirements, with the initiatives or standards, for the encouragement of CSR from the MNCs.

World Bank identified CSR to be an extent to which businesses can meet the legal, economic, ethical as well as discretionary duties which are enforced on them through the stakeholders. Thus, the intention could be a blend of strategic, voluntary as well as lawful moves (Yang et al. 2020, 1-39). Hence, to close the disparity, it is important to grasp thoroughly the complex nature of poverty and the CSR efforts that fit into the regional needs. The issue is also having a poor level of information on the definite effect of MNCs' as well as CSR initiatives on decreasing the difficulties that are recognized for quality education as well as efficient ways to close the knowledge gap among the theoretical study with real-world strategies.

1.5 Persistent Issues of Poverty Despite of Economic Growth

Economic growth is the most powerful instrument for minimizing poverty as well as enhancing the quality of life in developing nations. Both country case and cross-country research address overwhelming evidence that quick and sustained economic growth is vital to make faster progress toward accomplishing millennium development goals (Nahar & Khurana 2023, 724-732). The aspect of growth can lead to virtuous circles of opportunities and prosperity. Strong growth as well as employment opportunities tend to enhance incentives for people to make adequate investments which may lead to the emergence of adequate entrepreneurs. A strong and adequate level of economic growth tends to enhance human development which leads to prosperity amidst economic growth. However, under different situations, similar ratios of growth can have different implications on poverty, the employment prospects of the poor, and an extensive indication of human development (Yi et al. 2020). The extent to which growth decreases poverty tends to depend upon the extent to which the poor participate amidst the growth procedures as well as share in its proceeds (Nahar & Khurana, 2023, 724-732). Therefore, both the pattern and pace of growth matter for decreasing poverty.

However, persistent poverty communities are in some manners the nations being left behind to maintain higher poverty ratios and being detached from having significant economic growth (Khan et al. 2020, 1395-1419). Most economies tend to face poverty due to the influence of structural inequalities being pertained in the communities (Hussain et al. 2021, 139-154). These inequalities tend to develop disparities in access to resources, and opportunities as well as decision-making, and addressing them is vital for breaking the cycle of poverty. Furthermore, educational opportunities serve as a gateway out of poverty yet several nations encounter barriers such as gender-based discrimination, improper infrastructure, and economic constraints. However, economies need to ensure that they provide adequate and proper education to reduce poverty. Furthermore, unfair economic functions contribute vitally to the implication of poverty (Kang et al. 2020). Explorative labour practices, limited access to credit or resources, and unequal distribution of health can hinder the economic progress of weak populations (Hussain et al. 2021, 139-154).

1.6 Research Questions

The main purpose of this study is to examine the influence of Multinational Corporations' Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Programs on Poverty Alleviation. This analysis serves as the core research question driving the investigation in this study.

- *What is the role of CSR activities of MNCs in poverty alleviation in developing countries?*
- *How do MNCs engage with the local stakeholders in alleviating poverty in the host countries?*
- *What are the specific CSR strategies used by MNCs that contribute to poverty reduction in developing countries?*

Frist sub-question focuses on how MNCs are involved with local stakeholders and reveals the mechanisms through which CSR activities are integrated that shed light on the efficacy and inclusivity of the efforts regarding alleviating poverty. Understanding different CSR strategies employed by MNCs will be addressed in the second sub-question that elucidates practical interventions that directly influence poverty reduction. To address both the sub-questions the main research question on the role of CSR activities in poverty alleviation is answered inclusively. These questions will provide relevant insights regarding the strategies, alliances, and outcomes that are critical for MNCs to efficiently participate in reducing poverty in developing nations.

1.7 Context of Pakistan

Since the research is set to understand the role of MNC's poverty alleviation CSR activities in developing countries, Pakistan provides a relevant context. In Pakistan, poverty eradication is one of the most persistent issues. As per the World Bank, about a quarter of the population of the country tends to live under the poverty line (Jamal 2021). In 2023, the poverty in this developing country was predicted to be 37.2 percent (Region et al. 2023). This rate was slightly below the previously observed measure in the year 2018, which became 39.8 percent; though, accounting for the growth of population, more than 3 million poor people in the country rather than 2018 (Poverty et al. 2018). The proportion of the working class below the purchasing power parity of \$1.90 per day in the year 2021 was 3.7% (Shaikh 2023). Many ways are there through which poverty can

be eradicated, including governmental policies, international aid, as well as corporate social responsibility (Merino & Valor 2011, 157-167).

MNCs conducting CSR initiatives have a significant role in poverty alleviation with the provision of support for education, livelihoods as well as health. In Pakistan, in the upcoming few years, several organizations will incorporate various CSR reports in the annual results at the end of the year where socially responsible organizations will be able to develop a standout CSR report (Khan et al. 2020, 106-121). Nevertheless, it is observed that most of the firms in Pakistan usually lack in complying with the regulations and accountabilities to ensure that such laws are followed or enforced in a true manner that is aligned with the regulatory firms who are accountable for the duties (Shaikh 2023). A way through which poverty alleviation is possible in Pakistan is that as a part of CSR activities, MNCs invest in community development programs (Sajjad & Eweje 2014, 163-187). The companies must work with local organizations as well as communities for identifying the particular needs including the challenges that are faced through the community. Later, programs must be developed to address such needs. The Pakistan Centre of Philanthropy (PCP) published a survey regarding the philanthropic activities of publically listed firms in Pakistan back in 2005 (Alam & Rashid 2022). It was observed that donations were the most popular means by which many philanthropic activities could be conducted. The report revealed that 64% of the publically listed firms are involved in the social development endeavour (Yunis et al. 2017, 65-88). The main contribution to society from such companies is usually because of the faith or humanitarian relationship. In addition, it was found that certain MNCs focus on charity-based activities which include factors such as marketing prospects, tax benefits as well as developing a brand value and image. Furthermore, a follow-up survey report was published through the PCP in the year 2006 (Yunis et al. 2017, 65-88). A considerable increase in activities of the MNCs of a philanthropic nature was found in that report compared to 2005. Though corporate philanthropy is seen on the rise, it even has been argued that it yet suffers from having needed strategies and tactics that can benefit and have a considerable positive impact on poverty alleviation in Pakistani society. Moreover, the role of MNCs in engaging with the local stakeholders, knowing their issues, and facilitating them with needed help are all direly needed in Pakistan so that the rate of poverty declines.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature primarily explains the concept of CSR and then explains the current scenario of poverty and the importance of CSR in addressing poverty in developing nations. It then discusses distinct CSR strategies that are employed by multinational corporations for poverty alleviation. In addition, the review focuses on a comprehensive analysis of the coordination of MNCs and public sector organizations for poverty alleviation. This is followed by the analysis of the interaction of MNCs and local communities for poverty alleviation and the influence of stakeholder engagement in MNCs on CSR programs to alleviate poverty. The review also examines the cutting-edge and innovative strategies employed by MNCs within their CSR initiatives, such as creative program designs, special alliances, and technological integration. It also highlights the challenges faced by MNCs while implementing CSR initiatives for poverty alleviation. Besides, most of the theoretical frameworks including stakeholder, sustainable development, resource-based view, and institutional theories are rooted within this debate.

2.2 Analysis of Multinational Corporations at Global Context

2.2.1 Overview of MNCs

Multinational Corporations (MNCs) are firms that operate in several nations across the globe and have reached in terms of their distribution channels (Singh & Misra 2021, 27). MNCs have particularly their headquarters situated in a single nation which is known as their home country whilst they tend to have branches or subsidiaries. MNCs tend to play a vital part in the worldwide economy since they account for significant contributions towards global investment, trade, and goods production (Werhane et al. 2020, 21). One of the major aspects of MNCs' expansion is related to the fact that there pertains globalization which has reinforced the free flow of capital goods as well as information amidst different nations. In addition to this, due to globalization economies across the globe have benefitted from the advancements in technologies, transportation, and communication which have allowed MNCs to collaborate effectively.

MNCs play an important role in the procedures of globalization and they are in close association with small and local manufacturers for the collaboration of the markets located amidst far-off places (Castillo & Chiatchoua 2022, 433). Their efforts and role tend to enhance international ties by promoting global investment. Besides, the notion of globalization is in terms of an increase amidst international interconnectedness and/or interdependence yet its distinctiveness from interdependence derives specifically from the increased role of MNCs in the traditional world economy. Furthermore, in the year 2014, the global stock of inward and outward FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) accounted to be 26 trillion dollars increasing from around 2.2 trillion dollars in 1990 (Yi et al. 2020, 33).

Moreover, the underlying reason for globalization is due to an emphasis on the role of international entities such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) or the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) for the world economy (Brandl et al. 2021, 23). MNCs tend to induce economic growth by addressing substantial employment opportunities amidst their host nations (Kang et al. 2020, 323). Through hiring local employees who are familiar with local culture, these MNCs attain significant insights into the local community's demand and needs and further, they cultivate a multicultural approach towards carrying out the business (Zou et al. 2021, 952). Besides, emerging economies are inclined to encourage foreign nations to invest in their nations via incentive policies to attain significant investment (Khan et al. 2020, 1395-1419). Given that, the presence of MNCs do not just foster technical expertise but also addresses accessibility to foreign markets which develops innovative business opportunities. Furthermore, MNCs are inclined to take part in exporting their business offerings to several nations whilst also importing the offerings from different nations. Such dynamic collaboration sustains international trade as well as delves higher economic collaboration among the nations (Zou et al. 2021, 952).

MNCs are major players in transferring research & development and technology transfer tends to have a significant impact on the competitiveness as well as welfare levels of the nations under which MNCs run their operations via investments in capital and technology-intensive industries (Nahar & Khurana 2023, 724-732). Through promoting the dissemination of innovative advancements such firms tend to contribute towards the growth of the economies by transferring the training, knowledge, and knowledge. In present times, MNCs play a vital part in extending their actions as well as measures to

reduce the environmental influences on a global scale. Moreover, firms play a significant part in driving social and economic development amidst their operating areas (Castillo & Chiatchoua 2022, 5). These firms actively contribute towards social progression by developing job opportunities, promoting inclusion amidst the local supply chains, reinforcing education as well as promoting talent development. In addition to this, MNCs tend to reinforce sustainable development by investing in as well as financing projects that prioritize sustainability (Zou et al. 2021, 955). Such investments pertain to vital aspects such as renewable energy, education, clean water, and health care fostering sustainable growth (Goralski & Tan 2022).

2.2.2 Types of MNCs

There are four types of MNCs depending on their horizon and scope.

Decentralized corporations have several offices in different world locations. They have a strong presence in the country of their origin and do not have any centralized headquarters (Tse 2020). Depending on the respective country's conditions, demands, and supply, they can manage and operate in the local context. They have their own hierarchal structure and organizational culture. Such organizations are famous for growing quickly as they adhere to local demands and shape their operations accordingly (Allen 2020). Additionally, they can cash any opportunity quickly and have less red taping. However, such organizations lack coherence, control, and alignment of goals.

Those global corporations that have head offices in one specific location and all chief executive officers and higher management reside there (Chung 2008). The power of decision-making is in the hands of these higher authorities and they guide the local offices in different locations to act accordingly. These organizations take advantage of the cheap labour and resources in different countries by centrally managing and controlling them. These types of corporations have a strong hold on all the sub-offices and offer a better cost-saving approach (Dekker 2003). However, such corporations cannot spontaneously address the local concerns as this might take time for higher authorities to make decisions.

The international division is a type of corporation that keeps its local and international operations separate from each other (Cohen 2018). The international division monitors all the activities of the foreign countries. This helps in adhering to the international market context and catching up with different cultures which allows acceptance by a wider

audience. However, there are issues regarding the brand image as it might not be the same in all these international locations.

A transnational enterprise has a unique relationship of parent-subsidiary. This helps them explore new avenues in the local context while utilizing the resources of the parent company (Kumar 2019). They can also take advantage of the parent company's strong brand image and their powerful R&D. They may also take assistance from the parents' team efforts and experience in exploring new opportunities. However, they might take a longer time to strengthen their brand image and get loyal customers.

It is significant to understand the types of a Multinational Corporation (MNCs) as it has a direct impact on how MNCs approach their efforts towards CSR and poverty alleviation. For example, decentralized corporations might be more receptive to community-specific CSR initiatives like local poverty reduction programs because of their capacity to quickly adjust to the needs of the community. On the other hand, global corporations with centralized decision-making can execute comprehensive, standardized CSR plans throughout several areas, even while their top-down strategy could ignore specific local needs. With specialized foreign operations, international divisions provide a middle ground by enabling a more customized CSR strategy for various countries, potentially addressing poverty locally while sustaining brand consistency. Subsequently, transnational corporations can combine local knowledge and global expertise to develop creative solutions for poverty reduction by utilizing the resources of their parent firms. However, the time required to establish a strong local presence may impede the CSR impact of these organizations. Therefore, the type of MNC influences not just their organizational techniques but also how they interact with and address local communities and more general societal issues like poverty.

2.3 Corporate Social Responsibility

2.3.1 Concept of CSR

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a multidimensional concept where MNCs become socially accountable to themselves, to their stakeholders, and to the general community. To demonstrate such responsibility they perform many social tasks which would benefit their stakeholders and the general public in their particular context. Since context varies therefore we come across many variations of the definitions of CSR. Table 1 presents these definitions;

Table 1. Definitions of CSR

Author	Definition
Hopkins (2006, 6)	"CSR is referred to as the process that is concerned with managing the stakeholders of the organization or institution ethically or in an accountable way"
Fadun (2014, 13-31)	"The CSR comprises of the economic, ethical, legal, and discretionary expectations that a community has a firm at given time."
Wan-Jan (2006, 176-184)	"CSR could be defined as managing the organization's stakeholders ethically or in a responsible way"
Khan et al.(2012, 41-52)	"The ways through which the firms address numerous social problems in their operating areas, individually and collaboratively is called CSR"

Firms to meet the expectations of CSR, it is important to have processes aligned for the integration of social, environmental, ethical, and human rights and concerns of the consumers in daily business operations (McHugh, J. Jönsson & AL Eryani 2019) It is found that there is an increasing interest in CSR particularly in the strategic role of CSR for the firms (Abdulaziz 2018, 1-14). As organizations are rising and becoming multinational, the macro pressure from the investors will most likely endure to rise. It is further argued that CSR is the result of possible agency issues in the organization, where mistreatment of the resources could be dispersed on value-creating activities whereas the organizations exhibit that there is a need to satisfy various stakeholders that are affecting the performance and results of the company.

CSR is a strategic advantage when it yields significant business-related advantages to the organization that specifically supports the core business activities and thus results in participating in the efficacies in acquiring its mission (Chakraborty 2015, 23-45). Several characteristics of CSR start where the law ends. This trait acknowledges the discretionary management power for involving in and promoting voluntarily CSR activities and policies. Involvement in CSR activities denotes the firm that deals with it in daily operations. The firm will be functioning in different ways that improve the society and the overall environment rather than participating adversely to them (Khaskheli et al. 2020, 2941-2955). Besides, the CSR activities vary from firm to firm and thus varied definitions could affect the way individual firms choose to be involved in CSR activities. Elaborating on this topic further, certain definitions of CSR comprise financial performance, where the companies pay more attention to environmental performance (Abdulaziz 2018, 1-14). Therefore, social performance gives relevant data regarding the firms' engagement and the impacts of it on the social environment. Environmental performance emphasizes the communication of environmental performance by the firm to its stakeholders.

The concept of CSR has been a comparatively novel phenomenon within the developing world, nevertheless, the awareness and interest in CSR have observed a steady growth in the economy. It is observed that CSR has turned out a main constituent of corporate trust as well as legitimacy in the society that ascertains the business survival over the long term in the developed world (Kim et al. 2020, 40-47). Nonetheless, the concept of CSR in the business environment of developing nations is yet a buzzword for numerous individuals and business organizations (Vuong et al. 2021, 30-41; Syed & Chuhan 2023, 477-486). It is observed that the concept of CSR is mystified with labour laws, workers' rights, traditional charity, and philanthropic activities, in numerous different companies in developing nations (Javed et al. 2020, 1395-1409).

Corporate practitioners and multinational corporations have remained unacquainted regarding the CSR ramifications, obligations, and activities within their businesses. The inherent issue remains at both ends, the lack of knowledge of MNCs regarding the true philosophy of CSR and less awareness of the general public regarding the MNC's role in society (Mahmood et al. 2019, 8). However, research studies have found that CSR activities are not restricted to philanthropic activities or charity (Eger et al. 2019, 141-153; Widiastuty & Soewarno 2019, 22-37). Instead, they entail a commitment of corporate business to implement a set of responsibilities revolving around improved

environmental, social, and economic outcomes and offering mutual value to corporate stakeholders (Wójcik 2018, 121-148). The primary CSR-related research was conducted a decade ago by Ray (2000, 347-367), and he analysed that there exists a negative association between poverty and child schooling, however, a positive association between family income and child labour in the developing nation context. This suggests that the advancement of infrastructure and female education could result in reducing child labour in developing nations (Ray 2000, 347-367). In addition, the notion of CSR as well as natural disasters found that the social responses of businesses and multinationals were reactive instead of proactive. It also observed that CSR was not been completely “internalized” within the firms of developing nations. However, CSR initiatives and considerations were mainly enforced upon the business organizations with a few “external Factors”. (Hongming et al. 2020)

In addition, Yunis et al. (2017, 65-88) analysed that Multinational Companies (MNCs) were likely to make short-term CSR investments that contributed considerably to improving the image of the businesses, including events of cultural nature, billboards, and landscaping. Further, research studies examined that CSR initiatives deliver an imperative part in the alleviation of poverty by offering support for livelihoods, health as well as education (Sun et al. 2019, 6456; Shehzad et al. 2022, 137-146).

2.3.2 Historical Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility

Even though there pertains significant adaptation of CSR in recent times, this concept relates its roots in the late 1800s when the increase of philanthropy collaborated with deteriorating working situations making some firms reconsider their manufacturing lines (Kolk & Van Tulder 2006). In addition, most of the entrepreneurs initiated donations towards the communities to manage their causes and decrease the working hours as well as improve the factory’s situation. Given that, the notion of CSR nonetheless was not coined by the time 1953 when an economist published the social responsibilities of a businessman in the book. However, the idea of CSR has prevailed for a significant time, yet this aspect has drastically shaped and been modified. Most significantly the scope of CSR initiated is narrow and involves some issues, however, over time there have been significant aspects which have been related to CSR that the firms are inclined to consider (Brammer, Nardella & Surdu 2021, 301-320).

In addition to this, the implementation of CSR sustained gradually in the 1970s and 1980s due to the higher deregulation of firms which means that firms had to involve in self-regulation and own responsibility for the social influence of their business operations (Pimpa, Gekara, & Fry 2012, 164). Besides that, in present times, CSR has become a significant belief for firms to take into account as around 90 percent of the consumers may purchase a product because the firm supports any social issue and cares about it (Medina-Muñoz and Medina-Muñoz 2020, 643). Moreover, CSR is a huge aspect in attracting talented workers as individuals are willing to work for a business that holds on to having strong values.

2.4 Role of CSR and MNCs in Poverty Alleviation

The association between poverty and CSR has remained highly contested, multi-dimensional, uneven, and complex (Fordham and Robinson 2008, 1-20). This partly provides explanations of why poverty has appeared as a main challenge in the mainstream CSR agenda. It is observed that most business organizations claim that they make direct or indirect contributions toward the alleviation of poverty through different CSR initiatives, whereas, only a few business organizations set CSR objectives to reduce poverty explicitly (Idemudia 2009, 91-116; Osuji & Obibuaku 2016, 329-347). The complexity of the association between poverty alleviation and CSR is mainly because of the dearth of a consensual definition for both poverty as well as CSR, along with the certainty that poverty manifests within diversified kinds (such as voice-lessens, exclusion, lack of capacity, and lack of income) (Bray et al. 2020, 134). Similarly, the contested nature and unevenness of the association between poverty alleviation and CSR are also attributed to the responsible factors for poverty's multi-causal nature. The demise of well-established methods for systematically evaluating or appropriately capturing the influence of businesses (MNCs) on poverty alleviation (Davis 2018). The combination of such factors implies that distinct large-scale business organizations differently define poverty and CSR, and their legitimate contribution towards poverty alleviation (distinct organizations employ distinct methods for estimating their contributions to poverty alleviation).

Poverty alleviation has been a key concern of developing nations, in which a substantial portion of the populace resides under the line of poverty (Singh & Chudasama 2020). By adopting a myriad of approaches, the challenge of poverty can be addressed in developing

nations, in which CSR plays a key part in poverty reduction efforts. MNCs have unparalleled competency as well as the power to work with several other stakeholders regarding social subjects including poverty eradication. Research studies analysed that MNCs minimize poverty by establishing connections with world markets and local businesses, thereby enabling access to technology and credit (Naradda-Gamage et al. 2020, 79; Brandl et al. 2021, 1-20).

