

# Assessing corporate social responsibility in South Africa's built environment industry

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Studies showed that stakeholders want the construction sector's organisations to be more accountable and transparent regarding social and environmental issues through corporate social responsibility (CSR). There is a paucity of literature regarding CSR implementation in the construction sector, especially in developing countries like South Africa. Hence, the study evaluated CSR's merits and hindrances and suggested solutions to enhance its implementation in the South African construction sector of Mpumalanga Province.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The researchers employed a questionnaire survey method to collect data from 68 useable respondents in the South African construction sector of Mpumalanga Province. The main section of the questionnaire was divided into three parts, each addressing an objective mean item score ranking technique.

**Findings** – Findings show management lacks willingness, absence of recognition for implementing CSR at tender adjudication, professionals regard CSR as a “soft issue,” inadequate ability to carry out CSR initiatives and lax CSR knowledge emerged as the key issues hindering construction stakeholders, especially construction companies, from participating in CSR in South Africa. The research suggests initiatives to enhance CSR in the construction industry.

**Originality/value** – The study shows that the findings can be used to improve the implementation of CSR engagement and possibly enhance a policy to stimulate friendly CSR in the South African construction sector.

**Keywords** Construction sector, Corporate social responsibility, Hindrances, Organisation, South Africa

**Paper type** Research paper

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## 1. Introduction

The construction sector's contribution influences developing and developed countries' economies, environment and society. The sector accounts for about 10% of the gross domestic product (GDP) regarding employment ([International Labour Organisation, 2015](#)). In South Africa, not less than 1.4 million people are employed and contribute about 3.9% to the GDP ([Statistics South Africa, 2017](#)). The employment and GDP contribution from the construction sector is significant. Still, the concern of many is the impact on the environment and increasing climate change because of the high carbon emissions ([Ibbotson and Farrell, 2019](#)). The government's limited resources may not be enough to mitigate carbon emissions, thus the need for other stakeholders in the industry to intervene via corporate social responsibility (CSR). Therefore, engaging the private sector investors in mitigating the consequences of climate change via CSR needs to be encouraged. One germane reason is that government resources may not sustain the communities and environment. CSR is a developed concept that many sectors have embraced to improve ingenious and sustainable parts of scarce resources. The concept benefits commercial businesses and society. Thus, corporate governance reform discourse birthed CSR ([Raimi, 2018](#); [Rendtorff, 2019](#)). [Amodu \(2013\)](#) affirmed that the concept emerged as an organised governance tool for reconceptualising commercial firms to look outside prosperity growth for shareholders but obliging for any contrary environmental, social, or human capital penalties of their tasks.

The construction industry is seen as one of the major contributors to polluting the environment. In China, [Xiong et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Zhao et al. \(2016\)](#) have conducted research that focused on promoting CSR implementation by construction firms. A few studies addressed CSR issues in developing countries, including South Africa. For example, [Boachie \(2020\)](#), [Williams et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Auwah et al. \(2021\)](#), besides [Williams et al. \(2020\)](#), but none concerning encumbrances and measures to improve CSR implementation in the construction industry. [Williams et al. \(2020\)](#) examined the issue only from the contractors' perspective. In South Africa, a few studies ([Moyo et al., 2020](#); [Bhatia and Makkar, 2020](#); [Ackers and Grobbelaar, 2022](#); [Wentzel et al., 2022](#)) attempted to address CSR from other sectors with the exemption of [Wentzel et al. \(2022\)](#). [Moyo et al. \(2020\)](#) examined the influence of stakeholders on sustainable CSR in sports organisations. [Bhatia and Makkar \(2020\)](#) revealed that South Africa is at the top amongst the emerging markets in CSR reporting, yet there is insufficient literature in the construction sector. [Ackers and Grobbelaar \(2022\)](#) investigated how the CSR framework can be integrated into South African mining firms. [Wentzel et al. \(2022\)](#) examined the relationship between integrating CSR and sustainable business performance in the construction industry, but the perceived factors hindering and measures to promote South Africa's built environment stakeholders' participation in CSR were not addressed. This theoretical gap needs to be addressed, knowing the sector's significance to the economy. Despite the extant literature on CSR within the South African economy and its merits, there still needs to be more CSR literature on organisations within the South African built environment. Insufficient literature may have contributed to the encumbrances facing CSR implementation.

