Imbibing Public Libraries and Corporate Social Responsibility to Promote Rural Development

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ABSTRACT

Social responsibility encompasses the sectors like health, education, employment, income and quality of life. It should be binding on the corporate sector to work on the above aspects, which are thought to be primary social indicators. The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India is in a very nascent stage. It is still one of the least understood initiatives in the Indian development sector. The CSR represents an interesting evolution and culmination of philanthropy and ethics. It is regarded as vehicle through which companies give something back to the society. It involves providing innovative solutions to societal and environmental challenges. The corporate sector has a pivotal role to play in ensuring private investment flows to those rural areas that have been left out of the development process so far and also to work for sustainable development of rural areas in general. Public library can act as an agency for social and personal development and can become a positive agent for bringing change in the community.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, public libraries, rural development

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1970, Milton Friedman of *New York Times* rightly wrote: "Social responsibility of business is to increase profits." This view is often held and propounded by those who do not see much merit in companies being engaged in issues of social responsibility other than the making of profit. However, increasingly, the profit case, evident indicators that are tangible and the altruistic/philanthropic/ethical case, evident in the intangibles are getting blurred. In this context, the purpose is to highlight the need for a paradigm shift in the importance of greater investment in intangibles to enhance corporate value. The pressure on Indian industrialists to demonstrate their commitment to social development increased during the independence movement, when Mahatma Gandhi developed the notion of 'trusteeship', whereby the owners of property would voluntarily manage their wealth on behalf of the people. Gandhi's influence prompted various Indian companies to play active roles in nation building and promoting socio-economic development during the 20th century. The history of Indian corporate philanthropy has encompassed cash or kind donations, community investment in trusts and provision of essential services such as schools, libraries, hospitals, etc. Many firms, particularly, 'family-run businesses', continue to support such philanthropic initiatives. The CSR is not new to India; companies like TATA and BIRLA have been imbibing the case for social good in their operations for decades long before CSR become a popular cause. In spite of having such life-size successful examples, CSR in India is in a very nascent stage. It is still one of the least understood initiatives in the Indian development sector. In India, most of the corporate houses do not have a clear policy on social responsibility. While developed countries like England have separate ministries to look after the issues of corporate social responsibility. Out of very few companies who contribute to the social development; the basic intention was not to ensure the good of the nation, rather a business policy to stay away from the tax net. Social responsibility encompasses sectors like health, education, employment, income, and quality of life. It should be binding on the corporate sector to work on the above aspects, which are thought to be primary social indicators. They have enough money to serve the nation on the above segments of the society.

2. WHAT IS CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY?

A widely quoted definition by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development state that "corporate social responsibility is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving

the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large"[1].Thus, the meaning of CSR has two-fold. On one hand, it exhibits the ethical behaviour that an organisation exhibits towards its internal and external stakeholders. On the other hand, it denotes the responsibility of an organisation towards the environment and society in which it operates. The CSR centres on the relationship between business and the society, and how businesses behaves towards their key stakeholders such as employees, customers, investors, suppliers, communities, and special interest groups[2]. The CSR represents an interesting evolution and culmination of philanthropy and ethics. Specifically, corporate philanthropy has evolved from the donation of cash and products to charitable organisations because "it's the right thing to do" to more strategic philanthropy where donations are focused on a theme that has some relationship to the company's core business[3]. Similarly, ethics has evolved from the company's obligations to society to abide by the law, pay taxes, and provide employment to a more proactive approach where the firm is expected to adhere to high international codes of conduct that exceed these traditional obligations. The CSR is regarded as vehicle through which companies give something back to the society. It involves providing innovative solutions to societal and environmental challenges.

3. REASONS OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY?

Three reasons relevant in today's world are:
- Changing social expectations,
- Increasing affluence of the customers, and
- Globalisation

It is being increasingly recognised that progress and welfare of a society is not only the responsibility of the Government alone, but many more stakeholders need to be involved to attain the development goal. The corporate sector has a pivotal role to play in ensuring private investment flows to those rural areas that have been left out of the development process so far and also to work for sustainable development of rural areas in general. Corporate considers themselves as an integral part of society and accordingly act in a social responsible way that goes beyond economic performance. As a result of this shift from purely profit to profit with social responsibility, many corporates are endorsing the term CSR. It is essentially a concept whereby companies decide voluntarily to contribute to the society to make it better and environmentally cleaner. A lack of understanding, inadequately trained personnel, non-availability of authentic data and specific information on the kinds of CSR activities, coverage, policy, etc., further adds to the reach and effectiveness of CSR programmes. But the situation is changing. The CSR is coming out of the purview of 'doing social good' and is fast becoming a 'business necessity'. The 'business case' for CSR is gaining ground and corporate houses are realising that what is good for workers—their community, health, and environment is also good for the businesses.