Ahen and Amankwah-Amoah (2018, 2400) examined the association between poverty and CSR, assuming that irrespective of making profits, MNCs have a responsibility to make contributions toward the alleviation of poverty. Nonetheless, MNCs could alleviate poverty either by considering poverty reduction concerns or involving particular discreet activities in their day-to-day interactions with stakeholders and decision-making. Large-scale organizations are responsible for particular liabilities toward the unprivileged classes of individuals and the overall society (Zaidi & Siddiqui 2023). Specifically, organizations must demonstrate that their major concern should not be to generate profit; however, it must be to contribute to society in return. Accordingly, MNCs are obliged to make efforts, voluntarily, towards the betterment of both environment and the society (Buckley 2018, 323-374). With different CSR initiatives, MNCs make contributions toward the generation of employment opportunities and revenue streams for underprivileged or poor people, aiding in poverty alleviation (Hipsher 2016, 83-98). One way by which CSR makes considerable contributions toward poverty reduction, within developing nations, is by making investments in community development programs (Medina-Muñoz a & Medina-Muñoz 2020, 3-19). Specifically, business organizations could integrate with the local communities and organizations to recognize the particular requirements and issues confronted by the community. Following the identification of certain prevailing issues, the organizations develop programs and thereby address such needs. This includes the provision of vocational training and education programs by organizations, which aid individuals attain the expertise they require to secure respectable jobs as well as improve their livelihoods (Cho et al. 2016, 1-26). In all, by adopting CSR, MNCs could support locals by creating employment prospects, aiding in the alleviation of poverty, and enhancing economic prosperity.

2.4.1 CSR Strategies for Poverty Alleviation

Poverty has long been a major issue in the developing nations. There is an intense debate regarding the role of multinational corporations (MNCs) in nurturing and undermining development in poor local communities within developing nations. It is debated from MNCs' views that market forces, regulatory models, competition, and lack of resources place important pressure on MNCs to persist and contribute to societal welfare for the growth of the economy (Pimpa 2013, 66-77). It is determined that there is a positive influence of MNCs on poverty in developing countries that is severely constrained by comparatively small numbers that are employed and nothing within the existing agenda of CSR that motivates them to develop more employment than is justified economically. By integrating CSR, sustainable development will be more effective by ongoing coordination among the key investors in the society (Fallah-Shayan, et al. 2022, 1222). Certain questions are raised regarding the efficacies and capability of MNCs to positively support numerous local stakeholders in alleviating poverty. In the realm of the alleviation of poverty, CSR strategies comprise of wide array of initiatives where the goal is to improve socio-economic conditions, nurture societal development, and promote growth inclusively.

One of the major avenues through which MNCs participate in the alleviation of poverty is by creating employment as well as skill development programs. There is a role of MNCs in creating job opportunities, specifically in regions trailed by increased levels of unemployment and poverty (Tirimba & Macharia 2014, 1-6). By establishing production facilities, service centres, and outsourcing functions in developing nations, thus MNCs facilitate the implementation of the marginalized populace in the formal economy, leading to improving livelihoods and socio-economic well-being (Kshetri 2022 1-27). In addition, MNCs usually invest in occupational training and building capacity initiatives, equipping individuals with the skills and capabilities required for accessing gainful employment opportunities.

Additionally, to nurture economic empowerment, MNCs are involved in benevolent activities and social investments where the goal is to address the root cause of poverty. While, corporate philanthropy, comprises donations, grants, and in-kind participation serving as the mechanism for MNCs to provide appropriate support to the projects of community development, healthcare initiatives, and educational programs in

impoverished countries (Schlipfenbacher 2021). Thus, with the help of strategic collaborations with non-governmental organizations NGOs as well as development agencies, MNCs could leverage their monetary resources and expertise in integrating sustainable solutions that target poverty alleviation at the basic level. Such as, the initiatives emphasize enhancing the infrastructure of healthcare, accessibility to clean water, and facilities of sanitation that might significantly improve the quality of life for the vulnerable populace, ultimately participating in reducing poverty efforts.

In addition, MNCs often recognize the significance of implementing comprehensive business models that create value for both corporate investors as well as local societies. The study by Abugre and Anlesinya (2020, 541-557), further focuses on the notion of shared value creation, while firms are in line with their business goals with the needs of the community, thereby creating economic value that addresses social challenges for instance poverty. By involving in fair trade practices, marketing smallholder agriculture and providing support to micro firms, where MNCs could stimulate the growth of the economy at the basic level, empowering individuals as well as societies to break the poverty chain. Moreover, MNCs undertake several goals for improving the accessibility to financial services for instance microfinance and saving schemes enabling marginalized populace to build assets, invest in manufacturing activities, and mitigate the influences of economic shocks (Elliot et al. 2023).

MNCs further play a significant part in advancing important development goals with the help of ecological conservation and initiatives for managing resources. The study by Pimpa and Moore (2015, 2-23), underlines the interconnectedness of environmental sustainability as well as alleviating poverty that sheds light on the negative influences of environmental degradation on vulnerable societies. Through the adoption of eco-friendly practices, marketing renewable energy solutions, and integrating the programs of managing waste, MNCs could mitigate environmental risks and participate in the flexibility of local ecosystems enabling towards protection of the livelihoods of marginalized populaces that rely on natural resources (Pimpa & Moore 2015, 2-23). Furthermore, MNCs usually leverage their technological expertise and research abilities to develop innovative solutions addressing ecological challenges by creating chances for employment and fostering the growth of the economy.

The efficacy of CSR strategies in driving poverty alleviation hinges on the extent to which MNCs implement various principles of ethical governance, transparency, and stakeholder involvement within their business operations. On the other hand, there is a significance of the mechanisms of corporate governance in ensuring that CSR initiatives are in line with ethical standards and societal expectations (Lodge & Wilson 2016). By adhering to accountable business practices, valuing human rights, and upholding labour standards, MNCs could build trust and credibility with the investors thereby improving the efficacies and sustainability of poverty alleviation efforts. In addition, fostering dialogue and coordination with local societies, governments, and civil society firms enables MNCs to gain insights into novel needs and priorities of varied stakeholders, thereby facilitating the co-development of inclusive solutions addressing the systemic barriers to reducing poverty.

Besides, MNCs leverage technology and innovation to develop scalable solutions addressing systemic barriers to alleviating poverty. It underscored by the researcher the role of innovation in creating affordable products and services that cater to the needs of the low-income populace (Hoque, Khan & Bhuiyan 2017). By harnessing digital technologies, mobile banking solutions, as well as platforms for e-commerce, MNCs could facilitate financial inclusion, and accessibility to healthcare, and create educational opportunities in remote and underserved societies, moreover, collaborations with local entrepreneurs and start-ups enable MNCs to tap into grassroots inventions and co-create solutions that are contextually relevant and sustainable in addressing poverty.

Additionally, MNCs observe the importance of nurturing social entrepreneurship as well as society-led development initiatives as the facilitators for alleviating poverty. Social enterprises play a critical role in addressing the failures of the market and in delivering necessary services to the marginalized populace (Edobor, F.O 2018). By providing support to social enterprises by building capacity, mentorship, and market access, MNCs could encourage the growth of the economy, developing employment opportunities and market-inclusive development. Thus, MNCs are involved in strategic corporate collaborations with firms that promote social impact leveraging their complementary strengths and resources to deal with complicated social challenges in terms of poverty. By taking initiatives of collaboration, MNCs could amplify their influence and drive systemic change in societies that face entrenched poverty and inequality.

2.4.2 Regional and Sectoral Differences in CSR Strategies of MNCs

Several conclusions could be highlighted from the analysis of empirical studies regarding the role of multinationals in alleviating poverty (Medina-Muñoz and Medina-Muñoz, 2020, 3-19). The multinational energy sector is reactively integrating CSR programs instead of contributing to social challenges that are not associated with the core of the business (Valor 2012, 277-287). Likewise, the study by Medina-Muñoz and Medina-Muñoz (2020, 3-19), found that the commitments of multinationals towards poverty alleviation are not so far a priority in their CSR initiatives. However, there are only limited poverty-related problems that were covered by the multinational's CSR strategies.

Similarly, the research in the oil and gas industry in Nigeria reveals that with the increase in CSR budgets, there is minimal effect on poverty reduction (Ekhaton 2016, 1-28). It concludes that the rise in the expenses of CSR lacks in overcoming poverty. Multinationals could participate in reducing poverty by making investments in community development programs and ensuring present resources of development are not influenced adversely by their operations. However, the Nigerian government could make higher investments in poverty alleviation initiatives through the generated tax incomes by the oil and gas sector (Amadi & Abdullah 2012, 57). In contrast, the findings exhibit that findings concerning multinational CSR concluded that CSR and entrepreneurship are sufficient antidotes for poverty in Nigeria at a national level. Thus, the findings indicate that the kind of organization and economic industry might impact the firms' participation in alleviating poverty.

On the other hand, considering the case of Mauritian organizations, CSR is perceived as an essential, but inadequate tool to fight poverty. It is recognized that poverty reduction is amongst the Mauritian firms where CSR priorities and the implementation of pro-poor initiatives that is more obvious in the hotel, investment, sugar and banking industries (Medina-Muñoz & Medina-Muñoz 2020, 3-19). Thus, it is found that multinationals, in comparison to small organizations coordinating with the program make increased contributions to reducing poverty (Kabir 2019). Multinational organizations exhibited that sustainable solutions to poverty could only be reached by fulfilling the context problems and therefore providing poor people with sufficient means. The strategies used by multinationals for poverty alleviation are conducting community development initiatives in terms of community development programs, developing local capacity, and

empowering societies' education and training initiatives for instance by developing schools, paying the fees of the schools, generating employment, generating income for local suppliers, marketing entrepreneurship and local organizations, and the development of infrastructure (Ayoo 2022, 17-57). In developing infrastructure it might include electricity, roads, clean water, clinics, micro-lending access to capital, and accessibility to legal systems and social networks.

MNCs assist in alleviating poverty, generating employment prospects that use local individuals, driving economic growth, and raising job standards by offering higher wage rates nearly above the subsistence agriculture or the local firms' pay (Ferdausy & Rahman 2009, 111-137; Pettinger 2019). Additionally, MNCs are likely to contribute to improved economic development by improving or building up infrastructure, transferring knowledge and technology, and increasing individual living standards (Okon & Ojatorotu 2018; Ajibo 2019, 55-70). Nonetheless, there seem to be uncertainties regarding the influence of MNCs' activities on the economy, in negative or positive methods (Ferdausy & Rahman 2009, 111-137; Pettinger 2019). MNCs exploit undue benefits of developing nations, repatriate profit, instigate environmental pollution, pay lower wages, increase the poverty gap, monopolize the economy, do human rights abuse, and compel local firms out of business (Pettinger 2019). Thus, there exists a mixed view (including positive and negative aspects of MNCs), that this section of the review analyses the interaction of MNCs and local communities for poverty alleviation in developing countries.

2.5 CSR Activities of MNCs and Stakeholders

2.5.1 Impact of Stakeholders' Engagement and CSR Activities of MNCs

MNCs make money on a large scale, however, they do CSR activities to address the social issues and help communities in need. When MNCs pursue high-quality development, they even need to pay attention to feeding society as well as contributing to the high-quality development of society (Awuah et al. 2021, 1-13). Poverty is an enduring social phenomenon that is faced by mankind it is an obstacle that restricts the development as well as the progress of the human society (López-Concepción et al. 2022, 19-31). CSR strategies help in the elimination of poverty, bring improvement in the livelihood of people, and progressively achieve common prosperity which are all basic needs of

socialism (Nasr et al. 2022, 1-18). Thus, the fulfilment of strategic social responsibility is a core tool for enhancing the sustainable as well as high-quality development of MNCs. These help reduce the business risks as well as transaction costs, gain competitive advantages, and win social recognition as well as a good reputation, with the establishment of stable and dependable strategic alliances by the value chain innovation for obtaining a win-win case.

The inclusion of enterprises in the targeted poverty alleviation differs from the simple charitable social responsibility, however even closely relates the development strategy as well as advantages of MNCs with the development of society, collection of wisdom, and strengthening the people for conducting effective, lasting as well as targeted poverty alleviation with assistance (Khojastehpour & Shams 2020, 302-309). In this regard, different stakeholders play a dynamic role in ensuring that CSR strategies are aligned with the core identified issue such as poverty alleviation.

The stakeholders refer to the group or any individual who affects or can be affected through the attainment of the objectives of the organization (Khuong et al. 2021, 8). The stakeholders have a key role in the survival as well as development of the firm and generally tend to have formal, or contractual commitments to the companies that must comply with the requirements of CSR of the stakeholder groups for thriving and achieving SDGs (Rhee et al. 2021, 582-613). Stakeholder engagement is a vital aspect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects because it includes the identification, communication, and collaboration with many groups that have a keen interest or effect on the social, economic, and environmental effects of the business. While effectively engaging the stakeholders, the businesses tend to gain valued insights, as well as support for the initiatives of CSR, with the enhancement of their reputation, level of trust, as well as legitimacy.

The success of an organization is based on the multiple interdependent relationships with its customers, workers, suppliers, communities, as well as investors. No organization can work in isolation. Moreover, good Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) must involve the stakeholders of a firm, which includes both internal as well as external, in the decision-making (Figueira et al. 2023, 32). Engagement with the local communities as well as stakeholders is important for attaining the success of the corporate social responsibility

(CSR) programs. It helps to build a level of trust and enhance reputations while fostering positive relationships.

Stakeholders tend to have a key role in the creation of a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy for the organization (Sachs, S., & Kujala 2021). The CSR framework helps promote a commitment of the firm to the social, environmental, as well as ethical issues beyond its key business operational activities. It includes considering the core interests as well as expectations of many stakeholders which are affected through or having an effect on the company. The inclusion of the stakeholders in the organization makes sure to have a more highly comprehensive level of understanding of the CSR program, enhances the probability of successful execution, and encourages a sense of ownership or commitment amongst all parties (Isaksson & Kiessling 2021, 4021-4031).

Similarly, in the CSR projects of poverty alleviation, it is important to communicate each step of the program to the key stakeholders so that they share their views on its effectiveness and results are expected to be positive. The prime stakeholder which needs to be convinced and satisfied, refers to the investors (Sahasranamam et al. 2022, 163-174). MNCs tend to plan a CSR project on a social issue such as poverty eradication for which they approach investors, who must be convinced by the plan of helping communities, seeing the proposal. Based on it, investments are released. These are the ones who give the financial as well as strategic backing to the projects thus, the investors must be engaged in disclosing as well as communicating on the CSR strategy. It is important to demonstrate the value as well as the return of CSR reserves that have to be aligned with the CSR goals or objectives with the expectations as well as interests of the investors (Esposito & Ricci 2021, 953-964). For instance, Unilever is a consumer goods company that tends to engage investors with the issuance of the annual report regarding social as well as environmental progress, which highlights the positive effect on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Baragiola & Mauri 2021).

Other central stakeholders are the communities who benefit from constructive social as well as environmental effects of the firm. Moreover, the communities must engage in many ways, like consultation and inclusion in the CSR planning as well as implementation, with the provision of various opportunities or resources for improving their livelihoods as well as well-being (Subramaniam et al. 2020, 3-25). It is important to address their needs as well as concerns while measuring or reporting the consequences

and effects of CSR projects. Coca-Cola, for instance, is a beverage company, that engages the communities in partnership with local organizations as well as governments for the provision of access to safe water as well as sanitation (Mason 2022). They tend to empower women entrepreneurs as well as farmers through support programs for encouraging poverty alleviation. The impact of this stakeholder engagement in MNCs on CSR programs is effective as without their support, CSR projects cannot work well. They are the ones who assist CSR programs and ensure that the program is meeting the level of expectation.

Communication is the one key aspect of the stakeholder engagement. It includes sharing of the information, listening to the feedback, or trust development and dialogue. Considering the stakeholder analysis, one has to use many communication channels or tools, like websites, reports, surveys, newsletters, interviews, forums, workshops, or even social media (Awuah et al. 2021, 1-13). The idea is to communicate with the stakeholders, consistently, and transparently. In this regard, the use of the UN SDGs being a reference point is important for showing the alignment as well as progress. One must communicate with the stakeholders respectfully, and inclusively, abiding with cultural sensitivity.

The stakeholder engagement is not a one-time event, but a constant procedure of learning as well as improvement. One must monitor as well as evaluate the engagement activities with the outcomes, and should also report them to the stakeholders including the public. Various indicators or frameworks can be used for measuring and reporting the impact, like the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), the UN Global Compact, and the International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC) (Hamad et al. 2020). MNCs must report the impact with credibility, using the UN SDGs as a benchmark for showing the contribution as well as challenges. The poverty alleviation by MNCs not only serves as a national strategy of meeting the increasing needs of individuals to have a better life but even pushes MNCs to upgrade their strategies, products, organization as well as cultures, with the promotion of the constant improvement of the efficiency of business including the optimization of the industrial structure (Nasr et al. 2022, 1-18). Thus, inclusion in the targeted poverty alleviation as well as proactively meeting social responsibility is a novel path for improving the efficiency level of corporate investment and achieving high-quality development. Hence, the stakeholder engagement and improvement in the investment efficiency of MNCs in CSR projects enhances the ability of value creation as well as the development of the quality of enterprises, obtaining reliable cash flow with sustainable

competitiveness. Therefore, MNCs are involved in CSR activities for implementing welfare as well as development schemes. Moreover, CSR is a complicated factor in the relationship between the business and society. It has resulted in the stakeholder orientation for the business from the management of the shareholders. Thus, businesses have taken the social responsibility to contribute to society ensuring stakeholder engagement and promoting social welfare in society.

2.5.2 Coordination of MNCs and Public Sector Organizations for Poverty Alleviation

Governments-led poverty alleviation comes across various limitations and constraints that fight poverty and it is vital to mobilize social forces as many as possible, particularly by engaging with corporate forces (Tadung 2023, 289-303). Effective poverty alleviation needs coordination among various stakeholders which involves multinational firms as well as public sector firms. This collaboration among the private and public industries upholds immense capabilities to address the complicated socio-economic challenges that are linked with poverty.

The collaboration among MNCs and public sector enterprises usually takes the strategic partnership form that impacts their strengths and resources for gaining shared goals of development. The study by Ugwoji (2022, 279-305), exhibits the significance of such collaborations in driving the initiatives of sustainable development that sheds light on the corresponding roles played by public and private sectors for addressing poverty. By aligning their goals and combining their assets, MNCs and public sector firms could improve the efficacies and influence of poverty alleviation interventions leading to the effective well-being of societies and other populations (Florini & Pauli 2018, 583-598).

In addition, one of the major areas of collaboration among MNCs and public sector organizations is in the integration of comprehensive business models as well as the initiatives made for the development of the value chain (Dahan et al. 2010, 326-342). However, public sector firms usually provide relevant policy support, development of infrastructure, and other regulatory models facilitating the implementation of smallholder farmers, women entrepreneurs, and marginalized societies within the supply chain of MNCs (Shah 2023). With the help of targeted intervention for instance programs regarding capacity building, accessibility to capital, and market linkages, where MNCs and public sector firms have the ability and create chances for empowering the economy

and reducing poverty at the basic level. Furthermore, there are several initiatives were taken that emphasize sustainable agriculture, practices of fair trade, and ethical sourcing that enable the MNCs to create shared value for both the stakeholders as well as local societies, thereby nurturing inclusive growth and development (Perez-Aleman & Sandilands 2008, 24-49).

Additionally, collaboration among MNCs and public sector firms undertakes various initiatives concerning CSR aimed at alleviating poverty. However, Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) play an important part in organizing the resources, expertise, and knowledge to address the social challenges associated with it which entails accessibility to healthcare, education, and fundamental infrastructure (Lodge & Wilson 2016). With the help of CSR projects and philanthropic activities, MNCs and public sector firms could invest in the development programs of community, healthcare amenities, as well as educational initiatives for enhancing life quality and improving vulnerable populace (Osemeke, Adegbite & Adegbite 2016, 357-375). Strategic alliances with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups influence varied networks as well as local expertise in designing and integrating solutions for sustainable development that are customized to specific societal needs.

It is observed that firms that are involved in public welfare with the motive of improving the economy lead to enhanced reputation of the company, gaining the effects of advertising and raising their products' market share (Liu et al. 2023). Similarly, firms whose customers make direct purchases of their products or services were more profound to the impacts of marketing and more powerfully encouraged to increase the reputation of the company with the help of public welfare, as well as their donations surpassed those by 50% for other organizations on welfare that creates the effects of advertising (Liu et al. 2023). In contrast with other public welfare, the projects of poverty mitigation could be better integrated locally, where the possessions of advertising are precise and have enduring effects.

It is observed that poverty alleviation in China began in 2013 and follows the plan of embattled poverty improvement which is a revolutionary work of human society (Liu et al. 2023). Organizing social militaries as well as managing the connection effectively between the government and the marketplace is necessary for making administration-led progressions of embattled poverty improvement. In the current study, global firms,

NGOs, and business relations are usually involved in business participation in anti-poverty, but through traditional CSR poverty as the social problem was not addressed (Baldo 2014 191-223). By penetrating anti-poverty, the government is required to get engaged with the firms in sustainable developments which include eliminating poverty and ensuring the impending of international and local firms in anti-poverty. Furthermore, it is suggested that firms full-fill corporate social accountabilities addressing the issues of social and environment where businesses diverged from the mission of making profits for marketplace distortion, minimizing public welfare, and causing possible damage to the community (Costello 2021, 107008).

