

CSR Implementation Strategies to Achieve Sustainable Business Performance of Large Contractors in the Western Cape Construction Sector

Ademola Kamal Oyewumi¹, Lance Wentzel² and Rainer Haldenwangl³

¹⁻³Department of Construction Management and Quantity Surveying, Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa.

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is becoming a critical constituent in influencing the long-term sustainable business performance of organisations across sectors. Despite CSR being a global driver of sustainable business, large contractors in the Western Cape Province of South Africa continue to face obstacles integrating CSR. In this research, CSR strategies that could be implemented by large contractors in the Western Cape Province, to achieve sustainable business performance were identified. A quantitative methodological approach was utilised with a structured online questionnaire survey. The research data was analysed using descriptive (percentages, mean, standard deviation, etc.) statistics. The sample population comprised of large construction enterprises registered with the Construction Industry Development Board (cidb) between Grade 7 and 9 under the General Building (GB) and/or Civil Engineering (CE) categories. CSR strategies such as promoting energy-efficient product development; Prioritising employee health and safety; Clear reporting on social and environmental performance alongside financial results, and collaborating within supply chains to ensure ethical and environmental standards are maintained throughout the project lifecycle; are among the top strategies that were highlighted. The findings of this study contributes to understanding the interplay between the CSR strategies and how it can strengthen the business resilience of large contractors in the Province, contributing to their sustainability and long-term business growth.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility; Sustainable Business Performance; Large Contractors

1. Introduction

The construction industry is well established, contributing and impacting the economy, environmental development, and society (Zhang *et al.*, 2022). It promotes employment, creates jobs, and supports other organisations' economic endeavours, and influences the standard of living of people by constructing housing and infrastructure (Pearce, 2006). The construction industry is one of the biggest consumers of raw materials and waste generators, accounting for 25% of global CO₂ emissions and 38% when combined with building operations (Ecochain, 2026), including 35% solid waste globally (Balasbaneh *et al.*, 2025). Olanrewaju, (2025) adds that, with the continuous societal expectations, construction firms face a consistent pressure of being more aware of their environment and being socially responsible through their business activities, hence a need for these firms to be more sustainable. It should be noted that CSR, has in recent years begun to attract research interest in the construction industry. However, Ebekozi *et al.*, (2024) indicate that there is a paucity of literature regarding the implementation of CSR in the construction sector. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2000) defines CSR as:

“the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local communities and society at large to improve their quality of life”.

The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) (2010) defines CSR more elaborately as the need for firms to operate ethically, transparently and make a contribution to the health and welfare of society by considering six core dimensions: (1) human rights; (2) environment; (3) labour practices; (4) consumer issues; (5) fair operating practices; and (6) community involvement and development. Considering these definitions the construction industry continues to struggle with a bad reputation for exploitation, and its negative impact on the communities and environments in which it operates, due to many activities causing pollution and environmental degradation (Mokwena, 2020). Notwithstanding the CSR implementation challenges, Nichols (2023) is of the opinion that there is a definite need to develop CSR strategies that can be employed by construction organisations, creating a sense of accountability towards environmental protection, efficient energy practices, use of sustainable materials, waste management and recycling, erosion control, employees' improvement, and community development, all of which can contribute to sustainable business performance. Wentzel *et al.*, (2022) stated that

¹ Corresponding Author

Email address: 250144530@mycput.ac.za

CSR initiatives among other: Improves an organisations prestige; Increases the organisational ability to attract good and quality staff; Improves the organisations efficiency; Positively contributes to the credibility of the organisation, and improves the organisations corporate image and reputation with various stakeholders (employees, customers/clients, investors, government, suppliers and the community) all of which contributes to sustainable business performance. Despite some research on CSR conducted from a construction perspective in South Africa, very little research focuses on CSR strategies that large contractors can utilise in order to contribute to environmental, societal, and economic sustainability and also to improve their business sustainability trajectory. Hence the following research question and aim:

- What are the CSR strategies that should be implemented by large construction firms in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, to achieve sustainable business performance?
- The aim of this study was to establish CSR strategies that could be implemented by large contractors in the Western Cape Province, to improve their sustainable business performance.