4. INFORMATION SECTOR AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Information sector as an emerging area for the overall social development is an essential prerequisites for the present social milieu. All information problems usually stem from information poverty, the concept which appears to be highly wide-spread and a pervasive in rural India. Although several factors can be attributed to this phenomenon, the parameters are not yet established to identify the information issues in the context of rural development. Improving the quality of life of rural folk by providing greater access to the information needed to affect their development. The broad areas of rural development approaches the requirement of information and satisfying users' information needs that stand as the pillars for defining the whole spectrum of information flow to several functionaries and beneficiaries involved in rural development programmes. The two concepts of rural development and rural education are intertwined with each other to such an extent that it becomes difficult to talk of one without the other. Many include rural education as a part of rural development. Rural development, in fact, consists of strategies, policies and programmes for the development of rural areas.

Libraries have always played a vital role in promoting education and research, in developing reading habit and in the dissemination of knowledge and information. It is a matter of great concern that the role of libraries in promoting literacy and reading habit has not been fully realised in our country; whereas, the growth of interest in library as an institutional tool for adult education and promoting literacy has been on a remarkable higher key in the UK, USA, Russia, and Japan. Literacy programmes should be integrated with social, cultural and library activities. These should be planned, keeping in view the provision for library facilities. Librarians should be fully involved at each stage, right from planning to implementation covering pre-literacy, literacy and post-literacy stages. A well-developed network of public libraries would be able to play its role effectively in promoting literacy[4]. Societal needs are satisfied through various kinds of activities, each of which requires information as an input. These include, for example, education, policy formulation, research and development, personal needs, business, decision-making, mass communications, public goods and private goods. Societal needs are also satisfied at different levels, from individuals through to global

communities with information. That is why Panos[5] stated that "Access to information is an essential condition for development". From this, it could be said that information if well uttered and packaged for rural communities will exterminate poverty, ignorance and will enlighten on how to achieve economic, social, educational, 'Rural communities' in Orissa has suffered from enjoying any meaningful development largely because of policy implementation gap artificially created by the governments and leaders. The consequence of this neglect resulted in rural communities lacking access to basic needs such as water, food, education, health care, sanitation, information and security, leading to low life expectancy and high infant mortality. These conditions, considered harsh by the majority of the rural dwellers, which result their massive migration into urban areas to look for greener pasture, and often in search of formal employment, as the only option for survival.

Abid[6] identified seven types of information needs in rural areas-(i) Health problem of daily existence occupation, (ii) government, (iii) society, (iv) recreation (v) leisure, (vi) education, and (vii) religion. People in rural areas require information that helps them to identify and prepare healthy meals and how to treat diseases that they encounter. Clean water, electricity, good roads, and living wage employment are vital to daily living and productivity in their communities. To be successful, farmers require understandable information about strategic planning information like—how to develop, schedule the plant and other crops; how to gain and sustain their firms and firm- related business; and how to educate and maintain healthy families.

4.1 Concept of Rural Development

The notion of rural development has been conceived in diverse ways by researchers, ranging from thinking of it as a set of goals, and programmes to a well-knit strategy, approach, or even an ideology. There is a widely shared view that its essence should be poverty alleviation and distributive justice-oriented economic transformation. Although policy makers and the development community have widely used the phrase 'rural development', what constitutes rural development seems to have changed significantly overtimes. Today's concept of rural development is fundamentally different from that used about three or four decades ago. The concept now encompasses concerns that go well beyond improvements in growth, income and output. The concern includes an assessment of changes in the quality of life, broadly defined to include improvement in health and nutrition, education, environmentally safe living conditions and reduction in gender and income inequalities. Today, there seems to be a universal consensus that the ultimate objective of rural development is

to improve the quality of life of rural people. This makes it essential to go beyond the income-related factors such as prices, production, and productivity to a range of non-income factors that Influence quality of life and hence inclusiveness of rural development. The 1948 Cambridge Conference on Community Development defined rural development as "a movement to promote better living for the whole community, with the active participation and if possible on the initiative of the community but if this initiative is not forthcoming by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it in order to secure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement. Rural development as defined by the World Bank is simply a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a particular group of people - the rural poor. Inclusive rural development is more specific concept. It is about improving the quality of life of all members of rural society. More specifically, inclusive rural development covers three different but interrelated dimensions.
• Economic dimension
• Social dimension
• Political dimension
Economic dimension—encompasses providing both capacity and opportunities for the poor and low-income households in particular to benefit from the economic growth.
Social dimension—supports social development of poor and low-income households, promotes gender equality and women's empowerment and provides social safety nets for vulnerable groups.
Political dimension—Improves the opportunities for the poor and low Income people in rural areas to effectively and equally participate in the political processes at the village level.