2.5.3 Coordination of MNCs and Communities for Poverty Alleviation

In China, directed poverty mitigation is categorized by management leadership with all the militaries required for an inclusive arrangement for alleviating poverty with government-backed projects, industry-specific agendas, and social help that supplements one another as the two-way poverty improvement instrument that is applicable for top-down and bottom-up for the economic progression, developing possessions and industrial upgrading in poverty troubled areas (Eang, Clarke & Ordonez-Ponce 2023). The collaboration among the administration, the community, and the marketplace assisted in enhancing the superiority and effectiveness of poverty mitigation along with business impending and the role in poverty mitigation should be reddened by policy interaction. Since MNCs are big organizations with processes across the world in various nations, there is an inherent value to getting involved in local societies in which they function (Cantwell, Dunning, & Lundan 2010, 567-586). MNCs could have a significant influence on native sustainable development that considers their influence on the worldwide economy, having admittance to varied resources as well as cooperative possessions, and the capability to deliver goods and services towards unapproachable locations and transferring possessions worldwide (Eang, Clarke & Ordonez-Ponce 2023).

MNCs undertake numerous roles for the development of the community and are involved in local sustainable development by organizing financial capital with the help of investment-based activities for instance foreign direct investment, microfinance, and social entrepreneurial ventures. In this regard, MNCs participated in SDGs through the alleviation of poverty along with addressing inequality and could be scrutinized for their roles in the economies of developed as well as developing nations.

The role of MNCs as the partner where leading collaborations with local stakeholders address local sustainable development challenges where MNCs are highly motivated to take part in communal problem-solving with the help of multi-stakeholder techniques (Moyeen 2018, 43-54). There are varied kinds of partnerships with distinct firms that lead to the process of partnership ranging from different partners, vision and goals, time and duration, geographical scope, funding sources, and other functions (Eang, Clarke, & Ordonez-Ponce 2023). However, local government can convene businesses as well as civil society firms in collaboration. While the private industry could further organize public sector actors and NGOs in collaborative procedures. However, there is a constraint in comprehending related to the initiatives of MNCs in local partnerships that are associated with SDGs towards sustainability operations of MNCs (Boddewyn & Doh 2011, 345-361).

With regards to direct coordination related to poverty alleviation, MNCs and public firms are involved in dialogue and the efforts of advocacy that shape policy models as well as development agendas. It is highlighted that the role of businesses and government partnerships influences the decisions of policy and promotes inclusive development strategies (Eweje et al. 2021, 186-212). By contributing to multi-stakeholder networks, policy forums, and advisory committees, MNCs and public firms participate in their views, expertise, and evidence-based insights for the process of formulating policy that drives the change systematically (Russon 2023). In addition, advocacy campaigns and lobbying efforts by MNCs as well as the public sector firms create awareness regarding the root causes of poverty, mobilizing public support and galvanizing the will of politics for reducing poverty initiatives at national and international levels.

The efficacies of collaboration among MNCs and public sector firms for the alleviation of poverty pivots on various critical aspects which include trust, transparency, and mutual responsibility. The study emphasizes the significance of creating trust-based relationships among diverse stakeholders for facilitating efficient coordination and decision-making. By ensuring to development of precise communication platforms, explaining shared goals, and fostering mutual respect, MNCs and public enterprises can overcome the barriers by coordinating and harnessing synergies that increase the influence of the efforts of poverty alleviation (Hidayat & Sutarjo 2021, 154-172). Moreover, mechanisms for examining, assessing, and providing feedback led MNCs and public firms to evaluate the

outcomes and effects of their collaborative initiatives, rectifying lessons learned, along adapting their strategies to acquire greater efficacy and sustainability.

Another critical aspect of collaboration between MNCs and public sector firms is the marketing of social invention and entrepreneurship ecosystems. The study by Ugwoji (2022, 279-305), focuses on the role of social firms and impact-driven start-ups in addressing complicated social challenges which entail poverty. By providing support to social innovation hubs, incubators, and accelerators, MNCs as well as public firms could foster a culture of entrepreneurship and experimentation that nurtures the development of scalable solutions addressing the root cause of poverty. In addition, initiatives emphasize social impact investment, venture philanthropy, and blended finance models enabling MNCs and public firms to mobilize private capital for social firms and community-based enterprises that drive inclusive economic development and reduction in poverty.

Moreover, collaboration among MNCs and public firms enlarges capacity building and taking initiatives for sharing knowledge that aims at improving local abilities and embracing societies. The study by Shah (2023), exhibits the significance of contributory approaches for development that involve different societies as active partners in the process of decision-making. With the help of providing training, technical support, and accessibility to best practices, MNCs and public firms could empower the institutional capacity of local governments, civil society firms, and community-based groups that enable them to design and integrate the programs of poverty alleviation that are contextually appropriate as well as sustainable. In this regard, initiative often emphasizes transferring knowledge, transferring technology, and developing skills, embracing individuals and societies to unleash their capabilities, pursue economic opportunities, and create flexibility against future shocks.

2.5.4 Stakeholder Theory Associated with CSR Activities & Poverty Alleviation

The Stakeholder theory, provided by Freeman (1984), supports the idea that business organizations have the responsibility not only related to shareholder benefits but also to the people working for the enhancement of the company (Valentinov et al. 2019, 826-849). The consideration for people working includes the employees, managers, supply chain people, and various others associated with different tasks within the organization. The surrounding communities are also included in this consideration of organizational development. There are a few major stakeholders as well which include shareholders,

consumers, suppliers, and the workers (Mhlanga & Moloji 2020, 352-368). In contrast, secondary stakeholders are those who do not have practical implementation within the business but rather, have social and community interests (Pittz et al. 2021, 134-147). In particular, the secondary stakeholders encompass the local communities or the government authorities. The general notion of the stakeholder idea includes the re-definition of the business organization (Mhlanga & Moloji 2020, 352-368). More precisely, the concept of stakeholder mainly focuses on how an organization must be conceptualized and what it should be.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) focuses on prioritizing one of the main business aspects, that is, the orientation of business organizations toward society at large (Nave & Ferreira 2019, 885-901). This specifically includes the social orientation of the business organizations over their other organizational responsibilities. Accordingly, it is posited by the stakeholder theory that the primary fundamentals of business organizations must remain in formulating associations as well as creating value for its key stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2018). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) focuses on prioritizing one of the main business aspects, that is, the orientation of business organizations toward society at large (Nave and Ferreira 2019, 885-901). This specifically includes the social orientation of the business organizations over their other organizational responsibilities. Accordingly, it is posited by the stakeholder theory that the primary fundamentals of business organizations must remain in formulating associations as well as creating value for its key stakeholders (Freeman et al. 2018). This is an important specification as in one of the research studies it has been observed that multinational corporations, their part is responsible and that is to working for the reduction of issues aligned with the privileged people within the society (Hoque et al. 2018, 1130-1142). In this realm of working for the privileged people and more specifically for the people having poverty issues, the Stakeholder Theory argues about the role and potential of MNCs for working towards the reduction of poverty. But in this aspect, the relativity is for the alignment of CSR efforts by MNCs.

MNCs can work on poverty reduction by enhancing employment opportunities, developing income sources, and the enhancement of skills and knowledge among employees (Agbebi et al. 2019, 189-210). MNCs can work on the development of local authorities with the help of initiatives on local infrastructure for healthcare and education development (Van-Niekerk 2020, 5427). These are not the only enhancements by MNCs

and their role in reducing poverty reduction the corporations can work for the development of roads, and bridges, along with the facilitation of support for energy-related solutions under CSR aspects. Further in this aspect, the revenue enhancement of MNCs is structured under the ripple effect (Tshidavhu & Khatleli 2020, 119-143). In this way, MNCs can provide significant developments towards economic development as well as poverty reduction within the society.

The correlation between multinational corporations (MNCs) and poverty reduction in Pakistan is complex and diversified, especially regarding their corporate social responsibility initiatives. The following study has worked on the consideration of investigating the relationship between CSR initiatives and the reduction of poverty concerning the application of stakeholder theory. The context of stakeholder theory has supported the consideration of socioeconomic and environmental influences of MNCs apart from their financial aspect as well (Elms et al. 2011). The stakeholder theory has sustained the idea about the significance of evaluating the operations of MNCs about the poverty reduction aligning with the CSR structures of the companies. The Stakeholder Theory evaluates the relationship between different social and economic aspects of the MNCs along with their responsibility towards the reduction of poverty and enhancing sustainable development.

2.6 Interaction of MNCs and Local Communities for Poverty Alleviation

The connection between MNCs and local communities for poverty alleviation is crucial for developing sustainability. MNCs could be involved with societies through varied networks for instance generating employees, developing skills, developing infrastructure, and community investment programs. By actively engaging with local investors in the design, integration, and assessment of CSR initiatives, MNCs could ensure that these interventions are customized to local needs, preferences, and abilities. This participatory approach nurtures mutual trust, social cohesion, and mutual possession of poverty alleviation efforts that lead to more effective and comprehensive outcomes contributing efficiently to the long-term well-being of the societies in developing nations.

2.6.1 Economic Inclusion of Local Communities

MNCs have been well-recognized for their competency in creating substantial prospects for employment within developing as well as developed nations. It is observed that MNCs contribute to establishing factories, branches, and subsidiaries within distinct regions, thereby creating job opportunities that offer revenue streams and economic stability for people and local community members (Ewers et al. 2022, 268-284). MNCs are likely to make considerable contributions within distinct economic forms including support to local suppliers, local employment, job creation, and taxes, specifically, recruiting the locals to work for them (Maponga & Musa 2021, 195-210).

MNCs contribute to the creation of both direct and indirect job opportunities (Alfaro-Ureña et al. 2021). More specifically, they create jobs directly by providing employment opportunities to the local people for participating in their operations. In addition, they create indirect job prospects by creating jobs in local businesses, which provide raw materials, products, and services to the MNC. Thus, it could result in a substantial increase in income levels and minimization in unemployment rates, thereby improving the standard of living and minimizing poverty levels in economies.

MNCs make contributions toward the advancement and development of human capital within developing and emerging nations. This is because generally, they offer training and development prospects for their workforces that could result in the formation of competent, productive, and capable employees (Oseghale et al. 2018, 509-531). Thus, MNCs can be specifically advantageous within nations that have limited education and training prospects, like Pakistan.

Research studies examined that MNCs tend to enact training and skills development programs that consequently exert a substantial influence on the firm performance, contributing more to an economy (Abugre, J. B., & Nasere 2020, 541-557; Mahmood et al. 2023, 49-62). MNCs make significant amounts of investments to provide training to their employees, which is observed to develop the professional and managerial skills of the staff and exert a significant influence on their performance (Del-Castillo-Feito et al. 2021, 127817). The improvement of skills and expertise enables individuals to secure a well-paying job in firms and other sectors, thereby alleviating poverty within the community.

MNCs have persistently provided focus to the challenges confronted in a region by community development interventions (Nelson & Phillips 2018, 252-262). Community development sustainability has remained at the centre of feasible Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) either from MNCs or from the part of the government. MNCs play a crucial part in overcoming the social issues confronted by the poor within developing nations. Primarily, it is observed that MNCs' businesses initiate to improve the living conditions of the poor by targeting poverty alleviation with the delivery of affordable products and services. (Hasegawa 2022, 201-218)

Particularly, they target a few goals of sustainable development, such as Goal 6; Goal 3; and Goal 1 with their direct targets of clean water and sanitation, sound health and well-being), and no poverty, respectively. MNCs support community development initiatives that are generally customized to overcome the particular requirements of the locals and consequently improve their present living conditions. One way in which MNCs could contribute to poverty alleviation while considering CSR is to make investments in community development programs (Shaikh 2023).

MNCs could focus on integrating with local communities and organizations to recognize the particular requirements and challenges confronted by the community, and thereby formulate initiatives and programs to address those requirements. This can include, MNCs supporting vocational training and education programs with the intent of aiding individuals to attain the required expertise and competencies to secure a respectable job along with improving their livelihoods (Shaikh 2023).

2.6.2 Social Development of Local Communities

MNCs have extended their interaction and production spread with local producers within numerous distinct nations across the globe (Van Tulder et al. 2021, 1-21). MNCs provide support to local SMEs by establishing partnerships and employing local companies for supply and also deliver provisions for local SMEs with the facility of short-term investment capital as well as financing, access to the market, and more (Jana 2018). This subsequently results in generating job prospects, improving living standards, and fostering advancements in the economy.

It is observed that in the host country, MNCs interact with local companies to make investments and experience business expansion (Kusek & Silva 2018, 83-86). These

collaborations enable MNCs to improve access to markets and facilitate local companies to access cutting-edge equipment and exposure to advanced technologies, enabling them to secure higher profits and minimize poverty. MNCs thereby pose the capability of transforming the lower income markets as well as aiding in improving millions—even billions—out of poverty.

Corporate-NGO partnerships tend to form 1 of the 4 possible kinds of cross-sector association to efficiently address societal issues (Mousavi & Bossink 2020, 80-95). MNCs could integrate with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to address societal issues by providing them with the essential expertise, resources, and funds. By integrating sustainable operations and consequently supporting environmental, economic, and social progress, MNCs could fortify their attempts to address societal issues like poverty.

In all, it is observed from the above analysis that MNCs deliver an imperative part in promoting innovation and technology transfer, creating employment prospects, and driving the economic growth of developing nations. Nonetheless, there is a need for responsible management and monitoring to certify that the target benefits are realized and the possible negative outcomes of the influence are mitigated. It is also observed that in cases when MNCs are likely to get actively engaged with local communities, they are likely to exhibit a sincere commitment toward the welfare of the individuals or communities that they serve. With transparent as well as consistent interaction of MNCs with local communities, MNCs could result in bridging the existing gap of poverty in the region and become trusted partners for economic advancement.

2.6.3 Environmental CSR Initiatives for Local Communities

MNCs play an imperative part in developing and emerging nations by promoting technology transfer and innovation, creating jobs, and driving economic growth (Isaac et al. 2020, 619-628). The engagement of MNCs is critical for poverty alleviation in developing or undeveloped nations mainly for two reasons: Primarily, poverty alleviation is contingent on the development of infrastructure and economic growth (Castillo & Chiatchoua 2022).

A well-maintained infrastructure contributes to improved Quality of Life (QOL) and individual safety by minimizing emergency services' response times and the number of accidents for the local population. When a factory is set up by a multinational corporation,

it results in increased investments within the physical building along with the neighbouring industrial infrastructure including water supply, power, and roads (Kim 2020, 88). Thus, MNCs contribute to improved and substantial economic development in the region, creating both direct and indirect job prospects and improved infrastructure. MNCs are key stakeholders in the global economy and, hence, impose significant implications on sustainable development (Shapiro et al. 2018, 1-14). Today, in addition, the economy, the environment, and society also seem as the key components in the sustainability agenda of MNCs. Nonetheless, there is a mixed response observed within the existing literature regarding the interaction of MNCs and local communities for environmental sustainability and poverty alleviation. It is found that MNCs are likely to have a major influence on sustainable economic development with their negative environmental as well as social externalities in emerging and developing nations (Becker-Ritterspach et al. 2019, 179-200).

Within developing nations, large MNCs tend to employ their economies of scale and thereby compel the local organizations out of business, which contributes to increased poverty (Anand et al. 2021, 545-559). In the case of higher revenue and proceeds, MNCs generally result in an increased usage of non-renewable resources and pollution, which poses a threat to the environment, specifically the poorest of the economy. However, MNCs are likely to get engrossed in environmentally sustainable practices, which consequently contributes to improved prospects for the local communities (Durugbo & Amankwah-Amoah 2019, 1500-1516).

MNCs tend to pose the potential to positively contribute to poverty alleviation and sustainable development initiatives, across the globe at local levels (Abdel-Halim & Eldin 2019, 773-795). This might encompass setting targets and numerous distinct initiatives including sustainable agriculture, waste management, water management, and renewable energy deployment, to guard the environment and enhance the subsistence level of locals.

2.6.4 Sustainable Development Theory Associated with CSR Activities and Poverty Alleviation

In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development supported the development of The Sustainable Development Theory. The theory promotes the consideration that human societies must work over the consideration of prioritizing the living and fulfilment of their need for the development of future generations as well

(Tomislav 2018, 67-94). The context of sustainable development is considerate of aspects more than just economic and social. It also supports the consideration of enhancing the needs of people living on earth to improvised development (CSR DG 2020). Thus, the theory takes an encompassing perspective on the world in which everything is connected. In other words, the idea envisions an optimal combination of economic development, environmental protection, and equal opportunity (Hariram et al. 2023, 10682). The concept of CSR is likely to be closely associated with the concept of sustainable development. More specifically, all organizations, including multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations, government agencies, and small businesses, have an impact on social environments or their surroundings (Chandra & Jatmika 2022, 444-452). As a result, companies must focus on achieving their immediate objectives while also taking into account their social and environmental impact.

Given the current state of poverty alleviation, this theory says that CSR programs must be integrated and should take into account several concepts of sustainable development (such as social fairness and environmental protection). Based on that it can be considered that eventually there are developmental enhancements supported by the environmental sustainability theory supporting the operational infrastructure. Moreover, the engagement of communities and societies towards the development of operational infrastructure of decision-making and CSR program initiatives (Schlipfenbacher 2021). The enhancement of the economic and operational development supported by MNCs also includes the classification of agricultural development along with the specification of small business collaboration ensuring the long-term enhancement of vulnerable members of society (Lodge & Wilson 2016). The primary aspect in this case is related to the operational infrastructure of investing millions within business strategies and projects which should also work for the betterment of society (Maitland & Ciencia 2018). Based on that it would not be wrong to argue that MNCs have the potential to support society and decrease its relative issues of poverty in Pakistan.

The CSR activities that align with the principles of sustainable development are also supported by the sustainable development theory which also supports the long-term impact of corporate choices on the environment and human beings. MNCs can work on reducing poverty in low-income societies within the specification of sustainable development operating their initial aspects of CSR. The CSR initiatives have the potential to support privileged individuals within the society along with community engagement

for the enhancement of their living standards. The sustainable development theory specifically supports the idea of how MNCs can provide small-scale firms with an economical business structure relatively. Overall, the purpose of the following study is to work on the consideration of enhancement within the resource-based development with better infrastructure prospectively in Pakistan with MNCs role.

The above discussion demonstrates a thorough understanding of how Multinational Corporations' collaborate with local communities to mitigate poverty, support infrastructure, and provide employment, education, training, and environmental sustainability in developing economies through their interactions and efforts. With strong partnerships with local businesses, SMEs, and NGOs contribute to social welfare by creating jobs and encouraging innovation. Multinational corporations' CSR initiatives are vital to sustainable development, especially when it comes to strengthening infrastructure and resource management. Innovation is vital in enhancing the efficacy of CSR initiatives and sustainable practices. It serves as an interface between the initiatives and the changing tactics that multinational corporations use to achieve their CSR objectives. Multinational Corporations can enhance their CSR initiatives by using innovative approaches that make them more effective and in line with corporate goals and community development. Innovation can also significantly develop the partnerships that exist between MNCs and local businesses. This is because Multinational Corporations can mitigate their environmental impact while simultaneously supporting the long-term sustainability of local communities through the development of sustainable technologies like waste management systems, renewable energy, and water conservation techniques. Innovation has a major impact on CSR initiatives because it assists MNCs not only in more effectively solving current issues but also in forecasting new ones. MNCs can develop more adaptable and efficient CSR solutions to address difficult societal issues including environmental degradation and poverty.

2.7 Relationship and Influence of Innovation on CSR Programs

2.7.1 Innovation in CSR Programs

As per the global grand issues like urban mobility, poverty eradication, widespread violent conflict, etc., the present complicated multidimensional corporate framework has intensified the need for corporate social engagements (Le et al. 2022, 362). Hence, a common catchphrase of businesses today is the need to adopt socially as well as environmentally responsible behaviours while making sure to have growth (Le 2022). Apart from this, as innovation is a core factor for heightening the growth of the company and gaining a competitive advantage, MNCs must invest in innovative and social matters to gain legitimacy and respond to the expectations of the various interested actors.