A quantitative research method was adopted, utilising an online structured questionnaire, with the link to the questionnaire emailed to large contractors who are registered on the Construction Industry Development Board (cidb) register of contractors between Grade 7 and 9 under the General Building (GB) and/or Civil Engineering (CE) work categories, in the Western Cape Province. It should be noted that the distribution of the questionnaire was guided by voluntary response sampling McCombes (2023), and that data was analysed using only descriptive (percentages, mean, standard deviation, etc.) statistics. Limitations to the research consisted of the following:

- Time constraint - The study was conducted within the limited time restricting the depth of data collection.
- Sample size - The study was confined to specific numbers of large construction firms in the Western Cape Province.
- Research design limitation - The study adopted only a quantitative approach for the study, and
- Access to Information - Some firms were reluctant to disclose detailed internal CSR data.

The following CSR strategies such as promoting energy-efficient product development; Prioritising employee health and safety; Clear reporting on social and environmental performance alongside financial results and collaborating within supply chains to ensure ethical and environmental standards are maintained throughout the project lifecycle, contribute to closing

this research gap. This assists large contractors not only achieve business operational sustainability but also impacts the environment and society where these businesses are housed and in so doing helps these businesses to balance profit and responsibility.

2. Literature review

2.1. Robust Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability Integration

A core element of CSR in the construction industry is its environmental responsibility to reduce resource consumption and waste production (Gurmu *et al.*, 2022). Large construction firms need to prioritise strategies that minimise their environmental footprint. This includes the use of cleaner production methods, the development of energy-efficient products, and circular economy practices (Munir *et al.*, 2025). For example, reducing emissions, appropriate disposal of waste, and tapping into energy from renewable sources are important environmental initiatives (Tiganis *et al.*, 2025). Sustainability includes overall waste management and the use of sustainable materials (Munir *et al.*, 2025). Companies should strive to not only meet but surpass environmental regulations and be proactive, looking for innovative solutions to help solve environmental issues to reduce regulatory risks, lower costs, enhance reputation, and ensure resource resilience (Grytskov, 2020).

2.2. Comprehensive Employee Welfare and Development

A responsible attitude towards employees is another fundamental aspect of CSR and includes fair labour practices, safe workplaces, and training opportunities for professional growth (Tiganis *et al.*, 2025). The nature of the construction industry, with its often-hazardous workplaces, makes it essential to put a high level of importance on health and safety (Zhang *et al.*, 2022). This includes ensuring non-discriminatory hiring practices, acceptable working hours, and a supportive work culture that promotes peace, wellbeing and loyalty. In addition to basic welfare, investing in employee development, including training and skills enhancement programs, contributes to improved organisational resilience and overall organisational productivity (Ma *et al.*, 2024). The higher the employee involvement rate and competency level, the better the quality of the project will be, and the more efficiently the organisation can operate, which is directly linked to sustainable performance (Zhang *et al.*, 2022; Sun *et al.*, 2024).

2.3. Ethical Governance and Transparency in Operations.

Transparency and good corporate governance are necessary conditions for increasing the trust between stakeholders and securing accountability (Tyan *et al.*, 2025). Large construction companies should have strong governance in place to manage CSR initiatives

incorporating ethical decision-making processes into all business operations. This includes clear reporting on social and environmental performance alongside financial results (Jamaluddin *et al.*, 2023). This is becoming increasingly relevant within the CSR framework, and within the context of Construction 4.0, which suggests an integration of corporate digital responsibility (CDR) within the CSR (Weber-Lewerenz *et al.* 2025). Effective corporate governance together with a properly aligned organisational structure can have a real impact on an organisation's financial and social performance which strengthens compliance, reduces corruption resulting in overall sustainable business performance (Tyan *et al.*, 2025).

2.4. Strategic Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration.

The construction industry is a complex network involving clients, suppliers, local communities and regulatory bodies (Ma *et al.*, 2024). An effective CSR strategy necessitates the engaged interaction with these diverse groups, building good relationships that are underpinned by trust and working together for project success and sustainable development (Nguyen *et al.*, 2025). This involves understanding and responding to the expectations and needs of stakeholders, which can be very different. (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). Within the realm of sustainable supply chain management, collaboration is key to upholding ethical and environmental standards throughout the project's life cycle (Munir *et al.*, 2025). Firms that engage their stakeholders are likely to have better implementation of CSR and are more aware of society's demands, which can lead to competitive advantages and reduced risks, and thereby enhance their sustainable business performance (Zhang *et al.*, 2023).