There may be apparent neglect to rehabilitate the environment where applicable construction activity occurs. Policymakers and other stakeholders, especially construction firms, are worried. Therefore, [Amodu \(2013; 2018\)](#), [Raimi \(2018\)](#), [Rendtorff \(2019\)](#) and [Ebekozi et al. \(2022a, b\)](#) shown that stakeholders want the construction sector's organisations to be more accountable and transparent regarding social and environmental challenges because of the excessive use of natural resources and their impact on the environment and human beings via CSR. There is a paucity of literature concerning CSR implementation in the construction sector, especially in developing countries, South Africa inclusive. Hence, the study evaluated CSR's merits and hindrances and suggested solutions to enhance the implementation of CSR in Mpumalanga Province in the South African construction sector. The objectives are as follows:

- (1) To examine South Africa's built environment stakeholders' understanding of CSR.
- (2) To investigate the perceived factors hindering South Africa's built environment stakeholders' participation in CSR.
- (3) To suggest measures to promote CSR in South Africa's built environment industry.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Overview of corporate social responsibility

CSR is an old term. However, the phrase “corporate social responsibility” was coined in the 1950s (Carroll, 1991; Ebekoziem *et al.*, 2022a, b). Carroll (1991) reported that it was after the enactment of the first legislation on the subject in the 1970s that gave rise to the creation of the Environment Protection Agency (EPA), Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). CSR describes business and society relations and focuses on economic and social issues. Raimi (2015, 2018) avowed that variables such as corporate conscience, corporate citizenship, stakeholder management, sustainable responsible business, corporate social performance and social performance can be used to describe CSR. In the 1980s, implementing CSR was optional for organisations. In Africa, the relevance grew to address mining's harmful social and environmental consequences. International conferences, workshops, summits and agreements played a significant role in enhancing Africa's CSR. For example, the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro followed the Johannesburg Summit. In South Africa and other African countries, this enhanced the development of corporate governance codes such as the King Code I in 1999. King Code II, III and IV currently focus mainly on conducting business ethically (Amos, 2018). Sheehy and Farneti (2021) and Conte *et al.* (2022) avowed that the CSR role could not be overstated because it is one of the initiatives organisations use to reduce information anomalies and provide their commitment to sustainable development.

Regarding the definition of CSR, there is no universally accepted definition. It differs from country and sector. Irrespective of the definition, the aim is to reduce the negative impact of business tasks on the environment in which they operate and enhance the positive effects by improving environmental and social issues (Pham *et al.*, 2021). In Ghana, Abugre and Nyuur (2015) defined CSR initiatives as corporate donations and building capacity as key components of CSR for sustainable livelihoods. It honours cultural diversity and looks for commercial potential in developing the capabilities of workers, the community and the government. In Thailand, CSR is geared toward resolving social and environmental issues and is dedicated primarily to improving society and addressing environmental issues (Srisuphaolarn, 2013). “*The continuing commitment by business to contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families and the community and society at large,*” as defined by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2000, p. 10). However, Carroll (1991) definition comprises the following:

- (1) *Economic social responsibility*: This entails producing goods and services that are of value to the community.
- (2) *Legal social responsibility*: This means that organisations should operate within the statutory frameworks of the country in which they are hosted, in the case of multinational corporations and in which they operate in the case of all, including the domestic ones.
- (3) *Ethical responsibility*: It emphasises firms' responsibilities to do what is correct, just and reasonable.

- (4) *Philanthropic social responsibility*: It is about organisations putting effort into improving the quality of human lives (Carroll, 1991).

In Africa, South Africa included, CSR is built within the need to make up for the ills of the past, namely, slavery, colonialism and apartheid, propelled by the need for social redress of the injustices and inequality within society (Muthuri, 2012). The trend in globalisation-related growth has made CSR a spectacle in management and governance, especially in developing nations, which has increased the requirement to abide by international norms of business conduct (Muthuri, 2012). In Africa, the [World Business Council for Sustainable Development \(2000\)](#) defined CSR as “*about capacity building for sustainable livelihoods. It respects cultural differences and finds business opportunities in building the skills of employees, the community, and the government.*” In South Africa, because of the country’s history, the term CSR was coined for corporate social investment (CSI) to enhance a long-term commitment to the project and focus on the returns (Mersham and Skinner, 2016). The latter (CSI) is toward a strategic approach, where possible social benefits are weighed against business gains. Thus, the study adopted [Mersham and Skinner \(2016\)](#) definition. In South Africa, there is an Act specifically for the environmental part of social responsibility, the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) 107 of 1998, which has Clauses that mention that development should be socially, environmentally and economically sustainable. NEMA emphasises handling chemicals and other substances, so they do not pollute the atmosphere, grounds and water.

In the construction industry, activities like mining are by nature labour intensive, thus highly exposing workers to accidents. [Jiang and Wong \(2016\)](#) asserted that the industry may be an unhealthy and unsafe undertaking for construction workers, accounting for more fatalities than any other sector in 2016–2017. Several issues plague the sector. Moreover, the sector is linked to large-scale resources and energy usage ([Zhang et al., 2022](#)). There is a paucity of academic literature concerning CSR implementation in the construction industry, especially in developing countries, South Africa inclusive. This is one of the study’s motivations. [Dragu \(2018\)](#) found that CSR has increased in South Africa since King III’s introduction. King III is the force behind the institutionalisation of CSR assurance techniques. [Ackers and Eccles \(2015\)](#) asserted that King III is a voluntary code and has hindered inconsistency in applying CSR. Thus, the implementation is optional and at the discretion of the organisation. This is a challenge and should be addressed.