During the fourth industrial revolution, the factor of innovation is a driver of sustainability (Zhou et al. 2020, 863-882). It tends to shape future production, strengthening competitiveness as well as bringing improvement in human well-being while decreasing environmental harm. It tends to underscore the key role of collaborations as well as strategic partnerships in the development of a competitive advantage. Innovation can help in better satisfying the needs of many stakeholders and going beyond the level of expectations while getting into a strategic CSR approach. Innovation can, thus, drive socially responsible projects more (Liu et al. 2021). There is a dire need to solve the socio-ecological issues and innovation is generally the most feasible path for supporting and strengthening the present standards of living while treating as well as overcoming the environmental issues. Innovation tends to support the social practices that can comply with the plan of circular economy (CE) which was launched by the European Commission in the year 2014 (García-Quevedo et al. 2020, 2450-2464). The plan focuses on unlocking the associated growth and boosting the competitiveness of the European Union with the use of new business opportunities and new methods of production as well as consumption (García-Quevedo et al. 2020). Nonetheless, due to the scarcity of resources, conflicting interests, as well as the perilousness of innovative investments, companies may face problems in balancing and defining their priorities.

Innovation in CSR is about the development as well as execution of new approaches, plans, and solutions for addressing social including environmental issues (Liu et al. 2021). It includes creative thinking as well as problem-solving skills for the development of new products, services, or business models that have a constructive effect on society as well

as the environment. Companies tend to innovate with either the development of sustainable products or services that are ecologically friendly as well as socially responsible. For instance, an organization can develop a product that is made from recycled materials or a service that tends to promote renewable energy (Li, X 2020). They innovate with the development of socially responsible business models which tend to integrate sustainability into the operations. For example, a company adopts a circular economy model, in which the waste is minimalized whereas the resources are used efficiently. MNCs even collaborate with other organizations, for instance, any NGO or government agencies, to address social as well as environmental issues (Broadstock et al. 2020, 99-110).

Innovation in CSR even involves the usage of technology as well as data-driven solutions for addressing social or environmental challenges. An organization, for instance, can use data analytics for the identification of the areas in which it can reduce the carbon footprint or bring improvement in the supply chain sustainability (Li et al. 2021, 2027-2045). The effectiveness of all these innovations in CSR is found in having an improved level of brand reputation. MNCs who innovate in CSR, enhance their brand reputation with the demonstration of their level of commitment to social as well as environmental responsibility. Sustainable services, products, as well as business models can help in the cost savings for the companies with the reduction of waste, improvement in the level of efficiency, and higher productivity (Mason 2022). Ultimately, companies succeed in gaining a competitive advantage while differentiating themselves from the competitors as well as appealing to socially conscious consumers. Overall, the impact of innovation in CSR is positive as well as the overall environment while addressing the social including environmental challenges and bringing improvement in the quality of life for the people in the world.

Engaging in CSR initiatives not only fosters the level of creativity but even works as a driving force ensuring innovation in the organizations. With the integration of corporate social responsibility in the business strategy, MNCs can leverage driving technological advancements as well as innovative sustainability initiatives. Moreover, innovative CSR initiatives have turned out to be increasingly predominant in the world of business showcasing the fusion of social responsibility with creative problem-solving (Lin et al. 2022, 14-23). Firms redefine their roles in society while driving impactful change by pioneering their innovative initiatives. In this regard, MNCs invest in programs that not

just benefit the community, they even enhance the overall well-being of the employees. It includes the organization of volunteer activities, promotion of the work-life balance, and provision of mental health support.

Most of the MNCs are executing ethical sourcing practices to ensure that the products are sustainably sourced. They even increase supply chain transparency, letting consumers trace the origins of products that they tend to purchase. The use of technology for the creation of innovative environmental initiatives like poverty alleviation is quite trendy nowadays. While driving CSR-driven innovation, MNCs enhance their level of reputation and develop long-term values for society as well as their business. Embracing CSR-driven innovation lets the firms reap many business prospects (Nasr et al. 2022, 1-18). Primarily, it aims at fostering the innovation impact with the encouragement of the development of innovative and novel products, services, or even processes that tend to address social and environmental issues. It not only increases the competitiveness of the company but even contributes to the society's betterment.

Moreover, CSR-based innovation lets the integration of sustainability into business practices, which leads to cost savings through efficient resource management including the reduction of the environmental impact. While aligning the factor of innovation with social as well as environmental goals, MNCs can attract as well as retain top talent, since the employees are highly seeking purpose-driven working environments (Awuah et al. 2021, 1-13). In addition, these initiatives lead to an increased level of customer loyalty since consumers are inclined to support businesses that demonstrate a level of commitment to social as well as environmental responsibility. Eventually, CSR-based innovation not just benefits the communities but even the bottom line of the company, ensuring a positive impact for both parties. However, when pursuing CSR-driven innovation, MNCs even encounter many challenges that need strategic solutions as well as much consideration. Such challenges impede progress as well as hinder the effective integration of CSR with innovation. However, with the use of the right approach, such hurdles are overcome, which lets the MNCs harness to complete potential of CSR-led innovation.

In this regard, addressing the factor of resistance to change in the organizational culture is important to foster a mind-set that embraces CSR-based innovation. It can be attained by effective communication, buy-in leadership, and the creation of a clear understanding

of the prospects that CSR-driven innovation can bring. MNCs even face issues in the allocation of resources in an effective way for supporting CSR initiatives as well as innovation. The development of a clear strategy that is aligned with the CSR goals with the innovation objectives as well as the allocation of the needed resources accordingly is vital to overcoming the hurdle (Hamad et al. 2020). Lastly, the integration of technology in CSR-led innovation initiatives is one of the basic challenges, specifically for traditional or recognized companies. Finding the right balance in terms of leveraging technology for the innovation and having a focus on the CSR goals needs careful planning with the level of expertise. Poverty is one of the endemic problems in developing countries (Le 2022, 374). In this regard, MNCs have a key role that fostering or undermining the development of poor local communities in developing countries. It has become a subject of intensive debate in academic as well as practitioner circles. Thus, MNCs are not just known as an obstacle to development but even a source of solutions to the pressing social as well as environmental problems that are faced by the communities.

2.7.2 Influence of Innovation in CSR Program on Poverty Alleviation

Innovation in CSR brings massive change in the global systems that even helps to attain sustainable development. If the companies collaborate with various actors, like other firms, or start-ups, it ensures to have effective results with bigger change in the society (Purnamawati et al. 2023). Moreover, the social responsibility of MNCs is one of the tools of social open innovation, by which a firm, using other institutions as well as individuals, implements many strategies while making a significant impact on society.

Poverty alleviation is a difficult task for all countries, it needs innovative solutions as well as determined cooperation of the institutions of the country including the society members (Syed & Chauhan 2023, 477-486). Many studies have proved that the mechanisms of market regulation which are applied through the state institutions, the international activities including domestic organizations, etc., are not anymore capable of solving the economic issues regarding poverty alleviation (Isaac et al. 2020, 619-628). Many researchers have emphasized the increasing impact of the MNCs' CSR activities on the economy, leading to economic success. Hence, to alleviate the level of poverty in the countries, innovative CSR approaches are needed as an integral part of solutions (Shaikh 2023).

Socially responsible business activity of MNCs is considered to be one of the major factors which defines the responsibility which is accepted through a business, for the effect that it imposes on the society (Kim et al. 2020). These initiatives tend to have a significant impact not just on the business or market, but the overall economy similarly, contributing to the need for changes in the rates of poverty in countries. The obscurity of the effects of social responsibility on poverty as well as the measurement complexity emphasizes the need to identify the social responsibility fields which has the biggest effect on the reduction of the poverty level in the countries.

MNCs tend to recognize social responsibility while actively engaging in the initiatives of CSR. Such programs even pay heed to education, health and safety, and community development, which directly affects the poverty-suffering areas (Ugwoji 2022, 279-305). Innovative CSR initiatives help to empower the communities while bringing improvement in the accessibility to basic services as well as promoting sustainable livelihoods. These efforts help in the formation of a positive brand image for the firms while fostering goodwill amongst consumers.

Moreover, MNCs have a key role in poverty alleviation while driving economic empowerment as well as social change as a part of their innovative CSR strategies. By the generation of employment, skill development, transfer of technology, as well as regional development, MNCs can create many opportunities for individuals as well as communities to escape the cycle of poverty (Arejiogbe et al. 2023, 6673). The innovation in their CSR initiatives leads to positive transformations in society. While harnessing the potential of MNCs, societies tend to make significant strides to attain a poverty-free future in which all individuals have the opportunity to thrive and contribute to the progress of the nation.

Adding innovation is quite creative as well as a collaborative approach that is used in solving complicated social problems, such as poverty, exclusion, and inequality (Hlioui & Yousfi 2020). It includes the development of new ideas, services, products, or models that help in addressing the root causes as well as effects of such challenges, and it can be scaled up or simulated for higher impact. The innovation for reducing poverty is based on empowering the communities for the identification and co-creation of the solutions that suit the assets, and needs, including aspirations. It includes engaging diversified stakeholders, like residents, companies, businesses, or governments, while facilitating

participatory approaches, like workshops, design sprints, or dialogues for the generation and testing of the ideas (Choudhary & Singh 2020, 329-338). While empowering the communities, one can foster the ownership, resilience, and agency amongst the people that MNC is serving, and enable them to have access as well as use of the resources effectively.

Apart from this, leveraging technology is a better idea for improving the access, level of efficiency, as well as quality of social services or programs. It includes the use of digital platforms, and devices for delivering information, health, education, or monetary services to marginalized groups or even remote populations (Arejiogbe et al. 2023, 6673). The outcome is expected this help in enhancing the reach, effect, as well as sustainability of the interventions, with the reduction of the barriers or costs linked with the service delivery. Influence of the innovation in CSR for poverty alleviation is developing networking which tends to connect as well as support many actors as well as initiatives that aim at addressing social issues. It helps to create or join the coalitions, partnerships, or platforms that can facilitate collaboration, advocacy, and learning amongst social innovators, funders, social workers, policymakers, as well as beneficiaries (Huang et al. 2022, 3255-3274). With the development of the networks, MNCs can increase their visibility, and influence of the work and credibility.

The companies will be able to foster a culture of innovation as well as change at an extensive level. Another benefit of having innovation in CSR is the development of skills that enable the community to adapt and thrive for change in the world. It includes the acquisition or enhancement of competencies, like creativity, communication, critical thinking, or entrepreneurship, which are important for the identification and seizing the opportunities, problem-solving, and value creation (Medina-Muñoz et al. 2020, 3-19). With the development of these skills, communities can improve their professional practice as well as performance and get empowered to have better livelihoods as well as well-being. Innovation in reducing poverty through CSR is also about evaluating the impact of the ideas, approaches, services, and models on the individuals and the overall environment. It includes the use of methods, like surveys, observations, interviews, or experiments, for the measurement and demonstration of the outcomes, impacts, as well as value of the interventions, and for learning from the successes or failures (Le et al. 2022). Through the evaluation of impact, MNCs ensure the significance, effectiveness, as well as efficiency of the work, while ensuring improvement in the accountability as

well as transparency to the stakeholders. Innovation cannot solve every problem of poverty, however, it is one of the powerful as well as promising strategies that can complement as well as bring enhancement to the social work practice (Le 2022, 374). The use of social innovation in reducing poverty is expected to make a difference in the lives of individuals as well as communities, leading toward a sustainable world.

The impact of innovation in CSR programs on poverty alleviation is deep and multi-layered presenting various opportunities for transformative change and developing sustainably. In current years, the intersection of CSR programs and innovation has evolved as a powerful force in driving efficient poverty alleviation strategies. The implementation of inventive approaches in CSR initiatives by businesses specifically MNCs can catalyse transformative change that addresses the root causes of poverty and nurtures sustainable development (Pansera & Martinez 2017, 2-13). The impact of innovation in CSR programs is the recognition that conventional philanthropic and charity-based approaches are essential but inadequate for addressing the criticalities of poverty. The study focuses on the interruptive invention in the CSR environment that sheds light on the power of novel and untraditional strategies challenging the present norms and developing comprehensive and sustainable solutions. While, MNCs are observed as the major players in the worldwide business environment that leverages their innovation capabilities for designing CSR programs for going beyond traditional aid models, targeting systemic barriers to poverty.

The other way through which innovation could impact CSR programs for alleviating poverty is through technological application and digital solutions. The digital emergence opens unprecedented chances for connecting, empowering, and uplifting marginalized communities (Kao et al. 2016, 140-149). Such as, MNCs are emerging innovative mobile applications to ensure financial literacy, facilitate access to microfinance, and improve the skills of the digital forum in underserved regions. Furthermore, initiatives such as mobile banking, e-commerce networks, and digital marketplaces for developing novel economic opportunities that enable individuals in poverty to contribute more efficiently to innovations underlying their capabilities for bridging the gaps in financial inclusion, spur entrepreneurship, and providing relevant tools for self-empowerment that leads to the reduction in poverty.

Furthermore, the advancements in technology enable social innovations in CSR programs that prove to be a major driver for poverty alleviation. While, social innovation entails the development of novel ideas, services, and models addressing social challenges with efficacy and sustainably. However, MNCs are investigating and integrating the approach of social innovation within their social portfolios to make a positive influence (Biridlo'i-Robby & Reza-Hariyadi 2024). For instance, collaborative models include collaborations with local societies, NGOs, and governments facilitating in co-creation of solutions that are appropriate and address particular challenges facing marginalized populace. Social inventions in CSR programs comprise the inclusive business model design that participates vigorously in targeting societies in creating value providing economic chances and minimizing dependency on aid. By implementing inventive influences assessment tools, for instance, Social Return On Investment (SROI) and shared value metrics, MNCs are capable of gaining deeper insights into long-term social, economic, and environmental outcomes of their CSR programs that lead to refining the strategies and optimizing the allocation of resources for the higher influence of reducing poverty (Hidayat & Sutarjo 2021, 154-172).

2.8 Challenges and Opportunities of CSR Initiatives for MNCs

Multinational Corporations (MNCs), are the tall, leaning pillars of the global economy, driving revolutionary change on a global scale. Their ability to combat unemployment and support economic progress is evident and frequently praised. However, there is still a complex relationship between the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of multinational corporations and the reduction of poverty, particularly in developing countries such as Pakistan. Here, layers of complexity are revealed by the interaction between corporate giving and poverty reduction, which motivates a more thorough investigation through this assessment of the literature. In this regard, several challenges are faced by MNCs during the integration of CSR initiatives for poverty alleviation as explained below;

2.8.1 Limitations of Resources

The limitations of resources provide numerous challenges for Multinational Corporations (MNCs) in implementing CSR initiatives for alleviating poverty. Whilst, MNCs are concerned with undertaking substantial financial resources, where they are required to

prudently allot these funds for maintaining a balance through CSR commitments with other business priorities and the shareholders' expectations (Gangwar 2023, 267-276). This act of balancing becomes particularly complex while addressing long-term universal issues such as poverty, which requires maintained investment and complex intrusions. In addition, apart from financial resources, MNCs encounter several limitations regarding expertise and human capital that are associated with CSR initiatives (Lodge & Wilson 2016). Developing and implementing effective programs for poverty alleviation require expert understanding, skills, and cross-disciplinary management that is lacking in the organizations or requires external alliances.

The policies of the government majorly affect how MNCs implement Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs along with determining how these programs influence the efforts to minimize poverty. However, irregular policies and inferior regulatory models often obstruct the efficacy of the program (Muruviwa, Nekhwevha, & Akpan 2018, 1-9). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is new to Pakistan and is usually disorganized with charitable work and labour rules. Although there have been substantial efforts to showcase the significance of CSR, small enterprises as well as medium enterprises particularly encounter significant and potential issues in regulating corporate social responsibility in operations. Due to this and the gap identified between CSR integration and its standards, it is imperative to state that there is a significant requirement for effective and solid initiatives that must be taken to develop and are suitable for the particular socio-economic circumstances of Pakistan (Mahmood et al. 2021).

2.8.2 Socio-Economic Challenges and Environment Sustainability

In Pakistan, the economic arrangement highlights the significant challenges of corporate social responsibility initiatives, making round to the development of ecological management and sustainable initiatives more challenging. An irregular approach to sustainable alternatives is endured by the usual assurance that CSR is consistently regarded as a philanthropic practice, mixed with some insufficient and not-so-appropriate ecological standards (El-Kassar, et al. 2021, 218-236). Due to a lack of cognizance and execution of CSR initiatives that aim to improve the ecology, it impedes the development of significant and challenging environmental issues. In 2013, the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) issued rules for CSR and environmental sustainability, there is yet a lack of involvement between real-life applications and initiatives as well as

theoretical underpinnings. Dynamically, the small enterprises and medium-sized firms segmentally show a contribution to the initiatives linked to corporate social responsibility regardless of the bigger firms taking steps and making pledges to sustainable standards (Zou et al. 2021, 952). This implies the significance of incorporating all-inclusive sustainable alternatives.

In the case of Pakistan, it is important to address the complicated factors that impact CSR initiatives, specifically regarding environmentally sustainable alternatives (Khan, Yu & Umar 2021, 863-885). The disunited approach to CSR highlights philanthropy as well as the lack of ecological laws implementation and execution, indicating certainty towards the incorporation of contemporized efforts to the development of environmental sustainability. By harmonizing CSR approaches that coordinate and reflect on stimulating regulatory strategies and frameworks as well as combine with environmental objectives, Pakistan may endure a more environmentally friendly culture. To fill these areas between the practice and theory of CSR combined with developing environmentally sustainable prospects, along with civil society, businesses, and collaboration with government authorities is important (El-Kassar et al. 2021, 218-236). To get rid of these issues, certain approaches can be utilized for international firms that can carry out various CSR strategies to produce sustainable results.

2.8.3 Impediments to CSR Effectiveness

To minimize poverty, various obstacles have been faced by Multinational Corporations (MNCs) while undertaking Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in Pakistan. Problems such as honesty, responsibility, and synchronized alignment with terminated exertions have been identified (Khan et al. 106-121). However, in the absence of strong cooperation among the MNCs, governmental bodies, and local societies, the effectiveness of CSR programs has been diminished. Considering the success rate of the efforts added in reducing the poverty rate, the absence of accountability and transparency impacts the trust of the stakeholders involved. The successful application of CSR programs is usually impacted due to the absence of devotion, where, the promises of top management emerge as the most crucial factor in the determination of the effectiveness of the program.

Many problems have initially been identified for addressing the underlying complexity of reducing poverty through the activities of CSR within Pakistan (Khan et al. 2020 & Yusliza et al. 2019, 2051-2078). To minimize the constant repetition of efforts,

enhancements must be made within the CSR models while addressing key factors such as responsibility, honesty, and coordination. Furthermore, building strong ties and maintaining effective communication among the administration of MNCs, and local societies can contribute to enhancing and enhancing the efficacies of CSR initiatives with the target of alleviating poverty. Alongside this, identification and overcoming challenges including integration barriers and marketing dynamics, major changes rely on the commitment of top management. On the other hand, by incorporating strategic interferences and supportive labours, MNCs can function effectively by handling the problems with ease and utilizing CSR in the best way possible to reduce poverty ultimately leading to sustainable development in Pakistan.

2.8.4 Improving CSR Initiatives by MNCs

Multinational companies are the ones who have taken into consideration the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative to a certain extent in the present era (Sohail, et al. 2020, 1277-1288). This development implies a significant modification to a dynamic and merged approach for business operations and regulation which is mainly focused on success as well as social welfare. MNCs are engaging in a wide range of initiatives linked to CSR, from environmentally sustainable alternatives and the growth of communities to saving education and healthcare (Khan, Ghouri & Gul 2021, 205-223). For instance, firms in China have been significant donors in Pakistan, generating more economic benefits in a range of sectors such as educational, national, and social. Employing these programs, international corporations (MNCs) not only support labours to minimize poverty but also improves the overall living standard, representing their devotion to endorsing sustainable growth and societal welfare.

A significant modification in the awareness of business is addressed due to the increase in the adoption of CSR initiatives by MNCs (Khan, Ghouri & Gul 2021, 205-223). The initiatives of CSR, on the far side, outmoded profit-oriented stances and endure a more socially responsible and thorough approach. These companies are gaining more internal relationships with social growth and business success along with ethically responsible alternatives, by giving contributions in arrangements that provoke certain socioeconomic issues.

2.8.5 Importance of Local Community Engagement

To improve and enhance the efforts of poverty reduction in Pakistan, MNCs must operate systemically by actively engaging with local communities on a dynamic basis. Jhatial and colleagues (2014, 111) conducted a study where they assessed the importance of involving the local societies while conducting decision-making processes and considering their necessities. Furthermore, building effective partnerships with local communities would aid in empowering communities and ensure the fostering of their trust to participate effectively in the creation and prosperity of initiative taken. This ultimately helps in building successful community engagements. However, the authorities including MNCs must function in ensuring that the initiative of CSR must drive the impact towards creating awareness of the socio-cultural context of Pakistan. MNCs should aim to prioritize meaningful engagement with the local communities to combat the rate of poverty in Pakistan (Jhatial et al. 2014, 111). This can be achieved by building partnership relationships where the voices and ideas of people are not left unheard and must be respected and integrated into the decision-making processes. Not only this, but MNCs' must also ensure that the initiatives of CSR for reducing poverty must address the novel needs of local people which will help in creating models for continuous collaboration and communication (Yeboah, Asuamah 2023).

