



The Green Dividend: Bridging the Industrial-Agricultural Gap through CSR in Odisha

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In the fiscal year 2025-2026, Odisha stands as a global case study for the integration of heavy industry and grassroots agricultural development. With a mandatory CSR framework under the Companies Act 2013 and a proactive state interface through the GO CARE portal, corporations are shifting from peripheral philanthropy to systemic agricultural intervention. This article explores the multi-dimensional role of CSR in Odisha's agriculture, covering infrastructure, technology dissemination, and market integration. By analyzing the contributions of major players like Tata Steel, Vedanta, and Dalmia Bharat, the study illustrates how corporate capital is fostering climate-resilient farming and empowering Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs). The narrative shifts from the 'resource curse' to a 'resource blessing,' where industrial wealth catalyzes the modernization of the state's most vital sector: farming.

Keywords: Odisha, Corporate Social Responsibility, Agricultural Development, FPOs, Climate Resilient Agriculture, GO CARE Portal.

Introduction: The Paradox of Prosperity

Odisha is a land of profound contrasts. On one hand, it is the 'Steel Hub of India,' boasting some of the world's largest reserves of iron ore, bauxite, and coal. On the other, it remains fundamentally agrarian, with nearly 70% of its workforce tied to the soil (Odisha Economic Survey, 2025). This duality has historically led to a tension between industrial expansion and rural livelihoods. However, the mid-2020s have seen the emergence of a new paradigm: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a strategic driver of agricultural modernization. As we enter 2026, CSR is no longer viewed by Odisha's industries as a mere legal tax. Instead, it has become a 'social license to operate.' By investing in the agricultural productivity of the regions they occupy, companies are reducing migration, improving local food security, and building a more stable socio-economic environment. This article delves into the four pillars of this transformation: infrastructure, technology, market access, and inclusivity.

The Regulatory Catalyst: Section 135 and GO CARE

The mandate of Section 135 of the Companies Act 2013, which requires companies with a certain turnover to spend 2% of their profits on social causes, found a particularly fertile ground in Odisha. To streamline these funds, the Government of Odisha launched the 'GO CARE' (CSR Administration and Responsive Engagement) portal. This digital platform allows corporations to align their spending with the state's developmental priorities, particularly in the agricultural sector. In 2024-25, the portal recorded a significant shift in funding towards 'Livelihood Enhancement Projects.' Companies are no longer just building community halls; they are funding solar-powered cold storages and soil testing labs. As

Mahapatra et al. (2024) noted, the transparency provided by government-industry collaboration has reduced project duplication and ensured that even the most remote tribal blocks in Keonjhar and Rayagada receive corporate attention.

Infrastructure and Water: Beyond Rain-Fed Farming

Odisha's agriculture is notoriously vulnerable to the vagaries of the monsoon. CSR initiatives have increasingly focused on drought-proofing the state. Vedanta Limited's 'Jeevika Samridhi' project in Jharsuguda stands out as a flagship model. By constructing check dams and implementing solar-powered lift irrigation, the project has successfully transformed mono-crop regions into multi-crop hubs (Vedanta Limited, 2025). Farmers who once migrated to cities after the paddy harvest are now growing vegetables and oilseeds year-round. Similarly, Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL) has utilized its CSR budget to desilt hundreds of traditional community tanks, or 'Amrit Sarovars.' These water bodies do more than just provide irrigation; they recharge the groundwater table and provide a secondary source of income through inland fisheries. The impact is measurable: in the Sambalpur-Angul belt, groundwater levels have stabilized despite rising industrial water demand, a testament to the ecological balance CSR can provide (Mishra, 2026).

