

## CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY - ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*In India companies like TATA and Birla are practicing the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for decades, long before CSR become a popular basis. In spite of having such good glorious examples; In India CSR is in a very much budding stage. A lack of understanding, inadequately trained personnel, coverage, policy etc. further adds to the reach and effectiveness of CSR programs. Large no. of companies are undertaking these activities superficially and promoting/ highlighting the activities in Media. This research paper focuses on the finding & reviewing of the issues and challenges faced by CSR activities in India.*

**Keywords:** CSR, Corporate Social Responsibility, Societal Marketing

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## INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is becoming an increasingly important activity to businesses nationally and internationally. As globalization accelerates and large corporations serve as global providers, these corporations have progressively recognized the benefits of providing CSR programs in their various locations. CSR activities are now being undertaken throughout the globe.

### 1. What is corporate social responsibility?

The term is often used interchangeably for other terms such as Corporate Citizenship and is also linked to the concept of Triple Bottom Line Reporting (TBL), which is used as a framework for measuring an organization's performance against economic, social and environmental parameters. The rationale for CSR has been articulated in a number of ways. In essence it is about building sustainable businesses, which need healthy economies, markets and communities. The key drivers for CSR are enlightened self-interest, Social investment, transparency and trust, increased public expectations of business.

### 2. Current State of CSR in India

As discussed above, CSR is not a new concept in India. Ever since their inception, corporate like the Tata Group, the Aditya Birla Group, and Indian Oil Corporation, to name a few, have been involved in serving the community. Through donations and charity events, many other organizations have been doing their part for the society. The basic objective of CSR in these days is to maximize the company's overall impact on the society and stakeholders. CSR policies, practices and programs are being comprehensively integrated by an increasing number of companies throughout their business operations and processes. A growing number of corporate feel that CSR is not just another form of indirect expense but is important for protecting the goodwill and reputation, defending attacks and increasing business competitiveness. Companies have specialized CSR teams that formulate policies, strategies and goals for their CSR programs and set aside budgets to fund them. These programs are often determined by social philosophy which have clear objectives and are well defined and are aligned with the mainstream business. The programs are put into practice by the employees who are crucial to this process. CSR programs ranges from community development to development in education, environment and healthcare etc.

For example, a more comprehensive method of development is adopted by some corporations such as Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited, Maruti Suzuki India Limited, and Hindustan Unilever Limited. Provision of improved medical and sanitation facilities, building schools

and houses, and empowering the villagers and in process making them more self-reliant by providing vocational training and a knowledge of business operations are the facilities that these corporations focus on. On the other hand, the CSR programs of corporations like GlaxoSmithKline Pharmaceuticals' focus on the health aspect of the community. They set up health camps in tribal villages which offer medical check-ups and treatment and undertake health awareness programs. Some of the non-profit organizations which carry out health and education programs in backward areas are to a certain extent funded by such corporations.

Also Corporate increasingly join hands with Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and use their expertise in devising programs which address wider social problems.

For example, a lot of work is being undertaken to rebuild the lives of the tsunami affected victims. This is exclusively undertaken by SAP India in partnership with Hope Foundation, an NGO that focuses mainly on bringing about improvement in the lives of the poor and needy. The SAP Labs Center of HOPE in Bangalore was started by this venture which looks after the food, clothing, shelter and medical care of street children. CSR has gone through many phases in India. The ability to make a significant difference in the society and improve the overall quality of life has clearly been proven by the corporate. Not one but all corporate should try and bring about a change in the current social situation in India in order to have an effective and lasting solution to the social woes. Partnerships between companies, NGOs and the government should be facilitated so that a combination of their skills such as expertise, strategic thinking, manpower and money to initiate extensive social change will put the socio-economic development of India on a fast track.

### **3. OBJECTIVES**

The Present paper is basically concerned with the following objectives.

- To study the Issues and Challenges for CSR in India.

### **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Looking into requirements of the objectives of the study the research design employed for the study is of descriptive type. Keeping in view of the set objectives, this research design was adopted to have greater accuracy and in depth analysis of the research study. Available secondary data was extensively used for the study. Different news articles, Books and Web were used which were enumerated and recorded.

## 5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Can shareholder money be used for a company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices? Shouldn't shareholders have a say in the CSR activities of the company they are invested in?