2.8.6 Positive Outcomes of MNCs CSR Initiatives

The social initiatives taken by MNCs help societies to grow and develop. MNCs use the resources and labour within the countries they operate so they must elevate the society with their investments and social contributions. The CSR initiatives grant the public access to clean water, quality education, effective healthcare, and durable infrastructure. These initiatives are valuable and are generally seen where the role of government is inactive. The governments are playing their part in uplifting the society but organisations need to understand that they have their role to play. The CSR initiatives help societies achieve sustainable development while elevating their social lifestyle and alleviating poverty. Through the CSR initiatives, the social and economic welfare of the society is ensured and hence, contributes to overall reducing poverty (Wirba 2023, 1-27). Organizations can deploy funds to remove obstacles in the way of social development and work in harmony with the government to develop society.

MNCs' initiatives towards the betterment of society reflect upon their commitment towards a better future and therefore, acknowledge their transformative power to uplift the local community along with organizational development. With budgeted and planned investment in social sectors including water, sanitation, education, and healthcare, the local communities can get access to services and infrastructure previously unavailable to them (Khalid et al. 2023). This helps the local community to attain quality education and advanced healthcare both of which are fundamental pillars in developing a society. Since education will lead to better opportunities, poverty alleviation is imminent within the society. The CSR initiatives have a long-lasting impact on society as they are done on a longitudinal basis empowering the society as well as affirming the role of organization in societal development. Tangible steps into the CSR initiatives enable companies to become a part of the overall ecosystem in a country and give back to society.

The case is evident in developed economies as companies actively contribute towards CSR initiatives and are a vital part of the overall societal development. However, in developing countries such as Pakistan, CSR is seen minimally with very few organizations realizing their role within society. Also, the poverty rate in Pakistan is very high hence, there is a dire need for companies to play their part and launch CSR initiatives within the country to alleviate poverty. Many large MNCs are operating in Pakistan and hence, they have huge opportunities to come forward and invest in the societal development for the overall economic growth and prosperity within the country. Transparency, collaboration, and responsive behaviours are the key to launching successful CSR campaigns and initiatives.

CSR activities can help in alleviating poverty by providing educational opportunities, infrastructure development, vocational training programs, apprenticeships, and internships that would provide equal opportunity to everyone in society without discrimination (Lincoln & Diamond 2023, 190-220). Yet, the CSR is not a one-time project but a long-running sustainably planned initiative that would continue to expedite the development. It is imminent for companies to work in countries such as Pakistan so societal development and prosperity can be achieved in harmony.

2.9 Theoretical Framework

Reducing poverty is one of the major global concerns as it is a necessary aim for successful economic development and it is also a crucial need for sustainable development. There pertains to evidence that CSR programs with a pro-poor focus, have a positive influence on their beneficiaries, specifically via employment generation, a rise in incomes and enhancements in working capabilities, social infrastructure enhancements as well and the promotion of human rights (Yi et al. 2020, 403). Nonetheless, researches on the influence of CSR programs in response to poverty reduction tend not to be conclusive. Besides, to reduce poverty it demands innovative solutions as well as purposeful cooperation of all the nations' entities as well as the members of communities.

In light of the present insights, some of the theories have been discussed regarding the phenomena of the research. One of the theories that can be taken into consideration is the stakeholder's theory which reinforces that firms tend to have a responsibility not just toward shareholders but also toward external stakeholders involving local societies that are impacted by their operations (El-Kassar et al. 2021, 218-236). The CSR programs when placed effectively can address the needs of such shareholders by ensuring that they get employment opportunities, infrastructure development, and social welfare initiatives.

Another adequate theory is the resource-based theory which states that businesses possess unique capabilities and resources that can be leveraged to develop adequate social value (Brammer, Nardella & Surdu 2021, 301-320). In the aspect of this research, MNCs can utilize their resources, technological expertise as well as market access to reinforce initiatives such as vocational training, microfinance, and healthcare services thus contributing to reducing poverty.

Besides that, the institutional theory can be taken into consideration which states that firms are impacted by the institutional environment under which they operate involving cultural, legal, and social norms by CSR (El-Kassar et al. 2021, 218-236). Amidst several nations, there is increasing pressure on firms to exhibit their commitment to social and environmental sustainability leading the MNCs to imply CSR programs as a means of improving their business reputation and goodwill. In addition, firms by aligning CSR strategies with poverty reduction can meet the firms' sustainable goals and provide a better reputation.

The developing economic value for shareholders tends to be compatible with developing social value for societies (Muruviwa, Nekhwevha & Akpan 2018, 1-9). MNCs can be motivated to address CSR programs which lead to addressing benefits for the businesses and at the same time cater to the needs of the communities in terms of granting training and development for skills development, especially for women. Figure 1 is showing a strong linkages between the education and alleviation of poverty, therefore, CSR activities must be reformed around educating societies, especially girls. Moreover, firms by collaborating CSR in their strategic decisions can ensure to increase the value of the business extensively.

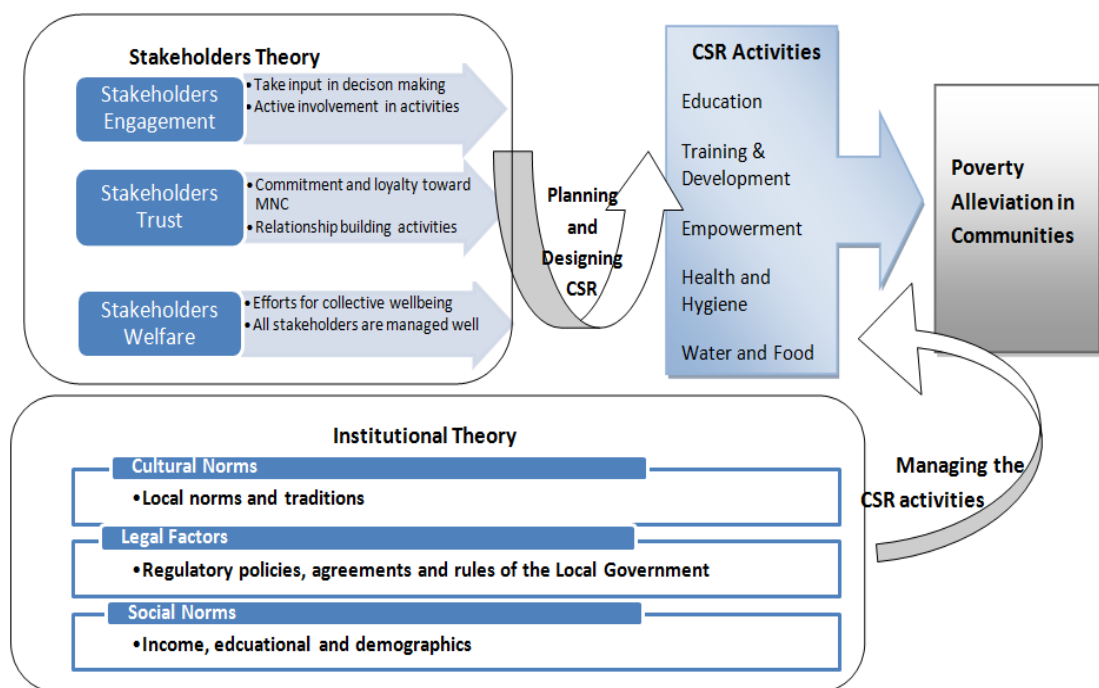


Figure 1. The role of Stakeholders Theory and Institutional Theory in guiding the CSR activities for Poverty alleviation.

Above framework shows that CSR activities have multiple guiding forces inside and outside the organization that help in shaping the CSR activities. If these theories are properly applied and the CSR activities are designed in light of such multi-dimensional theories, the effect might help alleviate the poverty in the societies.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Research design refers to how a topic is studied, whereas methodology encompasses the implications of conducting a study on any topic or phenomenon (Zangirolami-Raimundo et al. 2018, 356-370). The research approach, including the strategy chosen for doing the study and the research methodology based on that philosophy, is discussed in the part that follows in this chapter. In addition, the study design is included in this chapter. It outlines the research's placement and methodology. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the data collection techniques which involve how the data is gathered by the author of the research. Besides, this chapter involves the data sources, ethical considerations, and limitations of the research. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the search strategy and inclusion and exclusion criteria that are relevant to this research.

3.2 Research Approach

The research approach is a set of specific attitudes and assumptions about the progress of knowledge (Thomann & Maggetti 2020, 356-386). What is done when researching a given subject is also known as the research approach (Geoffrey, 2019). Interpretivism and positivism are the two main schools of thought in the field of research (Rahi 2017, 1-5). A fundamental tenet of the positivist school of thought is the importance of empirical evidence gleaned from scientific experiments and careful observation (Thomann & Maggetti 2020, 356-386). Due to the qualitative character of the study, the author of the following research incorporates interpretivism approach into the research process. The implication of interpretivist approach has aided the author of the research in assessing the Influence of Multinational Corporations on CSR programs in Pakistan. The interpretivism approach enables the author of the research to acquire an in-depth understanding with consideration to responses addressed by participants held in the research study which is carried out (Durdella, N 2017). The interpretivism approach is viewed as well as influenced about social constructivism. In the interpretivism approach outcomes are formulated and realities are decided by the inhabitants who are addressing the research. Thus, the results carried out in this approach are depended upon a person's personal experiences. The methodology approach carried out for this research involves the interpretivism research approach. It is a belief regarding the way data related to a

particular phenomenon has been collected, assessed, and then utilized. Interpretivism enables the author of the research to interpret elements of the study, creating an integration of human interest into a study (Ditlmann & Kopf-Beck 2019, 423-447).

3.3 Research Design

Research designs are the frameworks within which phenomena are often evaluated or investigated, while methodology refers to the processes that apply to any field of study. To choose which research strategy to use, one must first gather the necessary data to formulate study questions (Kumar 2018). It includes the quantitative method, the mixed method, and the qualitative technique, all of which are unique methods. Questions like "what is examined," "by whom," "when," and "how" can provide light on study design. All research designs are based on the evidence type needed to answer the study issue. To answer research questions, a research design is a set of procedures for collecting and analyzing relevant data (Pandey & Pandey 2021). The goal of a quantitative design is to provide generalizable results. Furthermore, high-quality qualitative research designs begin with properly informed, sufficient, and genuine data and information (Nayak & Singh 2021). In addition, since they deal with open-ended questions, qualitative research methods are inherently inductive. On the other hand, quantitative methods allow researchers to study their research objectives with credibility since the data collected is done in real-time and tends to be accurate, consistent, and sufficient. In addition, whereas quantitative methods tend to provide data that can be readily generalized with the use of deductive reasoning, qualitative techniques tend to offer data that may be applied to inductive approaches (Mohajan 2018, 23-48).

This study is focused on gaining in-depth knowledge, and aligns with the findings of the Pakistan case study, on the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs on poverty alleviation. That is why the secondary qualitative method is useful for this study to get a thorough understanding. This approach involves an exhaustive investigation and interpretation of existing qualitative data, charting the path for a comprehensive exploration of the research inquiries. By leveraging the richness of pre-existing data, this design ensures depth and context, furnishing a nuanced grasp of the subject matter. Additionally, this method is likely to focus on gathering numerical data and information in series (Apuke 2017). A major advantage of using a qualitative technique is the time and energy it saves the researcher by drawing on already collected data for new insights.

Moreover, secondary data sources mostly involve high-quality comprehensive information gathered by researchers or professional entities (Nayak & Singh 2021). Furthermore, the implication of this research design allows the researcher to explore an extensive scope of data via hence the research of this study have carried out this research design.

3.4 Data Collection

Gathering and analysing data involve repeating methods that have been successful in the past (Snyder 2019). Secondary data methods and primary data methods are the two main categories of information gathering. The term "primary data collection" is used when fresh information is gleaned from sources like focus groups or interviews (Geoffrey 2019). The term "primary data collection approach" is used to describe the practice of gathering novel, first-hand information for any purpose (Davidavičienė 2018, 1-23). Data that has been made available to other parties in the past for whatever reason is known as secondary data (Geoffrey 2019).

The secondary data collection comprises using sources that have already been published (Mishra & Alok 2017, 60). In light of the current topic, the usage of secondary data collection has been selected as it would allow the author of the research to gather materials from secondary sources, which are journals, articles, books, companies' annual reports, and websites. As asserted by Geoffrey (2019), the secondary data collection comprises using sources that have already been published. Henceforth, the data is gathered considering "The Influence of Multinational Corporations' Corporate Social Responsibility Programs on Poverty Alleviation." This study utilizes several data sources that provide details on the CSR activities and strategies implemented by the MNCs in Pakistan to alleviate poverty. In this regard, the most reliable and authentic sources are the company websites and CSR reports that demonstrate numerous activities adopted by them to engage the stakeholders in poverty alleviation. The data from the last four years was taken for further consideration. Precisely, this study takes into consideration the most relevant data in the CSR and sustainability reports. The study takes four companies as samples including Nestle Pakistan, Unilever Pakistan, KFC Pakistan, and Toyota Motors (called Indus Motors Company), selected based on the availability of data on CSR activities. The study takes major data from the following direct companies' websites.

The reports and websites mentioned in Table 2 have provided rich data that helped in analyzing the current activities such as empowering women, educational support, employability opportunities, agricultural support, water and sanitation, and several food programs for improving the community conditions and alleviating poverty. A detailed discussion of the themes generated from the data is presented in the upcoming chapter.

Table 2: Data Sources from MNCs' Reports & Websites

Name of The MNC	Report Title and Year	Date Retrieved	Link to Report
Unilever Pakistan	Guddi Baji Livelihood Program Report (2021)	22.7.2024	Website Unilever Pakistan https://www.unilever.pk/news/2021/unilever-jazz-cash-guddi-baji-livelihoods-program/
	Unilever Nutrition's Standards, (2023).	24.07.2024	https://www.unilever.com/files/unilevers-nutrition-standards-booklet.pdf
	Unilever Roadmap to Inclusion and Diversity (2021)	24.07.2024	https://www.unilever.pk/files/c0a1528a-5033-4e35-b876-3e1b5eb0e602/diversirt---inclusion-roadmap.pdf
	Unilever Sustainability (2023) Improve People's health, confidence and well-being	25.07.2024	https://www.unilever.pk/sustainability/improve-peoples-health-confidence-wellbeing/
Nestle Pakistan	Nestle in Society Report (2023)	26.07.2024	Website Nestle Pakistan https://www.nestle.pk/sites/g/files/pydnoa361/files/2024-03/nestle-csv-report-2023.pdf
KFC Pakistan	KFC Mitao Bhook (2023)	26.07.2024	Website KFC Pakistan https://www.kfcpakistan.com/mitao-Bhook
Toyota Indus Company	Toyota Education (2023)	28.07.2024	Website Toyota Indus Company https://toyota-indus.com/education/
	Toyota Indus Apprenticeship program (2023)	28.07.2024	https://toyota-indus.com/opportunities//
	Toyota, Concerns beyond cars (2023)	28.07.2024	https://toyota-indus.com/environment//

The data mentioned in Table 3 is collected from relevant sources that describe the CSR activities of MNCs such as the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) Career Development Centre published data in (2019) with the collaboration of KFC, Pakistan regarding CSR activities for student growth and employability.

Table 3. Data from the IBA Career Development Centre

Data for Company	Sources	Date Retrieved	Link to Report
KFC Pakistan	IBA Career Development Centre (2019)	26.07.2024	IBA Career Development Centre Report (2019) https://cdc.iba.edu.pk/kfc-excrusion-trip.php

According to this report, the Career Development Centre's educational excursion to the KFC headquarters is directly related to the company's commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR) in terms of job prospects and student development. By encouraging diversity and fair opportunity, the firm shows its dedication to corporate social responsibility. Along with learning about important business qualities like self-assurance and perseverance, the students also obtained real-world experience. By developing skills, improving their comprehension of working conditions, and imparting values like respect for every role, this knowledge directly relates to their future employability.

3.5 Data Analysis

Research questions and study designs provide the bedrock upon which data and analyses are built (Willmott 2020, 1-4). Similarly, research analysis entails submitting sensible methods to evaluate the gathered data (Babii 2020, 77-87). Both the research question and the research strategy form the basis of every study's research or data analysis. Similarly, data analysis is the process of evaluating the collected data using logical characteristics (Ragab & Arisha 2018, 1-14).

The data analysis can outline the steps for reducing and coding the available insights. In addition, research analysis is the process of describing, illustrating, and evaluating data via the analytical incorporation of logical and statistical methodologies. Given that this

study takes a qualitative approach, the research analysis technique it employs is also qualitative.

The data analysis method addressed for this research is content analysis. Content data analysis is utilized by creating themes that are relevant to the topic of the thesis (Ghauri 2022, 1-5). This analysis assists the researcher in identifying patterns and trends in different themes related to the context of the research (Ragab & Arisha 2018, 1-14). Additionally, content analysis enables tracking changes pertained during a period and enables to addition of new insights related to the subject matter. Hence, content analysis is carried out to attain insights into the “Influence of Multinational Corporations’ Corporate Social Responsibility Programs on Poverty Alleviation.”

In this regard, all the data was gathered and then arranged into understandable form. The researcher at this stage gained familiarity with the data that was collected through different sources and companies. The data was then broken down into several manageable segments through the process of coding. The codes are the small understandable phrases or words that help in understanding the overall agenda under discussion with a meaningful insight. Each code describes a unique and different idea that shows the richness of the data and depth of the findings (Harwood & Garry 2003).

Different codes and themes from MNC’s data are shown in Table 4 which demonstrates how MNCs are practicing their CSR activities effectively and efficiently for the betterment of the societies. The coded data is examined for themes that have the same pattern or fall in the same category. The categorized aggregated themes are then labelled and given names for further discussion on the objectives under study. The complete analysis and findings are discussed in the upcoming chapter.

Table 4. Codes and Themes from the MNCs' Data

Information from the MNCs	Codes	Aggregate Themes
<p>Training the 35800 drivers from Sheikhpura district including the company's 7900 drivers (Nestle in Society Report 2023). Empower farmers by training them, allowing both men and women to enter the workforce and create a better future for themselves and their families. (Nestle in Society Report 2023).</p>	Training and Development	Employment Opportunities
<p>Trainee Uplift program, Policy Revamp for Working Women, and Heroes Leadership Programs (Unilever Roadmap to Inclusion and Diversity 2021). Workers are paid a Living Wage and in April 2023, the company reported that 58% of employees are getting a living wage (Unilever Sustainability 2023).</p>	Attractive Salaries	
<p>Training and development to the local youth, to earn livelihood and become independent (Toyota Indus Apprenticeship program 2023).</p>	Uplifting Local Youth	
<p>KFC has been joining hands with different universities such as IBA to provide job opportunities along with kitchen training and competence development (IBA Career Development Centre 2019)</p>	Job Fairs	
<p>The company provides training and development in vocational centres for better entrepreneurship activities in the communities. An educational-based program, N4HK comprises of book designed by Oxford University Press (Nestle in Society Report 2023).</p>	Training and Development	Educational Support
<p>The Citizens Foundation (TCF) under the program "Beti Parhao, Usse Mazboot Banao" also highlights its support towards educating the girl child (Unilever Sustainability 2023).</p>	Girls Education	
<p>Toyota has joined hands with Habib University Foundation, The Citizens Foundation, Goth Education Program and INJAZ Pakistan (Toyota, Education 2023).</p>	Partnership & Collaboration	
<p>MitaoBhook through which the company intends to educate out-of-school children in Mardan. The Million Smiles Foundation School, KFC Campus, Mardan -to teach more than 250 children (The News International 2022). The "KFC Score a Scholarship Program" (KFC Mitao Bhook 2023).</p>	Scholarship Programs	

Information from the MNCs	Codes	Aggregate Themes
<p>Nestlé-BISP Rural Women Sales Program in 2017-to promote skill development among BISP beneficiaries for self-employment, leading to their graduation from poverty (Nestle in Society Report 2023).</p>	<p>Skills Development</p>	<p>Women Support</p>
<p>Rahim Yar Khan District, Unilever, and Circle Pakistan-50 young women received training. Upskill 400 women in 2023 and ensure that they are financially literate and empowered (Unilever Sustainability 2023).</p> <p>The Khud Mukhtar Project- women are empowered through motorcycles. Glow & Lovely (GAL) Foundation-initiating a scholarship program for girls (Unilever Sustainability 2023), 48,240 female registrations (Unilever Sustainability 2023).</p>	<p>Financial Independence</p>	
<p>Mitao Bhook initiative 62% of women seen in educational initiatives (KFC Mitao Bhook 2023).</p>	<p>Diversity</p>	
<p>Nestlé has established seven facilities that serve over 70,000 individuals every day. WASH Program-40 thousand children and 550 teachers in schools in 2023. 56000m3 water across its manufacturing facilities in 2023 (Nestle in Society Report 2023).</p>	<p>Schools and Communities' Water Facilities</p>	<p>Water Conservation and Sanitation</p>
<p>The “H for Hand washing” social marketing campaign by Lifebuoy embraced the health aspect by supporting telehealth through its partnership with Sehat Kahani. In 2022, more than 20 thousand consultations were provided concerning different health-related questions (Unilever Sustainability 2023)</p>	<p>Hygiene and Consultancy</p>	
<p>Participates in community-oriented water-based initiatives such as the Million Tree Plantation Drive across Pakistan and transforming a garden zone over 64,000 sqm at its plant Lake Saiful Muluk that involves a clean-up (Toyota, Concerns beyond Cars 2023).</p> <p>ISO 14001 certification, which emphasizes its sound environmental management systems as one of its key strategies to grow responsibly.</p>	<p>Tree plantations and water cleaning</p>	

Information from the MNCs	Codes	Aggregate Themes
Responsibilities in water stewardship signature initiative - Caring for Water-Pakistan (C4W-P). (Nestle in Society Report 2023).	Water supply	Agricultural Support
Partnership with the Centre for Water Informatics & Technology (WIT) at Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) across 548 acres has saved additional water to the tune of more than 3100K Cubic meters. Jointly working with the Agriculture Department of the Government of Punjab to finance local farmers-establishing drip irrigation (Nestle in Society Report 2023).	Innovative Technologies	
Finance local farmers (Nestle in Society Report 2023).	Farmers Support	
Unilever's Science-based Nutrition Criteria (USNC) and Positive Nutrition Standards (PNS) (Unilever Nutrition's Standards 2023)	Nutritional Standards	Food Support
Nestle specifically launched a curriculum-based program called Nestle for Healthy Kids (N4HK) in coordination with Oxford University Press to provide knowledge on physical activities and the importance of nutrition (Nestle in Society Report 2023).	Awareness on Nutrition	

The above table shows a snapshot of the analysis and identified themes through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of MNCs in Pakistan, with a focus on employment opportunities, educational support, women empowerment, food provision, water and sanitation, agricultural and food support aiming to address societal and environmental challenges while improving the quality of life in Pakistan.