2.5. Innovation for Sustainable Development

Innovation is an essential factor for sustainable business performance in the construction sector. This includes promoting both technological and organisational innovation that supports CSR objectives (Hussain *et al.*, 2024). Sustainable innovation may take different forms; these may include the creation of designs that are energy efficient, the adoption of new construction technologies that reduce wastes or coming up with new business models that result in enhanced sustainability (Munir *et al.*, 2025). As an example, companies pursuing innovation as part of CSR initiatives are more likely to respond to changes in the market environment, to improve their competitive position, or overall sustainable business performance of the firm (Zheng *et al.*, 2022; Han *et al.*, 2022).

2.6. Community Engagement and Social Contribution

In addition to their internal operations, large contractors have an obligation to get involved in giving back to communities where they conduct their operations. It includes community investment, community

employment programs, and social impacts related to the construction process (Melo *et al.*, 2020). Such engagement builds goodwill, improves reputation and may lead to a social licence to operate, which is especially important for projects that may have substantial local impacts. (Nguyen *et al.*, 2025). Companies may undertake different types of philanthropic activities or invest in the development of local infrastructure or take part in social programmes that are beneficial to the population. This builds trust, enhances reputation and social equity, directly reinforcing the firms' sustainable business performance (Al-Swidi *et al.*, 2024).

3. Research methodology

A quantitative methodological approach in the form of a structured online questionnaire survey was used, supported by a positivism philosophy and deductive reasoning. The justification for the research philosophy stems from the fact that positivism emphasises research through empirical observations and objective truths, which seeks to find laws and regularities that apply universally using systematic and quantitative methods (Zhang, 2024). The justification for deductive reasoning was that this is commonly used to validate or disapprove propositions according to empirical habits (Bryman, 2021), linking very well with the positivism philosophy and the quantitative methodological approach adopted. Positivism was appropriate for this study as it allowed the researcher, through the online questionnaire survey, to collect structured, quantifiable data that was analysed objectively. Deductive reasoning was employed because variables related to CSR strategies found in the literature were then tested in the context of this study, allowing for achieving of the research aim. The research population was 89 large contractors who are registered on the CIDB register of contractors between Grade 7 and 9 under the General Building (GB) and/or Civil Engineering (CE) work categories, in the Western Cape Province. The 89 questionnaires were distributed utilising the voluntary response sampling method as described by McCombes (2023). Thirty (30) large contractors indicated their willingness to participate and submitted the online questionnaire. Of the 30 who submitted the questionnaire, 3 were incomplete, therefore 27 completed questionnaires were analysed. The descriptive statistics were generated and reported to analyse the respondents' profile (percentiles, frequencies) and rank the CSR strategies that could be implemented by large contractors to achieve sustainable business performance (frequencies, standard deviation, and mean scores (MSs)). To analyse the data, the MS ranges were as follows: 1.00-1.75 (strongly disagree); 1.76-2.50 (disagree); 2.51-3.25 (agree); 3.26-4.00 (strongly agree). Standard deviation was also used to report the variability (how concentrated the data are around the mean) in ranking those items that have the same mean score (Neuman,

2011). Only the mean of the items was used to show the central tendency and to rank the CSR strategies in order of having the most effect to having the least effect.

4. Findings and discussion

The demographic information of the respondents is presented in Table 1 (Appendix 1). The data shows that 52% of the respondents are male, while 48% are female. While males still dominate as workers and business owners, more women are entering the sector and taking on ownership roles (CIDB, 2025). The data also indicates that all respondents occupy senior level positions, and that most of the respondents have obtained higher education training in the construction field.

4.1. CSR Strategies that could be implemented by large construction firms to achieve sustainable business performance

From analysing the descriptive data in Table 2 (Appendix 1), it is evident that 4 variables listed have MS values between 3.26 and 4.00 (strongly agree), and the 16 remaining variables MS values between 2.51 and 3.25 (agree) indicating that large contractors in general agree with the value of the CSR strategies listed. The top two MS values related to “Robust Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability Integration” shows that large contractors strongly agree with the CSR strategy to “Promote energy-efficient product development” as it is ranked the highest (MS = 3.33); followed by the CSR strategy to “Implement circular economy practices” (MS = 3.22) as highlighted by (Munir *et al.*, 2025; Grytskov, 2020) to reduce regulatory risks, lower costs, enhance reputation, and ensure resource resilience. This agrees with the ISO 14001 principle and reflects the standards of global sustainability (KPMG, 2023).