However, the merits of CSR cannot be over-emphasised. [Claydon \(2011\)](#) identified four aspects of CSR (organisational culture, financial performance, society and environment). The issue of the environment became a subject of discussion because of the inability of previous CSR models to integrate environmental management and corporate sustainability. Also, as part of the merits, they assist in achieving sustainable development. This submission corroborated [Visser \(2010\)](#), who argued that CSR should be an integral part of the change needed for a society to enable sustainability of the planet and reverse poverty. [Claydon \(2011\)](#) emphasised that CSR makes profitable companies socially responsible for their environment. It is the way an organisation can accomplish profitability and social responsibility. Also, CSR has accomplished raising awareness of the significance of ethical and socially responsible business conduct in the consciousness of business operators’ and the masses ([Claydon, 2011](#); [Aigbavboa et al., 2024](#)). [Ranangen et al. \(2014\)](#) found improved health and safety policy and practices at the workplace, improved staff involvement and training, promotion of good health in the host communities, material and financial support to the communities and community awareness of their environmental right as merits of CSR.

In Ghana, [Zhang et al. \(2019\)](#) discovered that implementing CSR integrates the desires of construction firms to accomplish competitive advantages. The construction industry is integrally socially responsible because it is labour- and material-intensive ([Lu et al., 2016](#)). It is their interest to be socially responsible for business sustainability, including construction-

related businesses. Thus, it is a win-win concept and increases customer retention, improves business image, mitigates risks and offers access to funding opportunities (Masum *et al.*, 2020). Despite these merits, Friedman (an antagonist to CSR), as cited in Masum's work (2020), contended that the only social responsibility of business is to maximise the profit of the shareholders. Friedman claimed that government failure in service and welfare provision cannot be imposed upon businesses to do the job. Davis (1973) asserted that businesses should sacrifice some profit to serve all stakeholders. Also, the antagonist argued that businesses are not trained to handle social tasks (Davis, 1973).

### *2.2 Barriers to implementing CSR*

The concept of CSR has been around for some time. However, there are still several hindrances to its successful implementation. Pham *et al.* (2021) suggest that decision-makers must endeavour to understand the concept to formulate means to mitigate the hindrances and pave the way for smooth implementation. The South African Companies Act 61 of 1973 is the primary corporate legislation currently governing companies in South Africa. This Act, however, needs to clearly enforce the implementation of CSR in organisations in any sector, making it hard to legally hold organisations responsible for acting socially (Ramlall, 2012). Ebekoziem *et al.* (2022a, b) classified CSR barriers into internal and external, depending on the organisation's stakeholder pressure. Internal constraints include a lack of funding, a lack of awareness of CSR and a lack of understanding. In contrast, external barriers include a lack of government assistance, communities' weak management of CSR resources, CSR policy uncertainty and lax collaborate with peers. Similarly, Agudo-Valiente *et al.* (2017) classified the barriers into subjective and objective barriers. Subjective CSR hurdles include a lack of ethical integration, CSR as an imaging approach and a lack of commitment to transparency and objectivity, which are difficult to describe and linked to managers' and owners' attitudes and beliefs. CSR objective obstacles include inadequate resources, institutional motivation and difficulty interpreting CSR.

Lack of expertise and understanding, absence of significant benefits for CSR implementation to enterprise, lack of top management commitment, ineffective strategic planning for CSR, disadvantaged distributor and supplier commitment, poor involvement of external stakeholders, customers' lack of willingness to pay for CSR and societal cynicism for CSR as a promotional act are some of the factors that contribute to low internal stakeholder willingness to partake in CSR events (Dawar and Singh, 2021). Zhang *et al.* (2019) found a lack of awareness, lack of CSR knowledge and understanding, ineffective employee training and education programmes about local and industrial legal systems, an inability to address strategic CSR facets and restricted resources and ability as the factors responsible for the poor participation of firms in CSR. Lack of customer interest in CSR and lack of awareness of it (Loosemore and Lim, 2018) and lack of universal frameworks to appraise CSR performance (Lu *et al.*, 2015) were identified at the industrial level as the barriers.