3.6 Ethical Use of AI

The ethical commencement of AI has become a major issue since AI technologies have begun to flourish amidst many sectors of communities. In regards to this research, the author of this research has been careful and considerate concerning the usage of AI in availing the insights of the research. Henceforth the author of the present research has made use of AI such as ChatGPT and Grammarly to attain information associated with the phenomena of the study and improve the language of the thesis. However, the author of this research made sure to comply with the ethical concerns of AI and not to entirely copy-paste the information but rather have an understanding of a few complex terms more efficiently to enhance the effectiveness of the research. The prompts used from ChatGPT to aid in understanding intricate concepts are listed in Appendix 1.

Furthermore, the author of this research made sure to have transparency and fairness in attaining the information for this research. Hence the author of this research did not irresponsibly use AI, rather the usage of AI was only used to increase the knowledge and awareness about the impact of MNCs' corporate social responsibility programs for poverty alleviation. Moreover, the author of this research has made sure to have proper transparency so that there is no kind of lack of trust and that there is adequate understanding of the subject matter.

3.7 Evaluation of Study

While working on the data collection and analysis few limitations hindered the scale of findings. The initial problem was regarding the availability of separate CSR reports in the Pakistani context. Although MNCs provided CSR reports from their global headquarters, the regional reports were quite missing. In this regard, the researcher has taken help from other published material, annual reports, and sustainability reports. The study also focussed on the genuine data from the company's website, but only KFC provided extensive data on their website, and other companies focussed on the branding aspects of their websites. The data availability and the compilation were the main issues and the data was based on the company's perspective.

The main concerns of any study while taking data from different sources are the reliability and validity of the data, which show the trustworthiness of the findings. The reliability of the data in qualitative study can be taken as the consistency in the interpretations. The

reliability is strengthened by the consistency in findings (also called reproducibility) and methodological transparency (Aguinis et al. 2018). Hence, future studies can also use the exact links and can generate more or less the same codes with the same underlying meaning. All the sources are well documented to adhere to the principle of transparency as well. The rigor of the original documents is maintained through proper citations and references to make the study more transparent and credible.

Another factor to consider to enhance data collection is data accuracy, to check on validity and correct use of the collected data. This means that the secondary data sources have to undergo some processes through which their authenticity has to be ascertained to ensure the data collected is both reliable and valid. Besides, the study affirms that it is conducted without bias when collecting, analyzing, and or interpreting the data. This is especially true in cases where the researcher might have some form of bias that might influence a study in qualitative research. To adhere to the tenets of ethical standards and guidelines, ethical clearance from an ethical committee or review board would be sought. In analyzing secondary sources (Zawacki-Richter et al. 2020, 59) proper citation and acknowledging of the source is done, and respecting intellectual property rights and refraining from plagiarism is done. Indeed, full disclosure of all the steps and methodologies utilized in the research process is also achieved. This can entail providing information about the research methodology utilized, how data was collected, and how the data gathered was analyzed. In this research, despite the absence of direct involvement with human subjects, ethical scrutiny is not obviated. The researcher remains committed to adhering to principles of confidentiality, respect, and integrity for intellectual property rights. Furthermore, transparency in the reporting of outcomes and recognition of data sources become paramount in sustaining the ethical integrity of the research initiative. By complying with these ethical imperatives, the study seeks to contribute knowledge ethically and responsibly within the academic community.

The research faced several limitations that restricted the findings in specific ways. The scope of this study was impacted by two main factors, time and financial limits. The reliability of the results was impacted by the short time frame for data collection and analysis; as a longer time frame would have permitted a more thorough evaluation of the body of current research and the use of additional data sources. Similarly, the lack of funds made it difficult to obtain high-quality resources like databases, journals, and articles. Because the researcher has to rely on publicly available secondary data, which

might not have been as thorough or current, the internal validity of the study may have been affected due to the lack of access to some legitimate and valuable sources.

The availability of data is a further external validity limitation, especially when concentrating on the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of MNCs with operations in Pakistan. Finding the most recent and pertinent information was challenging due to the reliance on secondary data, and this constraint may have limited how broadly the results may be applied. The study's conclusions might not apply to other nations because of variations in their socioeconomic, cultural, and political contexts, even while it offered insightful information on Pakistan's particular situation. The use of secondary data generates questions regarding the authenticity, comprehensiveness, and applicability of the data gathered. Because the researcher has little influence over the quality and scope of the available data sources, this has an impact on the study's validity. The inherent limits of secondary data collecting pose obstacles to assuring the robustness of the conclusions, despite best efforts to employ the most reliable and pertinent data. The reliability, internal validity, and external validity of the research findings were compromised by time, money, and data availability limits, despite the researcher's best efforts to utilize all available resources.

4 Findings

This findings chapter explores the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of leading multinational companies operating in Pakistan, focusing on environmental sustainability, women empowerment, food provision, water and sanitation, and agriculture. The analysis is illustrated with a case study of Nestlé, similar examples from Unilever, Toyota Indus, and KFC that show how they are strategically working to align against the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in line with Stakeholder Theory. Highlighting MNC's CSR practices and activities, the analysis describes how they develop several community-based projects on a wide scale, develop sustainable agriculture practices, and manage water and sanitation, empowering women, through programs under role-modelling education aimed at raising their socio-economic status. These companies also incorporate CSR into their business models to tackle key societal and environmental issues in Pakistan to reduce the diseases and extra burden on the communities. The chapter underscores the broad-ranging effects of these initiatives, illustrating how corporations are committed to promoting sustainable development and contributing positively towards improving the quality of life in their areas of operations to alleviate poverty.

4.1 Employment Opportunities

For a productive and sustainable community, the members of the community must have good livelihoods to fulfill their basic needs. Therefore, employment opportunities are created by several MNCs to make societies strong and economically viable (Singh & Misra 2022). In this regard, the major step is taken by Unilever as it has developed into broad-based initiatives to enhance the lives of all stakeholders in Unilever Pakistan's value chain. They have launched programs for gender equality and inclusion. Programs such as the Trainee Uplift Program, Policy Revamp for Working Women and Heroes Leadership Programs (Unilever Roadmap to Inclusion & Diversity 2021). Unilever Pakistan is working towards making sure that all workers are paid a Living Wage and in April 2023, the company reported that 58% of employees are getting a living wage (Unilever Sustainability 2023). Living wage is defined as the wage required to meet the basic needs of the average adult worker without support, including food and water, clothing, housing, energy, transportation, health care insurance education child-care other essential needs. The literature highlights CSR strategies aimed at poverty alleviation,

which often include ensuring fair wages as a means to uplift communities and reduce poverty (Ahen & Amankwah-Amoah 2018; Brandl et al. 2021). This commitment arises from the conviction that a Living Wage is an essential element of a decent society. This is in contrast to the minimum wage, which historically has been far lower than what a person needs for basic health care, education, sustenance, and social security (Ahen & Amankwah-Amoah 2018).

Nestle has also been making efforts to uplift the societies by providing different training and development opportunities such as the company training the drivers from Sheikhpura district for better safety and more job opportunities. The company offers training to 35800 drivers including the company's drivers that include 7900 drivers (Nestle 2023). The company has also joined hands with several NGOs for better livelihood for the local communities. Such as the company donated 4 million to Akhuwat NGO to uplift small-scale entrepreneurs to scale up their businesses. This has also benefitted the female small business owners to improve their business.

MNCs are also making efforts to elevate the role of women in the workforce and bring more gender equality such as Unilever Pakistan wants gender to be perfectly represented in the company, wanting it to balance 50:50 by 2030. To include women as well as people with disabilities or the transgender community are effort to reach out to all kinds of talents to let them feel welcome in every way and represented from all corners. According to Singh and Misra (2021), corporate social responsibility often includes initiatives aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion within organizations. The Guddi Baji livelihoods program's onset in 2012 showcases Unilever Pakistan's commitment to uplifting local communities (Unilever 2023). Operated in conjunction with the Rural Support Program Network, it links up to cater to society's most vulnerable sections cutting across women of villages. Female trainees are inculcated with the skills and resources to fulfill their roles as Unilever's entrepreneurial ambassadors at a route-to-market level. It encompasses recruitment, training, and empowerment through well-proven training that teaches business skills honed to perfection over the years. Guddi Baji has come a long way ever since its first day. In 2012, it was initiated by a salon model, from 2015 to 2018 focused on retail operations, and in 2009 Johar partnered with Jazz Cash & the Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN). As of today, there are more than 8000 women trained and provided livelihood opportunities. In partnership with Jazz, Pakistan's largest mobile

telecommunications increases value proposition and financial inclusion for low-income Women (Unilever 2023).

Other companies have been also making serious efforts to improve employment opportunities in the local communities of Pakistan. Such as Toyota Indus provides a three-year apprenticeship program for training and development to the local youth, to earn livelihood and become independent (Toyota Indus Apprenticeship program 2023.). The technological advancements are updated and the trainees are given hands-on learning experience on innovative technologies. Similarly, KFC has been joining hands with different universities such as IBA to provide job opportunities along with kitchen training and competence development (IBA Career Development Centre 2019).

The vast description of the employment opportunities shows that the companies are committed to improving the skills and competence of the local people. This helps the local communities in elevating poverty and generating their income through innovative sources. When people have decent wages and can earn a good livelihood, they can invest in education, and healthcare, buy food, and fulfil the basic needs of their lives. By engaging the community, stakeholders, and employees, businesses can alleviate poverty in Pakistan. However, it is also seen that there are certain instances where the MNCs' global initiatives do not match the local cultural values (Martínez-Ferrero et al. 2021). Such as the support of the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) community is controversial in Asian countries and companies refrain from providing any assistance in employment opportunities to such members of society (Yousuf et al. 2022). However, it is strongly needed that the companies take measures for inclusion and diversity at the workplace.

4.2 Educational Support

The educational programs supposed by the MNCs in their CSR practices have a long-lasting impact on the lives of the community members. There are multiple initiatives in providing education that can be adopted by the MNCs, such as schooling, providing scholarships, and providing access to distance education. Such as KFC Pakistan has launched the campaign 'Mitao Bhook' and the company has placed great emphasis on the issues concerning education, diversity, and social inclusion (KFC Mitao Bhook 2023). These efforts are life-changing and helping to build a better society. It is an extensive programme that aims at enhancing the education of thousands of students, especially

females, the promotion of gender diversity, and support to persons with disabilities, not to mention the provision of scholarships to deserving students to enable them to take university education. Promoting education is a key function of the Mitao-Bhook initiative and is enshrined in itself. The KFC Mitao Bhook has contributed its support in shaping the academic progress of 6,313 students across different educational levels, enabling them to gain the tools and learning environment they need to succeed in their academics. This support plays a major role in ensuring that the students, as well as the communities they come from, embrace the culture of learning, academic excellence, and development.

KFC's Mitao Bhook also supports education in general and is an active participant in campaigning for gender parity. The high female participation in the educational programs remains at an amazing 62% (KFC Mitao Bhook 2023). Specifically, this means focusing not only on developing equality between male and female students but also on protecting their rights within a learning process to create an environment that supports a student's success regardless of gender. Therefore, it is evident that through the efforts of KFC Mitao Bhook in offering more women a chance to attain education, gender disparities are being effectively addressed in society. The other key factor of the Mitao Bhook initiative is that it belongs to everyone, and all forms of diversity, uniqueness, and inclusion are embraced.

Having realized the role of education in the lives of every individual, KFC Mitao Bhook has taken a stand in promoting education for 2015 PWDs (People With Disabilities). Inclusive education promotes PWDs' integration and societal contribution (Naradda-Gamage et al. 2020, 79). In this way, the mentioned initiative makes it possible to empower such people to ensure that they would be able to mess the job market and better the society. This commitment to the process of valuing the inclusion of disabled persons is not only important for these people directly, but it also creates a diverse community, which is helpful to all members of society. Moreover, KFC Pakistan's Mitao Bhook program is now expanding its reach through the 'KFC Score a Scholarship Programme'. Part of this initiative entails a partnership with the Orange Tree Foundation which aims to offer over 200 scholarships to students pursuing higher education in HEC-recognized institutes across Pakistan (KFC MitaoBhook 2023). The Orange Tree Foundation is an education advocacy organization focused on increasing access to education in the country which makes them a suitable partner for this program. These scholarships are being

provided by KFC Pakistan and through these scholarships, KFC Pakistan is providing the youth of Pakistan a chance to compete in the modern world economy.

Besides this KFC Pakistan has collaborated with a non-government organization Million Smiles Foundation (MSF) for its CSR program Mitao Bhook through which the company intends to educate out-of-school children in Mardan. This partnership was first unveiled in Mardan as both organizations sought to establish a lot of improvements in the educational setting. The Million Smiles Foundation School, KFC Campus, Mardan will capitalize to teach more than 250 children (The News International 2022). The schools will also supply other necessities like uniforms, school bags, shoes and stationery, curriculum, etc. to enhance educational access and support (Singh & Misra 2021, 27).

KFC Pakistan has stated that private sector participation in the country is crucial to revolutionizing the process of education. It underlined the value of education, especially for girls, noting that “one educated daughter is as good as getting an educated nation.” The statement pointed to the importance of promoting education as a means of instilling positive change and development. This is also in tandem with the ‘Parhaygibeti, parhayga Pakistan’ (Educate the daughter, educate Pakistan) a national-level campaign by KFC Pakistan and Million Smiles Foundation (KFC Mitao Bhook 2023). This campaign aims at enhancing learning among female students since they will be instrumental in shaping the future of the nation. Both organizations have agreed to closely cooperate to provide Education and support different programs for out-of-school children in Pakistan.

They have come up with strategies that seek to ensure that each child is given an equal chance to education and prepare for school since many children are not in school currently. To sensitize people and spread the word about their organization, it has used certain hashes like KFC, Mitao Bhook, Smiles for Humanity, Million Smiles Foundation, and MSF schools. These are some of the hashtags in their social media campaign to solicit support from the community for their educational causes. Therefore, the collaboration between KFC Pakistan and the Million Smiles Foundation is a fruitful effort to advance education for children who are out of school in Mardan and the surrounding areas (KFC Mitao Bhook 2023). Being implemented through the provision of primary necessities and extensive assistance, it strives for sustainable improvement of the situation and the benefit of the future generation. An additional essence of this partnership is found in the principles of gender equality and the provision of education to girls.

Education at a postsecondary level is a significant factor in empowering individuals and breaking the vicious circle of poverty and joblessness (Skubiak 2021). These scholarships allow students to achieve their dreams and goals free from financial strain and stress. The “KFC Score a Scholarship Program” is not just an attempt at providing scholarships, but it is an investment in the future leaders of the society and part of the community. Apart from providing delicious food, KFC Pakistan is contributing to the future of Pakistan by sponsoring education for hundreds of scholars. These scholarships give opportunities to those students who may not be able to attend college and university, giving them a rewarding experience and a chance to learn and become successful. Scholarships empower students to learn and achieve success (Ahen & Amankwah-Amoah 2018, 10).

Lifebuoy Shampoo has also been very aggressive in the promotion of the education of girls through its partnership with The Citizen Foundation (TCF). Lifebuoy Shampoo promoted education for girls in Pakistan in 2019 by educating 10000 girls (Unilever Sustainability, 2023). Promoting girls' education supports educational equality and inclusive development practices (Fordham and Robinson, 2008). People are encouraged to share the film ‘Beti Parhao Usse Mazboot Banao’ (make your daughter strong by educating her). Furthermore, in the year 2022, Surf Excel continued the ‘Khushiyon Ka Sadqa’ campaign asserting that happiness can also be charity in the form of good deeds (Unilever Sustainability 2023). The little things that people do, such as eating together, or offering a friendly greeting to a stranger, can mean a lot. This campaign entailed Surf Excel teams and celebrities to spend time with the kids with cancer at the Indus Hospital to improve their morale. To sum up, it is possible to say that Lifebuoy and Unilever Pakistan’s integrated approach seeks to enhance the population’s health and education and empower ladies to ensure a more tolerant and healthy society. By raising awareness about hygiene, providing tele-consultation services, offering scholarships to educate children, and empowering women in Pakistan, they are positively contributing towards the better health and confidence of the Pakistani people (Unilever Sustainability 2023). Glow & Lovely (GAL) Foundation has realized the importance of addressing inequality and initiating a scholarship program for girls (Unilever Sustainability 2023). Following in the footsteps of GAL India, this program provides scholarships to women in Pakistan for the chance to continue their education. There have been 48,240 female registrations for the program since 2019, which can be considered to be rather influential.

The Toyota-Indus Motor Company (IMC) has a firm belief in addressing corporate social responsibilities and education is one of them. Education is one of the key factors to support sustainable human development, several programs have also been initiated by IMC to improve the education system and education parameters in Pakistan (Haneef 2017). They consist of various goals aimed at solving problems in the area of education such as equitable access to education, professional development of teachers, and availability of basic learning tools. IMC has a solid scholarship framework. They have joined hands with Habib University Foundation, The Citizens Foundation, Goth Education Program and INJAZ Pakistan (Toyota Education 2023). The main goal is to provide deserving yet needy students with the necessary assistance. Providing necessary assistance enhances access to education for disadvantaged students (Singh & Misra, 2021; Pfajfar et al. 2022). It is a program that gives students who are academically talented but financially challenged an opportunity to fund their college education. With tuition fees and other education costs covered, IMC guarantees that such a student will not need to struggle financially while pursuing his/her education.

The scholarship program is also an example of how IMC supports the growth and development of the talents of young people so that they can become productive members of society (Montgomery 2017). Besides the academic scholarships, IMC has a strong focus on technical and vocational education. The company engages technical institutes to provide a vocation that prepares students with practical knowledge of the industry. Such programs include practical training sessions comprised of professionals and industry experts to provide students with relevant knowledge and training. By minimizing the gap between theory acquisition and theory application, IMC has the potential to prepare a professional human resource base to compete for the available opportunities. Knowing that quality education largely relies on teacher performance, IMC provides substantial support for teacher professional development. These programs target skills of teaching, management, and content knowledge in a classroom setting. With this partnership, IMC guarantees that teachers get the appropriate support and tools necessary to perform their duties effectively.

The overall idea is to create a proper learning climate for students that can be effective for their academic and personal growth. It also responds to the issues of infrastructure that are common in many education sectors in Pakistan. To address this challenge, the company has embarked on various projects of constructing and renovating schools to

ensure that students receive their education in a safe environment. Such projects include the construction of classrooms, a library, and a science laboratory, and the provision of water and sanitation (Toyota Education 2023). In enhancing the physical environment of schools, IMC assists in enhancing the learning environment whereby teaching and learning activities take most of their time. It is not only an active participant in educational processes but also a supporter of the initiatives of other organizations. To expand its reach, the company regularly engages in partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and educational institutions.

Nestle has also contributed to education through different programs and campaigns. The company has been investing in improving the building of the schools and other facilities in schools. Other than this the company encourages mothers to use healthy milk products for their children at school going age. The company provides training and development in vocational centres for better entrepreneurship activities in the communities (Nestle in Society Report, 2023). Besides this, the company has also launched Nestle for Healthy Kids (N4HK) for nutritional awareness and nutritional food products, such as fortified milk by Nestle.

