

CSR in PMDDKY districts: a practical guide for PSUs choosing where to invest

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Learn how PSUs can use PMDDKY districts to make informed CSR investment decisions in digital education with this practical guide.

Key Takeaways

- PMDDKY provides a structured starting point for CPSE CSR location decisions, helping PSUs identify nationally prioritised districts.
- The Ministry of Finance encourages CPSEs to align CSR investments with PMDDKY districts, particularly for digital learning infrastructure, smart classrooms, and digital learning tools under the "Innovative Livelihood Enhancement" theme.
- A practical four-step framework simplifies CSR planning: align with operational footprint, validate education needs, assess implementation readiness, and design interventions around district priorities.
- Sustainable school digitisation depends on more than technology alone – teacher capacity building, curriculum-aligned content, assessments, and continuous support are what drive meaningful classroom adoption.

Every year, India's Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) invest significantly in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). As these investments grow, one question becomes increasingly important: **Where can they create the greatest long-term value?**

Today, that decision has become both simpler and more meaningful.

Across the country, state governments are steadily expanding digital infrastructure in government schools through Information and Communication Technology (ICT) initiatives. In many states, this journey is still in its early stages, with initial efforts understandably focused on urban and semi-urban schools where implementation is comparatively easier. As a result, schools in remote and underserved districts – the last mile within the last mile – may continue to face infrastructure constraints, limited connectivity, and other implementation challenges that require more context-specific approaches.

At the same time, the Ministry of Finance has identified common CSR themes for Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) for FY 2026–27 and FY 2027–28. Among these are support for digital learning infrastructure, smart classrooms and digital learning tools under "Innovative Livelihood Enhancement", alongside encouragement for CPSEs to adopt one or more Pradhan Mantri Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana (PMDDKY) districts aligned with their operational geography.

Taken together, these developments present an important opportunity.

Rather than duplicating investments where digital infrastructure is already gaining momentum, CSR can help extend quality digital learning to the last mile – reaching learners and teachers in districts that have historically remained underserved.

This is where PMDDKY offers a practical starting point.

The Pradhan Mantri Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana (PMDDKY) was introduced to accelerate development across approximately 100 districts identified for low agricultural productivity and related developmental challenges. Cabinet-approved for a six-year period from 2025–26 to 2030–31, the programme ensures that at least one district from every state and union territory is included.

At first glance, PMDDKY appears to be an agricultural initiative. In reality, it offers something much broader – a structured framework for identifying districts where focused development efforts can create long-term impact. Much like NITI Aayog's Aspirational Districts Programme, PMDDKY prioritises geographies that face multiple, interconnected development challenges rather than a single sector alone. In effect, these are the districts the government has already identified, through its own published shortlist, as needing focused development attention – the same lens CSR compliance teams are now being encouraged to apply to education spend.

For CPSE CSR leaders, this is particularly valuable.

One of the most important decisions in any CSR programme is choosing where to invest. PMDDKY removes much of that uncertainty by providing a nationally recognised starting point. Instead of beginning with a blank map, organisations can focus on districts that the Government of India has already identified as requiring targeted development attention.

Why PMDDKY districts are well suited for digital education CSR

While PMDDKY is centred on agriculture, the same conditions that depress agricultural productivity – weak infrastructure, thin public services, limited institutional capacity – tend to show up in the local school system too. Schools in these districts often have limited digital infrastructure, constrained teaching resources, and fewer opportunities for learners to access quality learning materials.

Digital technology is not a solution on its own. However, when combined with teacher support and aligned to local classroom needs, it can strengthen teaching, improve access to quality content, and help create more equitable learning opportunities.

For CSR teams, choosing a PMDDKY district offers several practical advantages.