## **3. Research method**

The researchers adopted a quantitative research method. It was achieved via a questionnaire survey. Creswell and Creswell (2018), Ebekoziem *et al.* (2021) affirmed that quantitative research is a systematic and objective technique that uses numerical data from only a narrow subset of the universe to generalise the findings. The study population consists of built environment professionals registered on the database of Mpumalanga's various organisations that implement infrastructure projects, contractors on Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) grade 5 and above, construction industry suppliers. Mpumalanga is a province in the Republic of South Africa. It was chosen because it is a developing rural province and attracts many ongoing infrastructure projects. The respondents include Architects, Civil and Structural

Engineers, Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Quantity Surveyors, Project Managers, Health and Safety Professionals, Land Surveyors, Construction Managers, Contractors and Construction Consumables Suppliers, as presented in Table 1. The researchers adopted the consensus approach because the sampling frame was less than 200, in line with Ebekozi (2019). Therefore, the sample frame was adopted as the sample size. From the 180 questionnaires administered across the province via Google Forms from early September 2022 to late October 2022, 90 questionnaires were retrieved and 68 questionnaires were certified useable for the analysis, as presented in Table 1. It represents a 37.78% response rate and is suitable for the study in line with Akintoye and Fitzgerald (2000). They recommended a response rate within 20–30% benchmark and above with the construction industry’s questionnaire, as presented in Table 1.

The retrieved 90 questionnaires were cleaned and, in the process, reduced to 68 useable questionnaires. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) computer software analysed and interpreted the useable questionnaires. Raw data was fed into the SPSS; from it, mean item

Category	Classification	%
Organisation	Architect	2.94
	Civil/Structural Engineer	33.82
	Construction Health and Safety Professional	16.18
	Construction Manager	7.35
	Construction Material Supplier	2.94
	Contractor	1.47
	Electrical Engineer	5.88
	Land Surveyor	2.94
	Mechanical Engineer	1.47
	Project Manager	13.24
	Quantity Surveyor	11.76
	<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>
	Academic Qualification	Diploma
Bachelor’s Degree		26.47
Honours		17.65
Master’s Degree		22.06
<i>Total</i>		<i>100</i>
CSR Initiatives Implemented	None	13.24
	1–3	30.88
	4–6	22.06
	7–9	13.24
	Above 9	20.59
	<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>
Number of times Organisation Involved in CSR Initiatives	Never	13.24
	Occasionally	25.00
	Sometimes	8.82
	Often	25.00
	Always	27.94
	<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>
Work Experience	0–5 years	20.59
	6–10 years	20.59
	11–15 years	26.47
	16–20 years	8.82
	Above 20 years	23.53
	<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Source(s): Authors’ work

**Table 1.** Summary of respondents’ description (N = 68)

score, standard deviation, rankings and Cronbach's alpha were compounded, as presented in the following section. The five-point scaling (strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neutral = 3, agree = 4 and strongly agree = 5) was adopted (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Also, SPSS was utilised to confirm the validity and reliability of the main variables. The Cronbach's alpha validates the consistency of a test and clarifies the internal reliability of how items in a test measure a comparative thought (Ebekozi, 2019; Ebekozi *et al.*, 2022a).

#### 4. Findings and discussion

In developing countries, including South Africa, promoting CSR in the built environment can bridge the corporate community contribution gap, especially in environment and related matters. Apart from Ebekozi *et al.* (2022a, b), academic literature concerning CSR implementation in the construction sector is scarce. Ebekozi *et al.* (2022a, b) suggested ways to fill the infrastructure development deficit gap in Nigerian higher education institutions through expanded CSR. Thus, this study has become pertinent and may improve the economic development of host communities. The section presents the main findings and discussion in line with the stated objectives in Section 1.

##### 4.1 Stakeholders understanding of CSR

The built environment stakeholders' understanding of CSR concept and route to contributing to the economic development of host communities cannot be over-emphasised. Thus, this subsection examines South Africa's built environment stakeholders' understanding of CSR as a concept from the respondents' perspective. Table 2 presents the stakeholders' understanding of CSR as a concept and compares the mean of the various sub-groups' levels of agreement regarding the identified major concepts. The results show an overall mean range of 4.57 to 2.90. Besides South Africa does encourage the practice of CSR by corporates (3.31), South African Construction Industry (SACI) complies with CSR requirements (3.18), SACI leads in CSR initiatives (3.16), the state is wholly responsible for ensuring the implementation of CSR (3.10), CSR is meant to be carried out by the private sector (3.00) and implementing CSR is time and cost consuming without any returns (2.90), the ten other concepts are above 3.50 mean score. It indicates that most respondents agree with the findings. Referring to Table 2, taking care of the environment, in turn, is taking care of the community with a mean score 4.57, is ranked 1st, followed by CSR ensures corporates contribute to sustainable development with a mean score 4.41 and 3rd position, the average business is more concerned about survival with a mean score 4.29. For others, refer to Table 2.