The above discussion shows that the MNCs in Pakistan are giving special attention to the education. Since education is considered a vital factor in the growth and development of societies, it is also helpful in poverty alleviation (Sengupta 2020). Besides awareness and knowledge, education brings numerous benefits to society. The learned members of the family have more access to the job market and they can improve the lifestyle of their family members. Well-educated individuals become empowered members of society who have the critical thinking power and creative skills for entrepreneurship (Zhang 2021). This is again a benefit as it makes the members free of the burden of poverty and they have more opportunities to earn. This helps in breaking the vicious circle of poverty which prevails in the generations.

Educational support is also on the main agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals. They have outlined several goals especially Goal 4 (Quality Education) for the sustainable development of the societies (Bello & Kazibwe 2023, 239-257). Education is interlinked with several goals and holds a pivotal position. SDG 4 aims to improve the equitable quality of education for all genders. The education must be beneficial in a way that improves the competence and skills of the students (Unterhalter 2019). SDG 4 outlines

the target of achieving equal education from primary to tertiary education or other vocational training. However, it is quite evident that in Pakistan female education is not given importance (Peng et al. 2021). In such a situation it is the responsibility of the MNCs to invest more in girls' education.

4.3 Women Support

Women are considered vulnerable members of society in the third-world countries. They are deprived of their basic rights of education and health and are forced into child marriages, early-age motherhood, and abusive marriages (Nawaz et al. 2021). Besides this, they are not provided equal rights and wages at the workplace. In this regard, the MNCs have made certain efforts to upgrade the lives of women in Pakistan. Such as, Unilever Pakistan has tried to focus on empowering women in various aspects of their lives through various campaigns and partnerships with Lifebuoy and Circle Pakistan. All these prove a focus on diversity in Pakistan to ensure women are empowered and have confidence in themselves. One of those projects that focus on the elevation of female standards is the digital skills training for young women in Rahim Yar Khan (Unilever Sustainability 2023). Working with Circle Pakistan and Unilever School, women gain technology literacy, marketing knowledge, and basic business competencies. It not only helps them secure job opportunities but also allows them to contribute to the emerging digital economy and become financially literate and independent. 50 young women received training in digital competencies, including marketing, design, and business development. Its goal is to help up skill 400 women in 2023 and ensure that they are financially literate and empowered (Unilever Sustainability 2023).

The Khud-Mukhtar Project is aimed at providing motorcycle training for women and has been launched by Unilever Pakistan (Unilever Sustainability 2023). The Khud Mukhtar Project (self-sufficient) is a project work spearheaded by the Unilever Pakistan Customer Development team where women are empowered through motorcycle training and other income-generating services (Unilever Sustainability 2023). This project focuses on the cultural barriers and social norms that contribute to the suppression of female education and autonomy in Pakistan. By changing early perceptions and empowering women with training in safe riding practices, this project also increases women's chances of economic engagement. This initiative aligns with Stakeholder Theory, which emphasizes

addressing broader societal needs, including women's empowerment and economic engagement (El-Kassar et al. 2021, 218-236).

Female empowerment breaks normative conventions and inspires women to expand their horizons and live a more fulfilling life. In this regard, the GAL Foundation scholarship program helps to reduce the existing gap between men and women as it provides scholarships to deserving women all over the country (Unilever Sustainability 2023). The goal of this program is to help illiterate women gain the ability to read and write, to offer women an opportunity to study on their merit, gain desired academic achievements, and pursue a career. Through educating thousands of girls, by giving them scholarships, this partnership can thus help remove barriers to girls' schooling. It focuses on the role that education plays in empowering girls and preparing them for the future.

In addition to education and skills training, Unilever Pakistan has reached out to provide women with health care provisions. For example, women in Pakistan can receive important telehealth consultancy services through services like SehatKahani (Vaccines Work 2023; Unilever Sustainability 2023). This is not only a way to solve immediate concerns such as health issues but also serves to provide women with access to medical consultation and help. Thus, it could be stated that Unilever Pakistan's activities coupled with the involvement of different stakeholders are aimed at providing women with opportunities for education, skills development, proper healthcare, and sustainable employment. These efforts are therefore much needed to open up opportunities for women to perform productive roles in our society and constructively contribute to the making of a healthier Pakistan (Nawaz et al., 2021). This proves that they are more than willing to stand for women's confidence, physical and mental health, and the quality of their lives, thus making the world a better place for everyone.

Nestlé is also deeply engrained in the welfare of the communities it operates within and feels a great sense of responsibility here, particularly to ensure that its people work under decent conditions. Community welfare and ensuring decent working conditions for its employees aligns with the Stakeholder Theory (Valentinov et al. 2019, 826-849; Mhlanga & Moloji 2020, 352-368). At the heart of its corporate philosophy is a dedication to making lives better and contributing towards local social development. That commitment is reflected in its various programs to arm women with economic and social self-sufficiency. In the countryside, Nestlé is a key ally for farmers thanks to training programs

that also involve women in economic activity so they too can have a better life made up of work and concrete hope (Nestle in Society Report 2023).

Acknowledging the change that rural women can positively influence within communities, Nestlé Pakistan has collaborated with the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) and under a Memorandum of Understanding their sponsors' self-help initiatives in ten villages near Kabir Wala along with several awareness sessions on healthy living (Nestle in Society Report 2023). The collaboration will focus on improving the lives of BISP beneficiaries through the provision of sustainable livelihood opportunities. Among such initiatives was the launch of the Nestlé-BISP Rural Women Sales Program in 2017 (Nestle in Society Report 2023). The program is designed to promote skill development among BISP beneficiaries which can be utilized by them for self-employment, leading to their graduation from poverty.

This BISP includes campaigns where beneficiary-selectees are trained to be micro-entrepreneurs working as sales agents, door-to-door retailers or finally as community-based Micro-distributors. Through these roles rural women not only add to their financial stability but also economically empower and provide security for their families. As of now, 3,000+ BISP beneficiaries have been onboarded successfully by the program in 28 districts across Pakistan (Nestle in Society Report 2023). To ensure the long-term success of program beneficiaries, Nestlé Pakistan is collaborating with Akhuwat Pakistan, the largest interest-free microfinance organization in the country. Nestlé has provided this revolving credit of PKR 4 million earmarked for women to scale up their businesses in partnership. The funds allowed beneficiaries to either set up their village shops or expand ventures they were already running, increasing their access to economic resources.

Additionally, brands are taking initiatives on gender equality to support women. KFC Pakistan has launched Mitao Bhook which aims at raising the community through education. In this regard, women are specifically targeted for their inclusion in the educational programs. With this initiative, 62% of women's ratio to men is seen in educational initiatives (KFC Mitao Bhook 2023). These educational initiatives include scholarships for students and supporting them through books and uniforms. This has also boosted the diversity and inclusion of the indigenous communities.

The above discussion shows that MNCs are making serious efforts to improve the living conditions of women and empower them. These initiatives are not only helpful in

improving the lifestyle of women but also help in elevating the living conditions of families. With more income women can manage their health, their children's education, and other necessities of life. Moreover, with education, they can serve their families better and can educate their children (Engida 2021). The support for women by the MNCs signals a critical transformation from social security to economic and social empowerment. By equipping rural women with the knowledge and expertise to boost their incomes, these programs increase living standards not just for them but also improve access to education and healthcare for all members of families (Mubeen et al. 2022). They are economically engaged, so they can take an active part in the development of their communities at grassroots levels and drive positive social change through sustainable economic means.

4.4 Water and Sanitation

Water holds a significant position in the survival of the mankind. Clean and safe drinking water is a basic necessity in human life but unfortunately. Many areas in Pakistan are deprived of this facility. Due to the non-availability of clean drinking water in several areas, people face numerous problems that include poor health, diarrhoea, the growth of mosquitoes, and other fatal diseases in children. This in turn increases the miseries of the poor people and makes lives difficult. Therefore, several MNCs are focussing on providing clean and safe drinking water to avoid uncontrolled disease and stress. Besides this clean and safe drinking water and proper sanitation help keep the environment clean which is again helpful in improving the health and hygiene of the people.

The WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) pledge taken by Nestlé Pakistan is in line with its water stewardship initiatives. This guarantees access to clean water, hygiene, and sanitation for more than 3,600 employees across all its locations (Nestle in Society Report 2023). In addition, Nestlé launched seven clean and safe drinking water facilities to ensure that clean water is available to over 70,000 people every day. These facilities are maintained by third-party service providers in places where strict stringent quality controls are implemented. A program educating farmers on these key practices is a second crucial part of Nestlé Pakistan's water stewardship efforts. The program has undertaken the Water Education Program educating 40,000 little kids and 550 teachers in the year 2023 creating awareness about water conservation & hygiene (Nestle in Society Report 2023).

Caring for Water Pakistan (C4W-P) is Nestle Pakistan's response to the issue of water management and conservation where the company has made tremendous progress in its water management practices in Pakistan (Nestle Pakistan 2023). This initiative, launched in 2017, is structured around three key pillars: These include factories, communities, and agriculture indicating Nestlé's duty to practice sustainable consumption of water in industries. Within factories, Nestlé Pakistan has been a leader in the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) drive as it has managed to secure AWS Certification for all its sites (Nestle in Society Report 2023). The main focus of this international standard is the efficient management of water at the site levels and catchment levels and includes the public. Beginning with the act of establishing the Sheikhpura Factory, Nestlé Pakistan proceeded to certify its factories in Islamabad, Kabir Wala & Karachi also as AWS-certified (Nestle in Society Report 2023). All of these certifications prove Nestlé's commitment to minimizing water usage and improving production efficiency.

Internal action to solve water issues has also played an elaborate role in making Nestlé a model water company. Nestlé Pakistan strictly recycled and reused over 56000m³ water across its manufacturing facilities in 2023 (Nestle Pakistan 2023). However, the company guarantees that all the wastewater that is released by the company complies with specific environmental requirements following treatment thus supporting sustainability concerns and regulatory requirements. Under the communities' pillar, the company has performed exceedingly well, especially in the provision of clean and safe water. The clean and safe drinking water facilities are established through partnerships and effective quality assurance measures, of which Nestlé has established seven facilities that serve over 70,000 individuals every day (Nestle in Society Report 2023). These facilities are very important in supporting the health and welfare of a community since the provision of clean water is a basic necessity. Moreover, Nestlé Pakistan focuses on water education, having meetings with 40 thousand children and 550 teachers in schools in 2023. Besides, through enlightening members of society and the future generation, this information educates them on the appropriate use of water (Nestle in Society Report 2023).

The role of Nestlé Pakistan's factories is also critical in its water stewardship priorities. The company's Sheikhpura Factory was the first site in Pakistan to achieve this standard and Nestlé became the first Food & Beverage (F&B) business globally, as well. These were later on certified for its factories in (in order of certification) Islamabad, Kabir Wala, and Karachi Nestlé saving over 56,000 cubic meters of water recycling and reusing in-

house efficiencies by 2023 representing the commitment to this process from their manufacturing units (Nestle in Society Report 2023).. Furthermore, industrial process water is also treated to a degree appropriate for environmental release. In the future, Nestlé Pakistan will continue to work on rejuvenating the water cycle and making a positive contribution towards this 2025 ambition. It means putting nature-based solutions into practice to enable more water absorption by nature in each of the watersheds than the amount consumed annually within them or it is producing drought-proof sites from natural resources. The commitment to this regeneration is freshly cast but in continuity with efforts under C4W-Pakistan. Additionally, they have joined hands with (Collect and Recycle (CoRe) to reduce plastic waste and help the circular economy grow (Nestle in Society Report 2023).

The “H for Hand washing” social marketing campaign by Lifebuoy draws attention to the significance of the correct washing of hands. The proper washing of the hands with soap can help prevent the spread of disease but many Pakistanis do not practice proper hand washing (Unilever Sustainability 2023.). This is a problem that Lifebuoy has been trying to resolve through a Hand-washing awareness program starting from 2010. On this day, Lifebuoy involves itself with other partners such as the TCF and Water Aid to educate more than a million children on hand washing every year (Unilever Sustainability 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Lifebuoy was able to assert its relevance yet again as the first brand in Pakistan to release PSAs promoting hand washing. These announcements were declared on TV channels, social media, and during the programs broadcasted during the holy month of Ramadan. Furthermore, Lifebuoy installed over 190 hand wash facilities in the country with the help of its different partners in the same cause of promoting hygiene. Another way that Lifebuoy embraced the health aspect was by supporting telehealth through its partnership with Sehat Kahani (Unilever Sustainability 2023). This initiative provided 45 million telehealth packs and reached over 28 million people monthly in Pakistan. Initiatives like telehealth packs improve health outcomes and disease management (Ahen & Amankwah-Amoah 2018). In 2022, more than 20 thousand consultations were provided concerning different health-related questions. When the dangerous floods happened in 2022, Lifebuoy contributed 0. 4 million soaps and initiated a mobile health clinic to reach out to extend help and support to flood victims, with the ultimate goal of reaching 0. 5 million people covering 15

districts. Another area of concern for Unilever Pakistan is as well women and inclusiveness. (Unilever Sustainability 2023).

In Pakistan, Indus Motor Company (IMC) has shown its strong commitment to sustainability and community welfare through numerous water & sanitation-based initiatives. IMC has always been practicing the ISO 14001 certification, which emphasizes its sound environmental management systems as one of its key strategies to grow responsibly (Toyota, Concerns Beyond Car 2023). This certification aligns with the principles of Sustainable Development Theory, emphasizing responsible growth and environmental protection (Tomislav 2018, 67-94; Chandra & Jatmika 2022, 444-452). The company commits to upgrading its effluent treatment plant that helps recycle water used in operations, especially for plantation purposes; this reduces the overall water footprint of our business and keeps negative impacts on local stream bodies as well as ecosystems minimal. IMC has also adopted an environment-friendly operational infrastructure by installing a co-generation power plant that runs on natural gas to operate engines and turbines, thus reducing CO₂ emissions (Toyota, Concerns beyond Car 2023).

IMC provides extensive education on clean water and sanitation. IMC also reaches out to schools, through the Toyota School Environment Program to promote environmental consciousness amongst young students. Children are also taught the values of water conservation, sanitation, and other forms of environmental protection to help future generations become responsible stewards (Toyota, Concerns beyond Cars 2023). Apart from operations, IMC actively participates in community-oriented water-based initiatives such as the Million Tree Plantation Drive across Pakistan and transforming a garden zone over 64,000 sqm at its plant (Toyota, Concerns beyond Cars 2023). These efforts help protect local biodiversity and environmental quality. A significant initiative has also been the environmental project at Lake Saiful Muluk that involves a clean-up of debris from surrounding areas and local education across residential and commercial sectors about maintaining sanitation as well as preserving natural water resources (Toyota, Concerns beyond Car 2023). These grassroots activities demonstrate that IMC plays a vital role in raising environmental awareness and conservation efforts at the local level.

In essence, Indus Motor Company's approach towards water and sanitation is an example of how the company places a high priority on sustainable development and community welfare (Toyota, Concerns Beyond Car 2023). This aligns with Sustainable Development

Theory, emphasizing integrated efforts for social and environmental well-being (Hariram et al. 2023, 10682; Schlipfenbacher 2021). IMC sets an example for corporate responsibility by reducing the water intensity of its operations, handling dangerous wastes properly, and planting large numbers of trees along with performing environmental educational programs. Projects like this help keep essential water resources intact but also provide the benefit of a solid, healthy, and educated local community. As MNCs continue to drive sustainable practices throughout their operations and towards communities, they should serve as an example for the wider auto sector and other industries altogether -- to focus on environmental sustainability along with social impacts. This aligns with Sustainable Development Theory, focusing on long-term environmental and social benefits (Tomislav 2018, 67-94).

4.5 Agricultural Support

Pakistan is an agricultural country and has multiple issues related to the agricultural sector. From the awareness of the farmers to the water channel distribution, there are numerous unaddressed issues by the Government. In such a situation the role of MNCs is twofold to increase awareness and provide the facilities to resolve agricultural issues. In this regard, Nestle has made substantial developments to equip the farmers with ethical sourcing and sustainable options. Nestlé Pakistan takes its responsibilities in water stewardship very seriously as we understand the need for fresh clean drinking water in our crop supply chains and operations (Galli & Vousvouras 2020). This commitment takes on shape and form with its signature initiative - Caring for Water-Pakistan (C4W-P). This initiative, launched in 2017, focuses on three pillars: Agriculture, Factories, and Communities. These are aimed at reducing water withdrawals from its locations, promoting sustainable farming practices, as well as ensuring safe access to the provision for all program areas. One key focus area of the initiative C4W-Pakistan is to introduce modern agricultural technologies irrigation and smart soil moisture sensors. These improvements are intended to increase agricultural water use efficiency.

Nestlé Pakistan is jointly working with the agriculture department of the government of Punjab to finance local farmers, who were offered a subsidy paying up to 40 percent for establishing drip irrigation. The rest of the costs are paid by The Punjab government under a World Bank program. Joint demonstration sites have been established with the Pakistan Agriculture and Research Council (PARC) and the University of Veterinary and Animal

Sciences (UVAS), Lahore. By 2023, this resulted in over a hundred acres operated by drip irrigation systems on the ground across Punjab and Sindh to have saved more than 223,000 cubic meters of water (Nestle 2023). More elaborately, the smart soil moisture sensors developed in partnership with the Centre for Water Informatics & Technology (WIT) at Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) across 548 acres have saved additional water to the tune of more than 3100K Cubic meters. Offering farmers live information on soil wetness, these sensors can help them in watering optimization. Some areas are facing the negative effects of climate change in the availability and sustainable production of quality food that Nestlé sources from farmers and sells to consumers. Understanding this, Nestlé has adopted a Net Zero Roadmap to address these issues with the help of a large-scale shift towards a regenerative food system. Despite being an aspect that is mostly overlooked, Nestlé has made some adjustments toward sustainability in its packaging (Nestle in Society Report 2023). The company recognizes the importance of packaging in conveying the products with minimal food waste and in maintaining the quality of the food & beverages from the manufacturer to the end consumer. However, it also comprehends that it should not be at the cost of the environment, which the world needs to address. Therefore, Nestlé is constantly innovating on more environmentally friendly packaging and is an advocate for minimizing the amount of packaging used (Nestle in Society Report 2023).

4.6 Food Support

Hunger and malnutrition are the main reasons in third world countries that contribute to the poverty. Due to no food or less food, people just think and work for the basic necessities of life and are not able to grow and develop (Ahmad & Faridi 2020). This dilemma keeps the societies illiterate and they keep on moving in the vicious circle of poverty. Additionally, societies cannot take advantage of the full potential of food which contributes to malnutrition.

In this regard, Unilever follows the international Unilever's Science-based Nutrition Criteria (USNC) and Positive Nutrition Standards (PNS) to create better diets that are effective and meet the daily nutritional needs of the people (Unilever Nutrition's Standards 2023). Both these standards are based on the International guidelines by authorities.

In the food support, the major contribution is by Nestle. As a global leader in the food and beverages industry, Nestlé has a deep-seated responsibility towards creating value through enhancing the quality and happiness of life (Daniel 2020). Its implementation, known as the 2030 Global Ambition, seeks to support healthier lives for 50 million children by promoting the consumption of nutritious and sustainable meals (Nestle in Society Report 2023). The focus on nutrition and sustainability can be traced back to the very foundation of the company since it was established by Henri Nestlé over 150 years ago. The story goes that when he created an infant cereal that brought a child back to life. Today Nestlé still invests in creating, disseminating, and utilizing such knowledge to construct a better and healthier society. According to Nestlé's claims, food is not only a nutrient that helps people sustain their health but also creates relationships between people as families and friends besides being a medicine (Nestle in Society Report 2023).

The company's research department works on the problem of nutrition and hydration as factors affecting disease management (Nestle in Society Report 2023). This commitment to health is evident in Nestlé products such as what was advertised about improving children's diets and Nestlé health literacy (Turner & Jones 2018). Nestlé's commitment to health aligns with the Stakeholder Theory, addressing societal health needs through CSR initiatives (El-Kassar et al. 2021, 218-236). Currently, Nestlé has set strategic plans including programs to reach out to at least 50 million children to improve their health by the year 2030. These are the development of appealing and health-beneficial edible products: nutrition education, health, and wellness-friendly partnerships with schools and communities. They have a main concern with the nutrition of the school-going children and therefore they provide consultancy and guidance to school-age children. Nestle specifically launched a curriculum-based program called Nestle for Healthy Kids (N4HK) in coordination with Oxford University Press to provide knowledge on nutrition's physical activities and importance (Nestle in Society Report 2023).

5 Conclusions

5.1 Theoretical Contribution

The exploration of the CSR measures implemented by MNCs for sustainable development has provided several benefits in understanding the theoretical implications of the stakeholders' theory. The stakeholder theory advanced by Freeman (1984), organizations must take into account the interests of all stakeholders. The MNC's CSR activities described in the theory are taken as a perfect example of how innovation can be used by various firms to generate value for shareholders and various stakeholders, such as customers, local communities, employees and the environment. The study makes a significant contribution to understanding how the MNCs are considering the shared values for growth and development while considering all the stakeholders. Earlier studies have mostly taken either internal or external stakeholders for study, but this study encapsulates all the stakeholders from internal employees to external women and children. This implies that the stakeholder theory is a multi-dimensional theory that involves the engagement, support, and betterment of all the stakeholders.