Skill Development: Scaling the SRI Revolution

Agricultural development is as much about 'software' (knowledge) as it is about 'hardware' (infrastructure). One of the most significant CSR-led interventions has been the scaling of the System of Rice Intensification (SRI). While the state government provides the policy framework, corporate partners like HDFC Bank's 'Parivartan' program provide the last-mile extension services. By funding master trainers and demonstration plots, they have helped thousands of smallholders in the Ganjam and Puri districts adopt SRI, which reduces water use by 40% while increasing yields (HDFC Bank, 2024). Beyond paddy, companies like Dalmia Bharat have focused on high-value organic farming. In the Sundargarh district, their CSR wing has trained Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in mushroom cultivation and vermicomposting. This shift not only reduces the farmers' dependence on expensive chemical fertilizers but also caters to the growing urban demand for organic produce in cities like Bhubaneswar and Rourkela.

Market Linkages: Empowering the FPO Revolution

The biggest challenge for an Odisha farmer has never been growing the crop; it has been selling it. Middlemen often siphon off the majority of the profit. To combat this, CSR projects are now centered on the formation and handholding of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs). An FPO allows small farmers to aggregate their produce and negotiate directly with big retailers. Tata Steel's CSR initiatives in the Kalinganagar and Keonjhar regions have been pioneering in this regard. They have supported FPOs not just with registration and seed capital, but with branding and packaging. For example, tribal farmers growing turmeric in the hills of Jajpur are now selling packaged, branded organic turmeric through corporate-supported supply chains (Tata Steel, 2025). This 'Seed-to-Shelf' approach ensures that the value addition happens at the village level, significantly boosting rural household income.

Digital Innovation: The Rise of Agri-Tech CSR

The year 2026 marks a digital milestone for Odisha's fields. At the 'Krusha Odisha 2026' summit, several corporations unveiled AI-driven crop advisory platforms funded through CSR. These platforms provide real-time weather alerts and pest warnings via SMS and voice calls in Odia. NALCO, through its CSR wing, has piloted the use of drones for nutrient spraying in the hilly terrains of Koraput, where manual spraying is both difficult and hazardous. Furthermore, the Odisha Agriculture Drought Mitigation Programme (OADMP), launched in early 2026, has seen active participation from corporate philanthropy. By funding IoT-based soil moisture sensors, companies are helping the state disaster management authority build a 'Drought Early Warning System' that protects over 24,000 households

(Times of India, 2026). This integration of high-tech with the 'high-touch' of CSR is redefining modern farming in the state.

Inclusivity: Bringing Women and Tribes to the Forefront

No agricultural development in Odisha is complete without addressing the role of women, who perform the bulk of the manual labor. CSR programs are increasingly aligning with the state's 'Mission Shakti' initiative. Companies are providing 'drudgery-reducing' technologies—such as mechanical weeders and paddy transplanters—to women-led SHGs. In the Rayagada district, organizations like WOTR (Watershed Organization Trust), funded by corporate grants, are training tribal women in climate-resilient kitchen gardening, ensuring nutritional security for the household while providing a surplus for the local market (WOTR, 2025).

Challenges: The Path Ahead

Despite these successes, challenges remain. A primary concern is the geographical imbalance of CSR spending. Most funds are concentrated in highly industrialized districts like Angul, Jajpur, and Jharsuguda, leaving purely agrarian districts like Kalahandi and Boudh with fewer corporate partners. Additionally, the sustainability of CSR projects post-exit remains a question. As Singh (2025) argues, CSR interventions must focus on building 'institutional capacity' within the community rather than creating a cycle of dependency on corporate handouts.

Conclusion: A Harvest of Hope

The evolution of CSR in Odisha from 2013 to 2026 tells a story of maturing corporate citizenship. By moving into the agricultural heartlands, Odisha's industries are proving that mineral wealth can, and should, nourish the soil. The success of the FPO model, the adoption of agri-tech, and the focus on water security have turned the tide for thousands of farmers. As the GO CARE portal continues to align corporate vision with government strategy, the 'Green Dividend' will ensure that Odisha remains not just an industrial giant, but an agricultural leader in the 21st century.

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