Construction industry stakeholders show an understanding that it is beneficial to implement CSR initiatives for the benefit of all. Findings agree with Visser (2010), Claydon (2011), Abugre and Nyuur (2015), Massoud *et al.* (2019), Ebekozi *et al.* (2022a, b) and Aigbavboa *et al.* (2024). Visser (2010) argued that CSR should be an integral part of the change needed for a society to enable sustainability of the planet and reverse poverty. Claydon (2011) identified four aspects of CSR (organisational culture, financial performance, society and environment). Claydon (2011) and Aigbavboa *et al.* (2024) emphasised that besides CSR making profitable companies socially responsible to their environment; it has accomplished raising the awareness of the significance of ethical and socially responsible business conduct in the consciousness of business operators' and the masses. Abugre and Nyuur (2015) found that CSR initiatives are corporate donations aimed at capacity building for sustainable livelihoods. Massoud *et al.* (2019) affirmed that CSR concerns corporations' ability to cater to social and economic challenges. Ebekozi *et al.* (2022a, b) discovered that the infrastructure of higher education institutions in developing countries might be enhanced via expanded CSR via investing in the construction industry. They proposed a model that can be utilised to

Code	Level of understanding (abridged)	Rank	Overall mean	Construction health and safety professional					Quantity surveyor	Construction manager	Project manager	Contractor	Construction material supplier	Land surveyor	SD
				Civil/ Structural engineer	Electrical engineer	Mechanical engineer	Architect	Architect							
Q1	Helps organisations give back to communities	1st	4.66	4.82	4.65	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.88	5.00	4.44	4.00	5.00	4.50	0.563
Q2	Improves community living	2nd	4.62	4.64	4.48	4.25	5.00	5.00	4.63	5.00	4.78	5.00	4.50	4.50	0.547
Q3	Positive brand recognition	3rd	4.56	4.55	4.48	4.75	5.00	5.00	4.38	4.44	4.44	4.00	5.00	4.50	0.632
Q4	Improves community involvement	4th	4.53	4.64	4.43	4.25	4.00	5.00	4.63	4.44	4.44	5.00	5.00	4.50	0.559
Q5	Shows signs of accountability	5th	4.46	4.82	4.26	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.50	4.60	4.33	5.00	4.50	4.50	0.800
Q6	Economic development	6th	4.41	4.64	4.22	4.50	4.00	5.00	4.50	4.60	4.33	5.00	4.00	4.50	0.696
Q7	Improves customer perception of the brand	7th	4.38	4.73	4.17	4.25	5.00	5.00	4.38	4.40	4.22	5.00	4.50	4.50	0.692
Q8	Helps government meet some of its obligations	8th	3.34	4.73	4.09	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.13	4.20	4.44	5.00	5.00	4.50	0.803
Q9	Helps reduce damage to the environment	9th	4.43	4.73	3.96	4.50	4.00	5.00	4.50	4.60	4.11	5.00	5.00	4.50	0.891
Q10	Sets organisation apart from competitors	10th	4.22	4.45	3.96	4.25	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.80	4.11	5.00	4.50	4.50	0.844
Q11	Risk mitigation	11th	4.19	4.64	3.96	4.25	4.00	5.00	3.75	4.40	4.00	5.00	4.50	5.00	0.851

(continued)

**Table 2.** Respondents understanding of CSR as a concept

Table 2.

Code	Level of understanding (abridged)	Rank	Overall mean	Construction health and safety professional	Civil/ Structural engineer	Electrical engineer	Mechanical engineer	Architect	Quantity surveyor	Construction manager	Project manager	Contractor	Construction material supplier	Land surveyor	SD
Q12	Increased employee satisfaction	12th	4.13	4.55	4.22	3.75	4.00	5.00	3.63	4.00	3.78	5.00	4.00	4.50	0.879
Q13	Improves creativity	13th	4.10	4.36	4.13	4.50	4.00	5.00	3.50	4.20	3.78	5.00	4.00	4.50	0.849
Q14	Ensures legal compliance	14th	3.97	4.64	3.70	3.75	5.00	5.00	3.63	3.60	3.89	5.00	3.50	5.00	1.092
Q15	Tax rebates	15th	3.88	4.00	4.04	3.50	4.00	5.00	3.88	3.20	3.67	4.00	3.50	4.50	0.939

**Note(s):** Reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) = 0.887  
**Source(s):** Authors' work

enhance physical infrastructure in higher education institutions. The outcome will enhance the social and economic status of the host communities and, by extension, improve the country's economic growth. Also, [Zhang et al. \(2019\)](#) discovered that implementing CSR integrates the desires of construction firms to accomplish competitive advantages. This is pertinent to the stakeholders, especially the construction companies.