Likewise, the study succeeded in comprehending the MNCs optimizing the true potential of the stakeholders through several products and services. It showed that the MNCs' strategic management of relationships with contract partners corresponds to the achievement of societal goals. Such as MNCs' minimization of plastic waste by employing new packaging and recycling policies can also be admired with the help of stakeholder theory as they elaborate on environmental and social issues. Moreover, it was imperative to analyse corporate activities in relation to the SDGs is useful for determining how companies can positively affect the world. The enacted strategies of MNCs discussed in this study align with several SDGs and clearly show MNCs' attempts to contribute to solving global challenges through their management (Kao et al. 2016). Their commitment to sustainable agriculture and water conservation represented objectives that relate to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG six (Clean Water & Sanitation). Through, techniques like drip irrigation and smart soil moisture sensors, Nestlé can hike the efficiency of farming and minimize water usage as a resource.

The study also helps in the development of the theory by showcasing that MNCs are achieving several goals while supporting the stakeholders. This implies that stakeholders'

support in one aspect has indirect and long-lasting on other features. Such as SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being for the population necessitates clean and pollution-free air and water, which also benefits the whole communities through SDG 13: Climate Action. Furthermore, such activities as MNCs' CSR actions to cut carbon footprint and increase efficient waste disposal fall under SDG 12 on Responsible Consumption and Production and SDG 13. Throughout the whole discussion, the strategies used by MNCs express the world's changing standards in CSR and sustainability policies. Thus, some of the key principles of corporate governance include such aspects as transparency, accountability, and compliance with ethical standards to gain society's confidence in a company's sustainable development.

MNCs in Pakistan strive to maintain good governance in CSR by reporting their water savings, implementing sustainable projects, and partnering with some research institutions. By releasing such outcomes, the companies complete goals that comply with such principles as transparency and accountability for all stakeholders. These companies have extensive sustainability reporting and strict compliance with ethical actions and reporting. This is again with the compliance of stakeholders' theory where the decision and actions need to be properly communicated with all the stakeholders (Koschmann & Koczynski 2017). It is due to such practices that theoretical knowledge can be developed on how corporate governance can enhance the sustainability and ethical conduct of business. The current concepts of sustainability involving the principle business strategies of MNCs transform established perceptions of CSR as a marginal undertaking. Nevertheless, the core of sustainability is integrated into business solutions, and Corporate Social Responsibility is no longer perceived as an add-on but as a strategic component of companies' activities.

The initiatives taken by MNCs such as working to provide sustainable food systems and adopting environmentally friendly packaging highlight a proactive model in managing environmental effects and fulfilling customers' needs. This is another aspect of the stakeholder's theory where the proactive approach for the survival of the stakeholders' future is emphasized (Mojtahedi & Oo 2017). These MNCs have future themes of sustainability in agriculture and healthcare for sustainability as the key driver for innovation and new competitive advantages. Concerning the integration of sustainability into the organization's operations as a key business strategy, it is evident how MNCs actively try to cut their environmental impact and encourage consumers to follow

sustainable practices through products and services. This theoretical perspective supports the thinking that sustainability can be a basis of competitive advantage and innovation for a business, instead of being only a compliance and/or ethical issue. Buysse and Verbeke (2003) called sustainability practices a deeper and broader encapsulation of stakeholders' interest in the long-lasting impact.

The study contributes to the understanding that innovation is a key factor that enables the enhancement of sustainability goals. Thus, the decisions made by MNCs illustrate how companies can apply innovation to tackle multifaceted global issues. Through the smart soil moisture sensors that the companies have been developing, and the advanced life sciences investment in trying to find innovative ways of managing plastic wastes, companies show a level of understanding regarding the importance of the implementation of technological innovation in current and future sustainability processes. The theoretical discussions on the subject of innovation and sustainability highlighted the necessity to address the technological progress within corporate management approaches (Shah & Guild 2022). Thus, successful case MNCs' innovation initiatives reveal the prospects of introducing innovations to resolve the global problems concerning water deficit, food safety, and climate change. For instance, KFC's sustainable sourcing and packaging innovations demonstrate how MNCs can contribute to global sustainability goals.

These MNCs show that CSR and sustainability ideas can be put into practice in an impactful and accountable way by translating general theories into practical activities. Thus, the studies of MNCs may be useful for enriching the theoretical paradigm of CSR and sustainability by presenting the real-life practical application of these concepts. Hence, their endeavours present learning to other organizations interested in integrating their strategies with international sustainability standards and stakeholder demands.

Currently, global social and environmentally related structures are affected by MNCs. They can always scale up their efforts to levels that the local organizations can only dream of, which means that they can influence positive change for their benefit. This shows an area of how MNCs are involved in the determination of sustainable practices across the world and equally a way through which they may be able to influence policies within various countries across the globe. Current theoretical frameworks of MNCs' role in the global environment emphasize that MNCs can contribute to the processes of sustainable development in different parts of the world through their power. The theoretical

perspective on MNCs confirms their decisive role in world problems' solutions and large-scale sustainable development.

CSR and sustainability studies with initiatives by MNCs advance theoretical aspects such as stakeholder theory, SDGs, corporate governance, and innovation. The CSR and sustainability concepts of these firms are described below and by incorporating these theories into the business development strategies, such firms give an appropriate idea about the practical implications of these theories. Thus, they serve as knowledge assets for the next studies and real-world application of the concept of corporate sustainability, expanding the literature on the role of businesses in addressing global sustainability issues. Another aspect that responds today to the influence of MNCs on social and environmental systems is a testimony of a significant part of their mission to promote sustainable development and determine the further trajectory of the CSR process.

5.2 Managerial Implications

The evaluation of CSR and sustainability policies and programs of MNCs revealed the following important implications for managerial practice. These suggestions are useful for business executives, managers, and policymakers wanting to improve their company's CSR existing practice, integrate with sustainable development goals (SDGs), and work for sustainable business outcomes. It is in this section that the implications of the foregoing findings are elaborated in detail. From this aspect, one of the major managerial implications is that CSR has to be aligned with strategic management initiatives. CSR is not an extra curriculum affair but part of MNCs' corporate planning and direction. Managers should be keen and see to it that setting and implementing CSR strategies is done in a way that the organization's mission, vision and general planning are reflected. It also implies an integration between the still CSR initiatives and the businesses' performance to ensure good CSR is a sustainable venture. For example, Nestlé's work on water risk management is strategic and by analyzing these examples the managers will be able to understand how sustainability can be integrated into the strategic objectives that can hence lead to innovation, increase efficiency, and also help to improve the image of the company.

Stakeholder management is very vital when it comes to CSR interventions. Managers must include all relevant stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers, employees, communities, and governments, as a constant, free, and open channel of communication

and cooperation. It builds a foundation of trust in which pertinent and important questions can easily be noted and addressed to the satisfaction of everybody in the process.

Another good example of stakeholder engagement is the case when Nestlé worked together with the Agriculture Department of the Government of Punjab and farmers to help them install drip irrigation systems. Thus, the multi-year cooperation of the company with research organizations and residents is an example of the effectiveness of cooperation. Managers should seek to establish such partnerships as this can help tap into the different specialist's skills and experience, resulting in greater effectiveness of CSR efforts.

5.2.1 Creativity

Creativity is another factor that has a direct relation with the agenda of sustainability. There is more potential in employing and supporting modern technologies and ideas that are ecologically responsible. Smart soil moisture sensors developed by MNCs leverage life sciences to enhance agriculture practices and elucidate the notion of posterity in the pursuit of a sustainable future. This should be controlled by the managers of the various organizations so that sustainable solutions are made to support and enhance the creativity of the employees. That can be done through spending on research and development, partnering with universities, and keeping up to date with technologies that may improve the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives.

5.2.2 Transparency and Accountability

Transparency and accountability are some of the critical aspects that govern CSR as well as sustainability initiatives. Thus, managers must make certain that their organizations disclose relevant, transparent, and timely information about their CSR activities and the resulting outcomes. Such actions foster integrity and offer assurance to stakeholders pointing to the firm's adherence to proper and legal business conduct. In the same respect, Unilever's initiatives to enhance supply chain accountability of sourcing are also evidence of an honest and straightforward style of business communication. The same is true of managers who should also use CSR frameworks to report on their activities and results in this area.

5.2.3 Quantify and Report the Outcomes

However, to enhance CSR initiatives, managers should quantify and report the outcomes. This includes the establishment of objectives, measurement, and reporting, where the results of the actual measurement are stocked and made available to the various stakeholders. Every CSR project should be measured and communicated since this can offer proof of the worth of the company's CSR efforts and encourage other corporations to do the same. One example of how positively companies are approaching the issue can easily be illustrated through the case of Nestlé which has reported on both water savings as well as the impact that sustainable agriculture has had as an example of how organizations are embracing impact measurement as well as reporting. The managers should follow and report specific results of the CSR activities: such clearly defined systems of performance measurement should be in place to communicate the outcomes of the CSR with stakeholders. Sustainable supply chain management remains one of the crucial fields in MNCs. It is the task of managers to bring the supply chains under check and bring about environmental and social changes. This comprises sourcing raw materials from environmentally friendly sources, reducing the use of raw materials, and working fairly with the labour force in the supply chain.

5.2.4 Sustainable Supply Chain Management

Sustainable supply chain management practices include KFC's guaranteeing its chicken suppliers to adhere to good animal welfare while Unilever's move to decrease the use of plastics on packaging. Managers should occasionally assess their supply chains, interact with the suppliers to ensure sustainable practices, and put Practical policies on the sustainability of the supplies and waste management. Managers need to monitor the regulating actions and market trends of sustainability and CSR. National governments around the globe continue to introduce policies that have the effect of supporting sustainability and the general public is getting more aware of the consequences of their consumption decisions. If firms can forecast such changes, then they will not only evade legal ramifications but also be on par with the expectations of the customers therefore increasing the competitive edge of their companies. For instance, Bayer's strategy is based on the Paris Accord for decarbonization as well as on the company's emission reduction goals including awareness of applicable legal requirements and market

indicators. Managers should pay attention to the regulations and markets that apply to them to stay compliant as well as create competitive strategic advantages.

Thus, the development of a culture promoting and valuing CSR is vital for the eternal sustainability of organizations. It is also recommended that managers personally set a good example as far as sustainability and ethical behaviour are concerned. Some of the strategies involve the incorporation of CSR values into the company's mission and vision statements, frequent communication of these values in the company, and rewarding employees for their efforts towards the achievement of CSR. Unilever's corporate culture includes sustainability and social responsibility as core values, and in operational activities and employee engagement. Managers likewise must cultivate this type of culture within organizations, which makes CSR a responsibility of all employees and part of a company's organizational culture.

Implementing CSR programs can effectively serve as a source of competitive advantage as it would establish the organization as one with a good reputation, foster customer loyalty, and set it apart from other companies. Managers should be wise when applying CSR to make sure they expand their brand in a bid to gain more market share. While promoting sustainable sourcing and green approaches, Nestlé and especially Unilever have thus ensured customer loyalty and brand competitiveness. Also, KFC's effort towards sourcing can do the same due to helping the company appeal to green consumers. Managers should take CSR as a propaganda tool that will be used in marketing and communication campaigns where achievements will be demonstrated as a sign of the organization's contribution towards the improvement of society and the environment. Lastly, there is a need to have a long-term vision and dedication to CSR on the part of managers. Issues of sustainability like climate change challenges available resources, and social inequality issues are long-term and result in long-term impacts that take time and planning to overcome. While short-term activities may yield positive results, long-term change and sustainability occur with people's devotion and long-term vision.

The long-term climate strategy of Nestlé's Net Zero Roadmap are examples of continued CSR and sustainability. CSR should become a long-term corporate initiative, the objectives of which are challenging but realistic, and the necessary resources should be provided to achieve them. In essence, firms must take a long-term view of CSR programs to create change that is enduring and drives long-term business development. Thus, the

cases of MNCs provide important insights that other managers can use to strengthen their organization's CSR policies and programs. Through the implementation of CSR initiatives into the centre of a business venture's operational aims and objectives, stakeholder interaction, creativity and innovation, accountability and transparency, effectivity assessment and reporting, responsible supply chain management, reaction to new legislation and market demands, culture change and embedding CSR into the business strategy and framework, utilizing CSR for competitive advantage, and maintaining a commitment for the long term, successful managers can effect positive change and bring about positive sustainability.

5.3 Contribution of the Study

The investigation regarding the development, historical background, as well as importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives that are undertaken through Multinational Corporations (MNCs) in Pakistan, has greater importance as well as far-reaching significance (Brandl et al. 2021, 1-20). This positions itself for making considerable contributions to theoretical knowledge with practical applications. This study contributes to addressing a crucial void in the existing research while delving into the historical development of CSR initiatives in the context of Pakistan, giving an inclusive historical backdrop that is even overlooked in contemporary discussions. The interdisciplinary nature of this research, assimilating perspectives from the global business, and development studies, as well as CSR, helps to enhance the scholarly discourse and provides a holistic comprehension of the roles of MNCs in addressing the socio-economic problems, like poverty, in the distinctive context of Pakistan.

The insights of this study served as valuable guidelines for the corporations that operate in Pakistan, letting them align the CSR efforts with the specific socio-economic issues of the country. In addition, the findings even give policymakers including the regulatory agencies a valuable piece of information for shaping or amending the regulations, adopting the ethical business tactics, and increasing the positive societal effects (Medina-Muñoz et al. 2020, 3-19). With the promotion of sustainable development ways, this research promotes MNCs for adopting the policies that have a contribution not just to the poverty reduction short-term but even to the long-term, ensuring benefits for the businesses as well as the communities to which they serve, hence underscoring the dual significance of the study in the academic as well as practical realms.

5.4 Limitations of the Research

Constraints of the research are the boundaries of the research. It is crucial for the author of the research to address as well as the reader to comprehend about all the hurdles that are faced while carrying out the research. Among this research time and budget had been a significant limitation and/or a constraint that the author of the research had to go through because the nature of the research was qualitative hence the insights for this research had to be gathered from secondary sources. Several of the authentic sources were paid and the budget of the research did not allow the author of the research to acquire access to such articles, journals, and websites. Additionally, the study author had a hard time because, even if the material was correct, sufficient, and legitimate, the researcher could not utilize insights from published publications before 2019. Time has been looked upon as being a significant constraint in the research (Rahi 2017, 1-5). More journals and publications may have been reviewed and considered to make the study more useful if the author of the research had more time. Regardless, the author of this research did their best to use all of the resources at their disposal to ensure the success of this research study.

Budget constraints are also important since due to financial constraints some online databases and journals may be out of reach thus limiting access to the best journals to be utilized. Another limitation is the availability of data. Secondary data are rather limited, and it can be challenging to find the most recent and appropriate data concerning Pakistan and the CSR programs of multinational corporations. In addition, the conclusions from the current research based on the case of Pakistan may not apply to other settings or countries given the differences in socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts. Depending on secondary data may raise some concerns about the accuracy, completeness, as well as relevance of the data collected. The research relies on the quality as well as the reliability of the existing databases.

6 Summary

The research provides an in-depth analysis of how Multinational Corporations (MNCs) appliance Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities to alleviate poverty, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan. MNCs are well-positioned to effectively eliminate poverty with their extensive resources. However, despite the dynamic nature of corporate social responsibility strategies, a visible gap exists between these endeavours and efficacious poverty mitigation, primarily owing to socio-political and economic factors. To address poverty more successfully, the study looks at how MNCs might better match their CSR initiatives with the unique requirements of local communities. Through community development programs, multinational corporations (MNCs) play a critical role in reducing poverty in Pakistan. The study emphasizes the need for more focused, appropriately contextualized initiatives as well as enhanced adherence to CSR standards and regulations.

An analysis of the literature shows how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has developed from early charitable activities to a strategic aspect of corporate operations that unites environmental and social concerns. CSR is now viewed as a holistic ethical commitment to society rather than just a legal requirement, especially when it comes to combating poverty in developing nations. MNCs are essential to these initiatives, and their CSR strategies are influenced by their diverse organizational structures. In contrast to global MNCs, which frequently employ standardized programs, decentralized MNCs are typically more sensitive to local demands. The review highlights the many methods that Multinational Corporations (MNCs) employ to reduce poverty, including job creation, skill development, environmental sustainability advancement, and investing in the development of communities. Despite these activities, difficulties include the possibility of adverse impacts on local companies, destruction of the environment, and the return of profits impede the comprehensive efficacy of corporate social responsibility programs. Effective stakeholder engagement is found to be a critical component of CSR success. MNCs are renowned for their generosity and involvement in society; to increase the efficacy of their CSR programs, they match societal demands with the initiatives. Partnerships among the public and private sectors show how coordinated efforts can significantly reduce poverty. It also looks at how MNCs contribute to local economies, especially by fostering the growth of skilled labour, creating jobs, and helping out social

entrepreneurs. MNCs support social progress and economic success by fostering innovation and partnering with local businesses.

Furthermore, CSR programs that emphasize environmental sustainability are essential for addressing infrastructure issues locally and reducing adverse environmental impacts. The theoretical perspectives like Stakeholder Theory, which contends that companies must maintain a balance between the interests of broader society and shareholder value. MNCs are urged to coordinate their CSR initiatives with sustainable development objectives, with a particular emphasis on enhancing the lives of marginalized communities. Utilizing secondary data analysis and a qualitative approach, the research methodology examines the effects of MNCs' CSR programs in Pakistan, including Nestlé, Unilever, KFC, and Toyota Motors. This approach looks at published CSR reports, academic journals, and openly accessible data to find out how these businesses' CSR initiatives help to reduce poverty. Through content analysis of qualitative data, the research finds themes and patterns that highlight the programs' wider societal effects. Throughout the whole research process, ethical principles are maintained, including transparency and intellectual property rights. Although many limitations, including the use of secondary data, the study offers insightful information about the efficacy of CSR programs.

Examining certain CSR programs demonstrates how MNCs support Pakistan's employment, education, women's empowerment, water and sanitation, and agricultural sectors, among other sectors. MNCs that have made great progress in coordinating their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are Unilever and Nestlé. Instances of how CSR projects are having a beneficial social influence include Unilever's programs promoting gender equality and fair salaries, Nestlé's sustainable water management and agricultural initiatives, and KFC's educational promotions. Considering these achievements, difficulties still exist, such as cultural disparities and budget limitations that may reduce the efficacy of CSR programs. To make sure that CSR initiatives are well-targeted and effective, the research highlights the significance of ongoing investment and the requirement for localized approaches.

Significant theoretical and practical advances are also made by the study. Showing how MNCs may meet the interests of various stakeholders, including marginalized communities, while aligning their operations with global goals like the SDGs, enriches the Stakeholder Theory. From a practical point of view, the study offers guidance to

businesses and decision-makers on how to include CSR in fundamental business strategies, encourage stakeholder participation, and promote innovation. Better accountability, transparency, and responsible management are among the main recommendations. These observations are especially essential to multinational corporations that operate in developing nations like Pakistan, where reducing poverty is the primary objective. Despite the research merits, many constraints are mentioned, including the dependence on secondary data and the difficulties in extrapolating results to different situations. The study suggests that to provide a more thorough knowledge of CSR practices' efficacy in reducing poverty, future research should include primary data collecting and examining CSR activities in various geographic regions. More extensive data gathering, longitudinal research, and cross-regional comparisons are advised to enhance the study's conclusions and add to our growing comprehension of CSR's role in alleviating poverty.

This study offers a comprehensive examination of CSR's potential to reduce poverty, especially through the involvement of MNCs doing business in Pakistan. By aligning CSR programs with community needs, developing public-private partnerships, and promoting innovation, MNCs may play a crucial role in creating sustainable development and increasing living standards. However, the study highlights the necessity of continuous improvement of CSR tactics to guarantee their applicability and efficacy in given contexts. The research makes a significant contribution to our knowledge of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a strategy for reducing poverty in developing countries by combining theoretical investigation with practical insights.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Prompts

ChatGPT, 25.03.2024. Prompt: "How CSR programs of MNCs can contribute to sustainable development and poverty alleviation?"

ChatGPT, 16.04.2024. Prompt: "What are the regional and industrial differences in the CSR strategies of MNCs?"

ChatGPT, 11.05.2024. Prompt: "What are the differences between interpretivism and positivism research approaches?"

ChatGPT, 25.05.2024. Prompt: "What are the common challenges and opportunities of CSR initiatives for MNCs?"

ChatGPT, 15.06.2024. Prompt: "How can we analyze CSR activities in poverty alleviation through the lens of Stakeholder theory?"

ChatGPT, 24.06.2024. Prompt: "How the Sustainable Development Theory can be associated with CSR activities and poverty alleviation?"

ChatGPT, 20.07.2024. Prompt: "Comparative analysis of CSR programs across different MNCs and their outcomes on poverty alleviation"