4.3 Information Sources in Rural Development

Information sources and services play a very important role to meet the needs of the villagers. According to the Library Association, Britain, Community information services assist individuals and groups with daily problems-solving and with participation in the democratic process. The services concentrate on the needs of those who donot have already access to other sources of assistance and on the most important problems that people have to face, problems to do with their homes, their jobs, and their rights. This would mean a positive decision to concentrate on enabling people, particularly those in lower socio-economic groups, to act either individually or collectively on their problems in the fields of housing, employment, family and personal matters, consumer affairs, household finance, education, welfare rights and civil rights." The community information sources are those which contain information about various aspects of the community in particular and the country in general. In other words, the community

information sources carry all types of information which meet day-to-day needs and provide general information of interest to local people and about the neighborhood. The community information sources serve the following purposes:

- To make all section of people educate, enlightened, and informed

- About problems of life and to be equipped for participation in democratic process of a country;

- To provide reliable information to people on time so that the society as a whole is enabled to function in an orderly and systematic manner,

To make information available to the people at large, without any discrimination, in accordance with the concept of universal availability of information collection of the information sources is task of the information officer unlike any research library or academic library the information centre for rural development totally differ in this aspect. Basically, the sources in the rural development can be grouped- Indigenous sources (sources which are available locally and generated locally) and exogenous sources (sources available commercially)

The people in the rural society have personnel sources, viz., friends/ relatives, village elders, neighbors, panchayat leader, patwari/lekhpal, village- level worker, etc. to get the required information. Therefore, it demands for the consideration to the development of indigenous sources in the rural area which will be useful to everyone in the society. It is also to be considered that as the people become more educated and economically sound, also their tendency to read and know about more changes. Rural development requires a variable mix of information generated by government, media, NGOs, rural development practitioners, and experts. Oral and written indigenous rural knowledge passed on to generations through largely informal means, statistical information, implementation data from previous projects and schemes, etc. The sources include published and unpublished, formal and informal, print and non-print, etc. The significant constraints of facilitating information to rural people, according to the World Information Report, 1997- 98 are:

- The bulk of the population is not information- depended in day to day work and living.

- A large proportion of the population cannot consume information in written form.

- The vast majority of the population does not have the means to access information.

- People, in general, are not accustomed to pay, cannot pay or are unwilling to pay for information as it does not figure in their list of wants.

- The existing pattern of economic activities does not favour a growth in information consumption.

- The countries do not have sufficient capacity to invest in infrastructure development.

5. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Vast majorities of the India's poorest people live in villages and these villages are in a state of neglect and under development with impoverished people. The problems of hunger, ignorance, ill- health, high mortality, and illiteracy are most acute in rural areas. This is not only because of shortage of material resources but also because of defects in planning process and investment pattern. India has the potential to meet these challenges in rural areas. However, the efforts of governments may not be adequate to provide basic services to its citizens. It is observed that most of the companies have adopted CSR approach into their overall business strategy. Therefore, they have been successful in achieving the objectives of both business and social development. Their approach to work is not mainly relief, welfare, and service delivery but it is sustainable development oriented, which have long-term benefits. Vedanta Aluminum Ltd., Tata Steel, NALCO, Dr. Reddy's Labs, Lupin India, Ambuja Cement Ltd., Bharat Petroleum, SAIL believe in promoting human and social sustainable development through poverty alleviation by building capacity of rural people. Companies implement CSR programmes with respect to rural development through four types of institutions:

(a) Companies do it directly by its own CSR division or human resource department, or local management of manufacturing unit;

(b) Through a foundation;

(c) Through partnership with NGOs, academic institutions, international agencies;

(d) Through partnership with Government.

6. IMPACT OF CSR PROGRAMMES ON RURAL POOR

The impact of CSR programs in India were classified under five areas: Livelihood, health, education, environment, and infrastructure.

6.1 Livelihood

The Grameen-LABS is a programme being implemented by Dr. Reddy's Foundation in partnership with the Rural Development Department, Govt. of India. It aims to provide 35,000 livelihoods to rural youth in the age of 18-25 years in 7 states of India. The results of livelihood programmes supported by Bharat Petroleum show that the SHG group members are earning a steady income of INR 2000

per month and members of the banana plantations and poultry are earning an additional income of INR 7000 to 8000 per annum.

6.2 Health

Many companies organise a number of health camps to create health awareness and sensitise people on health related issues like: Immunization, blood donation, water purification tablets, etc. Till 2007-08, SAIL has conducted 267 health camps benefiting more than 4.5 lakh people. In Lanjigarh (Orissa), Vedanta Aluminum Ltd covered 53 villages with 32,000 villagers by providing free medicines, treatment and referral services through its mobile health units. Tata Steel Family Initiatives Foundation (TSFIF) established 'Lifeline Express' hospital on wheels which has helped over 50,000 patients in Jharkhand, Orissa, and Chhattisgarh.