#### *4.2 Factors that may have hindered South Africa's built environment stakeholders'*

[Table 3](#) presents identified factors that hinder South Africa's built environment stakeholders in contributing to the community via CSR. Findings show an overall mean range of 4.47 to 3.12. Besides the absence of measures to enforce implementation (3.12), others are above 3.40 mean score. It indicates that most respondents agree with the study's results. Referring to [Table 3](#), management lacks willingness, with a mean score 4.46, is ranked 1st, followed by an absence of recognition for implementing CSR at tender adjudication with a mean score 4.25 and 3rd position is the professionals regarding CSR "soft issue" with mean score 4.15. For others, refer to [Table 3](#).

Findings agree with [Mersham and Skinner \(2016\)](#), [Duman et al. \(2016\)](#), [Zhang et al. \(2019\)](#), [Dawar and Singh \(2021\)](#) and [Aigbavboa et al. \(2024\)](#). [Mersham and Skinner \(2016\)](#) found a lack of information as a key factor hampered CSR. [Duman et al. \(2016\)](#) affirmed that stakeholders operate in silos and the outcomes hampered CSR regarding integrating and processing. [Zhang et al. \(2019\)](#) found that organisations have a less positive attitude toward implementing CSR practices due to a lack of strategic guidance from managers. They classified the barriers into internal and external factors, depending on the organisation's stakeholder pressure. Internal constraints include inadequate funding, absence of CSR awareness, lack of management's willingness to support and implement CSR and absence of understanding. External barriers include a lack of government assistance, uncertainty in CSR policy, lax collaboration with peers and poor management of CSR resources by the community and society. [Dawar and Singh \(2021\)](#) discovered a lack of expertise and understanding as factors that may hinder managers from implementing CSR initiatives. Also, [Aigbavboa et al. \(2024\)](#) found non-familiarity with CSR outcomes, lax government attitude towards an enabling environment, low awareness of CSR-related programmes by stakeholders, absence of a structured framework and inadequate funds for CSR projects as the top-ranked barriers facing CSR implementation in the industry. [Aigbavboa et al. \(2024\)](#) research focused on Ghana and adopted a qualitative approach.

#### *4.3 Ways to enhance CSR in the built environment*

[Table 4](#) presents suggested ways to enhance CSR in the South African built environment. The findings show an overall mean range of 4.69 to 3.18. Social responsibility in the construction sector should be left to the market to work itself out (3.18). Others have a 4.24 mean score and above. It indicates that most respondents agree with the findings. Referring to [Table 4](#), the government has the responsibility to formulate policies that will encourage companies to implement CSR in their operations, with a mean score of 4.69 ranked 1st, followed by organisations should be encouraged via tax rebates for implementing CSR with a mean score of 4.47 and 2nd position is organisation should put CSR as one of their targets in their strategies plans with a mean score 4.47. For others, refer to [Table 4](#).

Findings agree with [Buhmann \(2006\)](#), [Perry \(2012\)](#), [Samy et al. \(2015\)](#) and [Aigbavboa et al. \(2024\)](#). [Buhmann \(2006\)](#) found that CSR affects more than just the business and the stakeholders. It is of interest to the government as well. [Perry \(2012\)](#) affirmed that if the government is involved through legislation, it makes it easier for corporations to ignore the legislative requirements and encourages participation. [Ramlall \(2012\)](#), [Wu et al. \(2015\)](#) and [Zhang et al. \(2019\)](#) opined that governments have a lot of influence on all sectors,

**Table 3.**  
Barriers to South  
African CSR

Code	Possible hindrances to implementation (abridged)	Rank	Overall mean	Construction health and safety professional	Civil/ structural engineer	Electrical engineer	Mechanical engineer	Architect	Quantity surveyor	Construction manager	Project manager	Contractor	Construction material supplier	Land surveyor	SD
Q32	Management's lack willingness and decision-making on CSR	1st	4.46	4.64	4.26	4.50	4.00	5.00	4.63	4.60	4.22	4.00	5.00	5.00	0.700
Q33	Absence of recognition for implementing CSR at tender adjudicating	2nd	4.25	4.64	3.96	4.00	3.00	5.00	4.86	3.80	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	1.064
Q34	Construction practitioners often refer to CSR as 'soft issues' specific knowledge and abilities to carry out CSR initiatives	3rd	4.15	4.45	3.91	4.25	2.00	5.00	4.50	4.20	3.78	4.00	5.00	4.50	0.935
Q35	Is there a need for specific knowledge and abilities to carry out CSR initiatives	4th	3.99	4.27	3.52	4.50	4.00	5.00	4.13	4.20	3.89	5.00	4.00	4.50	0.985
Q36	Communication in the construction industry is generally poor, hence the lack of knowledge about CSR	4th	3.99	4.27	3.78	4.50	2.00	5.00	3.75	4.40	3.78	4.00	4.00	4.50	1.086