With reference to “Comprehensive Employee Welfare and Development”, the results suggest the top ranked CSR strategy in this section is to “Prioritise employee health and safety to a high degree” (MS = 3.37) as stated by Zhang *et al.* (2022); followed by the strategy to “Ensure employee non-discriminatory hiring practices” (MS = 3.22) described by (Zhang *et al.* 2022; Ma *et al.* 2024) that the higher the employee involvement rate and competency level, the better the quality of the project, and the more efficiently the organisation can operate. This is supported by Loosemore and Lim (2018), who stated that social responsibility and transparency improve workforce motivation and a credit to firms.

Data relating to “Ethical Governance and Transparency in Operations” clearly illustrates the CSR strategies to “Include clear reporting on social and environmental performance alongside financial results” and “Building strong relationships with stakeholders based on trust and collaboration for project success and sustainable

development” both having the same (MS = 3.22 and SD = 0.58) values, which is supported by Tyan *et al.*, (2025) stating that this strengthens compliance, reduces corruption resulting in overall sustainable business performance. Ali (2023) also supports this indicating that there is a need to adopt good governance processes that manage CSR activities and demonstrate the incorporation of ethics in all business practices.

Interpreting the data related to “Strategic Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration” shows that large contractors regard the CSR strategies to “Collaborate within supply chains to ensure ethical and environmental standards are maintained throughout the project lifecycle” as the highest ranked strategies having a (MS of 3.26). This is supported by Zhang *et al.*, (2023) as leading to competitive advantages and reducing risks thereby enhancing sustainable business performance. Oyewobi *et al.* (2022), concur with this stating that innovation and stakeholders play an important role in achieving sustainable competitiveness in the construction industry.

The top MS score relating to “Innovation for Sustainable Development” shows that large contractors regard the CSR strategies to “Adopt advanced construction technologies that reduce waste” as the highest ranked strategy having a (MS of 3.26) and opined by (Zheng *et al.*, 2022; Han *et al.*, 2022) that companies pursuing innovation as part of CSR initiatives are more likely to respond to changes in the market environment, to improve their competitive position, and overall sustainable business performance of the firm.

Lastly when interpreting the data for “Community Engagement and Social Contribution” it is apparent that the top ranked CSR strategy in this section is to “Contribute positively to local employment initiatives where they operate” (MS = 3.22). This finding is supported by Melo *et al.*, (2020) who is of the view that large construction firms should get involved in giving back to communities where they conduct their operations. Hence this builds trust, enhances reputation and social equity and directly reinforcing the firms’ sustainable business performance (Al-Swidi *et al.*, 2024)

5. Conclusion and recommendations for further research

This research set out to establish CSR strategies that could be implemented by large construction firms in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, to improve sustainable business performance. The study was motivated by a continuous struggle in the construction industry related to its bad reputation for exploitation, and its negative impact on the communities and environments due to activities causing pollution and environmental degradation, all of which not just affects

the environment, society, and the economy but also the sustainable business performance of construction organisations. A quantitative methodological approach in the form of a structured online questionnaire was utilised to gather data from large contractors who are registered on the CIDB register of contractors between Grade 7 and 9 under the General Building (GB) and/or Civil Engineering (CE) work categories, in the Western Cape Province.

The main finding in the research indicated the following CSR strategies that could be utilised by large contractors to achieve sustainable business: Promote energy-efficient product development; Prioritise employee health and safety to a high degree; Include clear reporting on social and environmental performance alongside financial results; Collaborate within supply chains to ensure ethical and environmental standards are maintained throughout the project lifecycle; Adopt advanced construction technologies that reduce waste, and Contribute positively to local employment initiatives where they operate. Limitations to the research consist of the following: the study was conducted within the limited time restricting the depth of data collection and confined to specific numbers of large construction firms in the Western Cape Province, only a quantitative approach for the study was used, and the research sample being small.