There are many obstacles which are emerging while adopting successful CSR strategies include the difficulty in making a business case for CSR, difficulty in integrating CSR with organizational values and practices, and the lack of organizational buy-in and commitment to CSR. Other obstacles reported is the lack of time and financial resources to pursue CSR practices are directly related to the above three. When an organization finds it hard to make a business case for CSR or link it to core organizational operations, it will be reluctant to commit and allocate resources or time to such practices. Moreover, these obstacles also point to another set of findings in the report: respondents view CSR more so as a means to manage regulatory impacts, reduce risk, and respond to stakeholders concerns, and to a lesser extent as a strategic source of competitive advantage.

## 6. ISSUES & CHALLENGES

Many companies think that corporate social responsibility is a peripheral issue for their business and customer satisfaction more important for them. They imagine that customer satisfaction is now only about price and service, but they fail to point out on important changes that are taking place worldwide that could blow the business out of the water. The change is named as social responsibility which is an opportunity for the business.

Some of the drivers pushing business towards CSR include:

### **The Shrinking Role of Government**

In the past, governments have relied on legislation and regulation to deliver social and environmental objectives in the business sector. Shrinking government resources, coupled with a distrust of regulations, has led to the exploration of voluntary and non-regulatory initiatives instead.

### **Demands for Greater Disclosure**

There is a growing demand for corporate disclosure from stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, employees, communities, investors, and activist organizations.

### **Increased Customer Interest**

There is evidence that the ethical conduct of companies exerts a growing influence on the purchasing decisions of customers. In a recent survey by Environics International, more than

one in five consumers reported having either rewarded or punished companies based on their perceived social performance.

### **Growing Investor Pressure**

Investors are changing the way they assess companies' performance, and are making decisions based on criteria that include ethical concerns. The Social Investment Forum reports that in the US in 1999, there was more than \$2 trillion worth of assets invested in portfolios that used screens linked to the environment and social responsibility. A separate survey by Environics International revealed that more than a quarter of share-owning Americans took into account ethical considerations when buying and selling stocks. (More on socially responsible investment can be found in the 'Banking and investment' section of the site.)

### **Competitive Labor Markets**

Employees are increasingly looking beyond paychecks and benefits, and seeking out employers whose philosophies and operating practices match their own principles. In order to hire and retain skilled employees, companies are being forced to improve working conditions.

### **Supplier Relations**

As stakeholders are becoming increasingly interested in business affairs, many companies are taking steps to ensure that their partners conduct themselves in a socially responsible manner. Some are introducing codes of conduct for their suppliers, to ensure that other companies' policies or practices do not tarnish their reputation.

Dr. Ratnam said the concept of CSR had different meanings depending on the stakeholder and that depending on the specific situation of the enterprises expectations can also vary. A CSR project can begin in response to a crisis or adverse publicity that a company may suffer. The motive for launching CSR can vary between philanthropy or notions of corporate citizenship. In India, over time, the expectations of the public has grown enormously with demands focusing on poverty alleviation, tackling unemployment, fighting inequality or forcing companies to take affirmative action.

The survey elicited responses from participating organizations about various challenges facing CSR initiatives in different parts of the country. Responses obtained from the participating organizations have been collated and broadly categorized by the research team.

These challenges are listed below:

**Lack of Community participation in CSR Activities:** There is a lack of interest of the local Community in participating and contributing to CSR activities of companies. This is largely attributable to the fact that there exists little or no knowledge about CSR within the local

communities as no serious efforts have been made to spread awareness about CSR and instill confidence in the local communities about such initiatives. The situation is further aggravated by a lack of communication between the company and the community at the grassroots.

**Need to Build Local Capacities:** There is a need for capacity building of the local non-governmental organizations as there is serious dearth of trained and efficient organizations that can effectively contribute to the ongoing CSR activities initiated by companies. This seriously compromises scaling up of CSR initiatives and subsequently limits the scope of such activities.

**Issues of Transparency:** Lack of transparency is one of the key issues brought forth by the survey. There is an expression by the companies that there exists lack of transparency on the part of the local implementing agencies as they do not make adequate efforts to disclose information on their programs, audit issues, impact assessment and utilization of funds. This reported lack of transparency negatively International Conference on Technology and Business Management

impacts the process of trust building between companies and local communities, which is a key to the success of any CSR initiative at the local level.

**Non-availability of Well Organized Non-governmental Organizations:** It is also reported that there is non-availability of well organized nongovernmental organizations in remote and rural areas that can assess and identify real needs of the community and work along with companies to ensure successful implementation of CSR activities. This also builds the case for investing in local communities by way of building their capacities to undertake development projects at local levels.