- **The same structural weaknesses that limit farm productivity tend to limit school outcomes:** Low agricultural productivity is rarely an isolated indicator – it usually points to broader infrastructure and institutional gaps in a district, including in education. This gives CSR teams a data-backed reason to treat these districts as education priorities, not just an agricultural shortlist borrowed for convenience.
- **Builds on existing district-level coordination machinery:** Government structures such as Dhan-Dhaanya Samitis and district-level committees give CSR partners an institutional entry point that already exists, rather than one that has to be built from scratch for the programme.
- **Strengthens governance and transparency:** Aligning CSR investments with a recognised national priority makes geographic selection easier to justify to boards, CSR committees, and auditors, while giving CSR disclosures a clearer, pre-established rationale.
- **Provides a nationally recognised starting point:** PMDDKY gives CSR teams a defined set of

priority districts identified by the Government of India, making it easier to narrow geographic focus rather than assess districts across the country from scratch.

- **Complements, rather than replaces, local assessment:** PMDDKY serves as a decision-support framework, not a substitute for district-level needs assessments and feasibility studies, which remain essential to ensure digital education investments are relevant, feasible, and capable of delivering meaningful outcomes.

A practical framework for choosing the right district

Start with your operational footprint

- Cross-reference PMDDKY districts with the states where your organisation already operates.
- This often simplifies stakeholder engagement while allowing programmes to build stronger relationships with local communities.

Validate the education need

- Review available learning outcome data such as ASER and NAS – alongside school infrastructure indicators and state education reports.
- The objective is to identify districts where educational challenges are clearly evidenced rather than assumed.

Assess implementation readiness

- Strong execution depends on capable local partners.
- Look for organisations with demonstrated experience working alongside government schools, established relationships with district administrations, and the ability to deliver programmes at scale.
- Implementation capability often determines programme success more than technology itself.

Align interventions with CSR priorities

- Whether the need is digital classrooms, teacher support, digital libraries, or learning resources, ensure that programme design aligns with both district priorities and your organisation's CSR reporting framework.
- The Ministry's guidance already recognises digital learning infrastructure, smart classrooms and digital learning tools as part of the recommended intervention areas.

What district transformation can look like

The Project Ka-Lawei initiative in Meghalaya offers an example of what becomes possible when digital learning is introduced thoughtfully within underserved communities.

When the initiative began in East Jaintia Hills, the challenge was not simply the absence of digital infrastructure. Schools faced multiple structural barriers that affected learning. Although English was the official medium of instruction, both teachers and students were more comfortable using the local Pnar language. Classroom teaching relied heavily on textbooks, many students carried significant foundational learning gaps, and teachers had limited access to ongoing academic support. Together, these factors created significant barriers to learning.

Rather than approaching the problem as a technology deployment exercise, the district administration designed Project Ka Lawei as a broader education transformation initiative.

Working alongside the Deputy Commissioner's office, smart classrooms were introduced across government schools, but they formed only one part of the programme. The initiative combined curriculum-aligned digital content, baseline assessments to understand each learner's starting point, bridge courses tailored to learning gaps, experiential teacher training, monthly progress assessments, and continuous implementation support.

The results illustrate what sustained implementation can achieve.

Within two academic years, Class X board examination pass rates in East Jaintia Hills increased from around 28% to over 92%. During the same period, meaningful classroom use of the digital infrastructure grew from approximately 4,500 hours to more than 53,000 hours, indicating that teachers had not simply received technology – they had adopted it as part of everyday classroom practice. [Read the complete story here](#)

For CSR leadership, the story extends beyond Meghalaya.

Lasting impact comes not from technology alone, but from combining digital infrastructure with teacher support, local ownership and sustained implementation. PMDDKY districts provide a practical starting point for this approach, bringing together recognised needs with existing government focus.

Choose where it matters

Every CSR programme begins with a choice of geography. By using PMDDKY as one of the inputs to that decision, organisations can take a more structured approach to identifying districts where their investments can complement ongoing public efforts and contribute to stronger learning environments.

Looking to build a CSR programme in a PMDDKY district?

At iDream Education, we are already working with government schools across several PMDDKY districts. Our digital learning solutions are designed to adapt to different levels of school infrastructure – from classrooms with limited connectivity to digitally enabled schools – and can be customised to align with your CSR objectives, district priorities, and implementation timelines.

If you're exploring education-focused CSR investments in PMDDKY districts, we'd be happy to discuss how your programme can be designed for local needs and long-term impact.