The following are recommendations of this study in line with the CSR strategies highlighted:

- Strengthen managerial awareness through training mechanisms to minimise resistance and increase

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- CSR literacy across the various levels of the organisation, and
- Develop measurable CSR performance indicators to monitor and continuously improve CSR performance.
- Based on the relatively small sample size:
- Future research may be extended to other South African provinces to facilitate comparative analysis of CSR practices and sustainability outcomes in different regional and regulatory contexts.
 - A mixed-methods or qualitative research approach can be used to obtain in-depth information, regarding the CSR strategies identified in this study as well as to better understand the attitude of managers, cultural factors, and organisational dynamics affecting CSR integration.
 - Future research should examine policy and institutional frameworks, in terms of how government regulations, industry bodies and professional councils influence CSR compliance and outcomes.
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Appendix 1

Table 1: Respondents Demographic Information

S/N	Variable	Category	Frequency	(%)
1	Gender	Male	14	52%
		Female	13	48%
		TOTAL	27	100%
2	Age Bracket	20 - 30 years	2	7%
		31 - 40 years	10	37%
		41 - 50 years	6	22%
		51 - 65 years	9	34%
		TOTAL	27	100%
3	Designation	Owner	2	7%
		Chief Executive Officer	5	19%
		Chief Operating Officer	7	26%
		Chief Financial Officer	7	26%
		Director	6	22%
		TOTAL	27	100%
4		ND in Building & Civil Engineering	4	15%

S/N	Variable	Category	Frequency	(%)
	Construction-related Education & Training	Degree in Civil Engineering	4	15%
		Degree in Construction Management	3	11%
		Degree in Quantity Surveying	3	11%
		Master's in project management	3	11%
		Degree in Architecture	2	7%
		PhD in Construction Management	1	4%
		Others (Business, IT, Electrical & Mechanical)	7	26%
		TOTAL	27	100%
5	CIDB Class of Work	General Building (GB)	15	56%
		Civil Engineering (CE)	9	33%
		Both (GB & CE)	3	11%
		TOTAL	27	100%
6	CIDB Grade	Grade 7	8	30%
		Grade 8	9	33%
		Grade 9	10	37%
		TOTAL	27	100%

Table 2: CSR Strategies that could be implemented by large construction firms to achieve sustainable business performance.

Variables		Response %				Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree			
		1	2	3	4			
Robust Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability Integration								
1	Promote energy-efficient product development	4%	0%	56%	41%	3.33	0.68	1
2	Implement circular economy practices.	0%	4%	70%	26%	3.22	0.51	2
3	Prioritise adopting cleaner production methods	0%	7%	63%	30%	3.22	0.58	3
4	Firms should aim to seeking innovative solutions to environmental challenges	0%	11%	59%	30%	3.19	0.62	4
Comprehensive Employee Welfare and Development								
1	Prioritise employee health and safety to a high degree	0%	11%	41%	48%	3.37	0.69	1
2	Ensure employee non-discriminatory hiring practices	0%	11%	56%	33%	3.22	0.64	2
3	Employ fair working hours, and create a supportive work culture that fosters employees' well-being and loyalty	0%	15%	48%	37%	3.22	0.70	3
4	Invest in employees' development through training and skill enhancement programs	4%	11%	52%	33%	3.15	0.77	4
Ethical Governance and Transparency in Operations								
1	Include clear reporting on social and	0%	7%	63%	30%	3.22	0.58	1

Variables		Response %				Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree			
		1	2	3	4			
	environmental performance alongside financial results							
2	Building strong relationships with stakeholders based on trust and collaboration for project success and sustainable development	0%	7%	63%	30%	3.22	0.58	1
3	Implement robust governance structures that oversee CSR initiatives and integrate ethical decision-making into all business processes	0%	19%	48%	33%	3.15	0.72	2
4	Integrate corporate digital responsibility (CDR) within the broader CSR framework	4%	7%	59%	30%	3.15	0.72	2
Strategic Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration								
1	Collaborate within supply chains to ensure ethical and environmental standards are maintained throughout the project lifecycle	0%	4%	67%	30%	3.26	0.53	1
2	Build strong relationships with stakeholders through understanding and responding to their expectations and needs	0%	4%	70%	26%	3.22	0.51	2
Innovation for Sustainable Development								
1	Adopt advanced construction technologies that reduce waste	0%	4%	67%	30%	3.26	0.53	1
2	Pioneer new business models that promote sustainability	0%	11%	59%	30%	3.19	0.62	2
3	Foster both technological and organizational innovation that supports CSR objectives	0%	7%	70%	22%	3.15	0.53	3
4	Foster sustainable innovation through developing energy-efficient designs	4%	7%	59%	30%	3.15	0.72	4
Community Engagement and Social Contribution								
1	Contribute positively to local employment	4%	4%	59%	33%	3.22	0.70	1

Variables		Response %				Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree			
		1	2	3	4			
	initiatives where they operate							
2	Address social impacts arising from construction activities	0%	11%	59%	30%	3.19	0.62	2