*(continued)*

Possible hindrances to implementation (abridged)	Rank	Overall mean	Construction health and safety professional	Civil/ structural engineer	Electrical engineer	Mechanical engineer	Architect	Quantity surveyor	Construction manager	Project manager	Contractor	Construction material supplier	Land surveyor	SD
Q37 Is there a need for reward and punish for organisation, on their implementation of CSR	6th	3.95	4.00	3.70	4.25	2.00	5.00	3.71	4.00	4.22	4.00	5.00	4.50	1.195
Q38 Capitalism is so entrenched in the construction industry that anything related to social responsibility is interpreted as socialism	7th	3.87	4.27	3.70	4.50	2.00	5.00	3.75	3.80	3.56	3.00	4.50	4.00	1.064
Q39 Lack of resources such as time and finances are contributors to non-implementation of CSR?	8th	3.81	3.73	3.61	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.13	4.80	3.78	3.00	3.00	2.50	1.188
Q40 The economic landscape of SA tends to encourage resistance by corporates to play their part in the CSR	9th	3.79	3.82	3.57	4.33	2.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	3.78	4.00	4.00	3.50	1.067

(continued)

Table 3.

Table 3.

Code	Possible hindrances to implementation (abridged)	Rank	Overall mean	Construction health and safety professional	Civil/ structural engineer	Electrical engineer	Mechanical engineer	Architect	Quantity surveyor	Construction manager	Project manager	Contractor	Construction material supplier	Land surveyor	SD
Q41	The social make-up of SA suggests that only poor members of society will benefit from CSR	11th	3.47	3.64	3.48	2.75	4.00	5.00	3.25	3.80	3.22	3.00	2.00	5.00	1.139
Q42	It should be left to the contractor, consultant or supplier in the CI to decide how they want to participate in CSR	12th	3.12	3.82	3.35	3.25	2.00	4.50	2.00	4.00	2.67	1.00	2.00	1.50	1.441

Note(s): Reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) = 0.796

Source(s): Authors' work

Code	Possible enabling factors (abridged)	Rank	Overall mean	Construction health and safety professional				Civil/Structural engineer	Electrical engineer	Mechanical engineer	Architect	Quantity surveyor	Construction manager	Project manager	Contractor	Construction material supplier	Land surveyor	SD
				Construction health and safety professional	Civil/Structural engineer	Electrical engineer	Mechanical engineer											
Q43	Government has the responsibility to formulate clear policies to encourage companies to implement CSR	1st	4.69	4.91	4.52	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.20	4.78	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	0.605	
Q44	CSR Should be one of the targets in strategic plans and reporting, mandatory	2nd	4.47	4.55	4.26	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.80	4.56	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	0.680	
Q45	Would it encourage organisations, to get tax rebates for implementing CSR?	2nd	4.47	4.55	4.35	4.50	5.00	4.50	4.00	4.56	4.63	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	0.782	
Q46	Corporate Social Responsibility implementation must be a legal requirement	4th	4.44	4.82	4.04	4.25	4.00	5.00	4.40	4.56	4.75	4.40	4.56	5.00	5.00	4.50	0.904	
Q47	A point scoring system can motivate for implementing that puts those that participate at an advantage	5th	4.43	4.82	4.09	5.00	3.00	5.00	4.20	4.44	4.63	4.20	4.44	4.00	5.00	4.50	0.834	

(continued)

**Table 4.** Identified ways to enhance CSR in the built environment

Table 4.

Code	Possible enabling factors (abridged)	Rank	Overall mean	Construction health and safety professional	Civil/Structural engineer	Electrical engineer	Mechanical engineer	Architect	Quantity surveyor	Construction manager	Project manager	Contractor	Construction material supplier	Land surveyor	SD
Q48	Training on CSR and related matters could help smooth the implementation of CSR for organisations	6th	4.37	4.45	4.22	4.50	4.00	5.00	4.50	4.00	4.44	5.00	4.50	4.50	0.689
Q49	Reporting on CSR initiatives has to form part of integrated reporting for organisations	7th	4.35	4.55	4.04	4.25	4.00	5.00	4.63	4.40	4.44	4.00	5.00	4.50	0.728
Q50	Environmental awareness is one of the most effective ways to educate corporates about CSR	8th	4.35	4.73	4.04	4.50	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.80	4.56	5.00	4.50	4.00	0.748
Q51	The construction industry must take the initiative and practise CSR so government can legislate it	9th	4.24	4.73	3.91	4.25	4.00	5.00	3.75	4.40	4.56	4.00	5.00	4.00	0.932
Q52	CSR should be left to the markets to work itself out, more so in the construction sector	10th	3.18	3.91	3.52	3.75	2.00	5.00	1.50	3.60	3.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	1.496