**Visibility Factor:** The role of media in highlighting good cases of successful CSR initiatives is welcomed as it spreads good stories and sensitizes the local population about various ongoing CSR initiatives of companies. This apparent influence of gaining visibility and branding exercise often leads many nongovernmental organizations to involve themselves in event-based programs; in the process, they often miss out on meaningful grassroots interventions.

**Narrow Perception towards CSR Initiatives:** Non-governmental organizations and Government agencies usually possess a narrow outlook towards the CSR initiatives of companies, often defining CSR initiatives more donor-driven than local in approach. As a result, they find it hard to decide whether they should participate in such activities at all in medium and long run.

**Non-availability of Clear CSR Guidelines:** There are no clear cut statutory guidelines or policy directives to give a definitive direction to CSR initiatives of companies. It is found that the scale of CSR initiatives of companies should depend upon their business size and profile. In other words, the bigger the company, the bigger is its CSR program.

**Lack of Consensus on Implementing CSR Issues:** There is a lack of consensus amongst local agencies regarding CSR projects. This lack of consensus often results in duplication of activities by corporate houses in areas of their intervention. This results in a competitive spirit between local implementing agencies rather than building collaborative approaches on issues. This factor limits company's abilities to undertake impact assessment of their initiatives from time to time.

### 7. Recommendations

- It is found that there is a need for creation of awareness about CSR amongst the general public to make CSR initiatives more effective
- It is noted that partnerships between all stakeholders including the private sector, employees, local communities, the Government and society in general are either not effective or not effectively operational at the grassroots level in the CSR domain. This scenario often creates barriers in implementing CSR initiatives. It is recommended that appropriate steps be undertaken to address the issue of building effective bridges amongst all important stakeholders for the successful implementation of CSR initiatives
- It is noted that only medium and large corporate houses are involved in CSR activities, that too in selected geographical areas. This issue builds a case for more companies to be brought under the CSR domain.
- It is found that corporate houses and non-governmental organizations should actively consider pooling their resources and building synergies to implement best CSR practices to scale up projects and innovate new ones to reach out to more beneficiaries.
- It is found that many CSR initiatives and programs are taken up in urban areas and localities. As a result, the impact of such projects does not reach the needy and the poor in the rural areas. This does not mean that there are no poor and needy in urban India; they too equally suffer from want of basic facilities and services. While focusing on urban areas, it is recommended that companies should also actively

consider their interventions in rural areas on education, health, girl child and child labor as this will directly benefit rural people

- It is noted that the Government should consider rewarding and recognizing corporate houses and their partner non-governmental organizations implementing projects that effectively cover the poor and the underprivileged.
- It is noted that CSR as a subject or discipline should be made compulsory at business schools and in colleges and universities to sensitize students about social and development issues
- As there are a number of companies involved in CSR activities, it is recommended that an accreditation mechanism should be put in place for companies through an independent agency for mainstreaming and institutionalizing CSR in the main business framework of the companies.
- It is recommended that companies involved in CSR activities urgently consider pooling their efforts into building a national alliance for corporate social responsibility.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

The concept of corporate social responsibility is now firmly rooted on the global business agenda. But in order to move from theory to concrete action, many obstacles need to be overcome. A key challenge facing business is the need for more reliable indicators of progress in the field of CSR, along with the dissemination of CSR strategies. Transparency and dialogue can help to make a business appear more trustworthy, and push up the standards of other organizations at the same time. Some of the positive outcomes that can arise when businesses

Adopt a policy of social responsibility include:

### **Company Benefits**

- Improved financial performance;
- Lower operating costs;
- Enhanced brand image and reputation;
- Increased sales and customer loyalty;
- Greater productivity and quality;
- More ability to attract and retain employees;
- Reduced regulatory oversight;
- Access to capital;



- Workforce diversity;
- Product safety and decreased liability.

**Benefits to the Community and the General Public**

- Charitable contributions;
- Employee volunteer programs;
- Corporate involvement in community education, employment and homelessness programs;
- Product safety and quality.

**Environmental Benefits**

- Greater material recyclability;
- Better product durability and functionality;
- Greater use of renewable resources;
- Integration of environmental management tools into business plans, including life-cycle assessment and costing, environmental management standards, and eco-labeling.

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