Note(s): Reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) = 0.829

Source(s): Authors' work

including the construction sector, through enacted laws and regulations. They affirmed that the government's role is crucial and must be balanced in enhancing the built environment stakeholders' CSR participation. [Wu et al. \(2015\)](#) suggested education and training for the stakeholders in implementing CSR. Also, [Olanipekun et al. \(2020\)](#) reiterate that government involvement is crucial and can enhance CSR in the construction industry. Regarding training and development, [Pham et al. \(2021\)](#) affirmed that training would mitigate some of the organisational barriers facing CSR. They corroborated [Wu et al. \(2015\)](#). The latter authors found that training and development could help workers regarding codes of conduct and ensure law compliance. [Aigbavboa et al. \(2024\)](#) found adequate budgeting to enhance CSR project financing, encouraging business code of ethics via CSR agency, creating more CSR awareness, establishing an implementable framework and engaging key stakeholders within the construction fraternity as top-rank measures to improve CSR in the industry.

## 5. Contribution to theory and practice

As reviewed in the literature, South Africa's context needs more academic literature concerning implementing CSR. Besides the few studies conducted regarding implementing CSR, there needs to be more exploring the possible hindrances in South Africa's construction sector. This study investigated the perceived factors hindering South Africa's built environment stakeholders' participation in CSR. The study developed a theoretical gap from related studies concerning CSR hindrances and initiatives to enhance CSR implementation, as presented in [Tables 3 and 4](#). From a theoretical perspective, the study examined South Africa's built environment stakeholders understanding of CSR; the perceived factors hindering South Africa's built environment stakeholders' participation in CSR; and recommended measures to promote CSR in the South African built environment industry. Theoretically, the study intends to help researchers expand knowledge regarding CSR hindrances and enhance implementation from the CSR viewpoint.

Concerning the study's practical implications, the research affirms that the South African construction sector needs a comprehensive CSR engagement with the support of the host communities and the enabling environment created by the government. Creating an enabling environment is germane and will improve engaging private companies in bridging social and environmental gaps within the environment sector. Results from this research would help stir up policymakers and other stakeholders, especially construction organisations, in linking with activities that threaten climate change and environmental impacts. Government policymakers should consider CSR-friendly legislation that will enhance implementation. South Africa's policymakers should utilise the benefits of the viable initiatives to improve CSR implementation, as highlighted in [Table 4](#). This is part of the practical implications, thus enhancing CSR implementation in South Africa's construction industry. Therefore, other developing countries with similar construction industry CSR issues may acclimatise some of the recommendations.

## 6. Limitations of the study

First, the study utilised a quantitative research design via a questionnaire survey in Mpumalanga Province of South Africa. Second, the collected data were restricted to construction professionals in Mpumalanga Province of South Africa. The study's findings might not be generalised across other provinces in South Africa. Hence, further studies are needed to cover other provinces to enhance generalisation and maybe validate the study's findings. Also, future studies could use a mixed method approach in subsequent studies to enhance the findings.

## 7. Conclusion and recommendations

The paper showed that implementing CSR by South African construction organisations has not been encouraging. The study identified the perceived causes. Findings show management lacks willingness and absence of recognition for implementing CSR at tender adjudication; professionals regard CSR's "soft issue," inadequate ability to carry out CSR initiatives and lax CSR knowledge as the key issues hindering construction stakeholders, especially construction companies, from participating in CSR in South Africa. Exploring ways to enhance CSR in the construction sector cannot be over-emphasised. This has become pertinent because of the impact of natural resources on the environment and the increasing climate change. Recommendations were made from the study to enhance CSR. This includes:

- (1) The paper recommends that the government has a major role in introducing legislation that will govern CSR implementation with incentives to users (construction companies). That legislation should be clear regarding understanding and what it seeks to achieve. Also, government intervention via creating CSR awareness, terms of implementation and associated benefits should be all-inclusive and cannot be overstated. Information dissemination should be all-inclusive via government agencies and non-governmental organisations involved in climate change and environmental matters. Thereafter, there should be measures to enforce compliance via monitoring and implementation.
- (2) The study recommends that the private sector, especially the construction firms and host communities, have critical roles in CSR enforcement and implementation. The era of implementing CSR as a "soft issue" by construction firms should be discouraged from the top management to the field staffers. Also, there should be a commitment from top management regarding profit-making set aside for CSR. The role of communities and their cooperation to ensure that construction firms are engaged in critical CSR that will enhance the environment and humanity cannot be over-emphasised. In many communities, this needs to be included via engagement. Communities' members should be fully involved in CSR activities in their area of residence. This approach of all-inclusive engagement may mitigate companies implementing CSR initiatives that end up being white elephants and unused because community members are not involved.
- (3) In addition, profit-making organisations in the industry should set aside a percentage to implement participatory CSR. The host communities should be involved in decision-making, especially if the CSR enhances environmental sustainability and development.

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