6.3 Education

Aditya Birla Group provided education to 62,000 children living in proximity to the plants by running 26 formal schools. The SAIL supports around 138 schools in the peripheral areas of SAIL's plants/ units in the country where more than 80, 000 children receive education. Asian Paints set up of the Shree Gattu Vidyalaya, a school catering to 25, 000 children from class I to X. It has helped rural children gain access to formal schooling. Similarly, Satyam Computers have developed 170 modern schools benefiting 40,000 rural children.

6.4 Environment

For sustainable management and development of natural resources, many companies have been working for tree plantation, watershed management, waste management, wind firm etc. For example, SAIL has planted 13.5 million trees in and around SAIL plants/ mines so far. Watershed development programme of Ambuja Cement Ltd. covered 9,000 ha in the last four years. Sustainable water management remains the top priority of Coca Cola India Inc. So far, the company's water initiatives have improved the lives of more than 1,40,000 people and spread awareness about the crucial importance of water conservation among millions of people.

6.5 Infrastructure

Out of 14 companies surveyed only six companies are providing different infrastructural facilities like construction or development of roads, electricity, water facility, sanitation, school, health centre, community centre, etc. Lupin Human Welfare and Research Foundation's 'Apna Gaon Apna Kam' scheme covered 38,000 villages in Rajasthan and almost all villages have school buildings, drinking water, ponds, link roads, community centres, and electricity. SAIL has been involved in the construction and repair of 33 km of pucca roads per year,

thereby providing nearby two lakh people across 435 villages access to modern infrastructure facilities every year. In Andhra Pradesh, in partnership with Hyderabad Urban Development Agency, local village communities and NGOs, Coca-Cola India has helped 16,000 villagers of 'Saroor Nayar' restore existing 'Check Dam' water catchment areas.

7. ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARY

Public libraries are otherwise called community libraries. Corporate houses can finance or sponsor various programmes of public libraries to fulfill their social responsibilities towards communities. Various examples and case studies have been incorporated below to corroborate this fact. In the last few years, the rapid and very exciting developments in information technology have revolutionised the way in which information is collected, displayed, and accessed. The synergy between information and communications technology (ICT) is allowing access to information in ways hardly imaginable. Many public libraries have responded to the challenge of the electronic public libraries have an exciting opportunity to help to bring everyone into this global conversation and to bridge what is often called 'the digital divide'. They can achieve this by providing information technology for public access, by teaching basic computer skills and by participating in programmes to combat illiteracy. Corporate houses can finance these projects. However, to fulfill the principle of access for all, they must also continue to maintain services that provide information in different ways, for example, through print or the oral tradition. Such services are likely to occupy vital importance in the foreseeable future. The opportunities provided by the ICT can be utilised to develop these services in new and exciting ways.

8. SOCIAL ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARY

The public library has an important role as a public space and meeting place. This is particularly important in communities where there are few places for people to meet. It is sometimes called 'the drawing room of the community'. Use of the library for research and for finding information relating to the user's education and leisure interests, brings people into informal contact with other members of the community. Using the public library can be a positive social experience.

8.1 Agency for Change

In carrying out its role in these key areas the public library is acting as an agency for social and personal development and can be a positive agency for change in the community. By providing a wide range of materials to support education and by making information accessible to all, the public library can bring economic and social benefits to

individuals and to the community. It contributes to the creation and maintenance of a well–informed and democratic society and helps to empower people in the enrichment and development of their lives and that of the community in which they live. The public library should be aware of the issues that are being discussed within the community and provide information that will inform that debate.

8.2 Libraries without Walls

In developing policies to fulfill the role and purpose of the public library the emphasis should be on the services it provides. In meeting the needs of its community the public library will provide a range of services, some of which (for example, large collections of printed material), can be most effectively delivered from a library building. However, there will be many circumstances where it is more effective to provide the service beyond the walls of the library. Examples will vary in different societies but the principle of planning library development from a service rather than a building perspective is important in all public library policy development. The provision of services using information and communications technology also presents exciting opportunities to take library and information services direct to the home and the workplace. A variety of transports is used to deliver services to sparsely populated areas. The provision of library and information services to people unable to visit a library due to physical or sensory disability or lack of transport, for example, ensures that access to these services is available to all at their home or workplace regardless of their circumstances. The public library service in Chile has developed a variety of mobile services, bookmobiles, book boats, book boxes, backpacks and bicycles. These services offer books and cultural activities for all ages and travel across all terrains. They also serve rest homes, hospitals, and prisons.

9. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN ORISSA

Vedanta Alumina Refinery Project and OMC's Niyamgiri Bauxite Mining Project donated three Ambulances to Rayagada District Administration. The Ambulance will be mainly used for Janani Suraksha Yojana programme and emergency medical services in Rayagada. Vedanta Aluminium Limited (VAL) provides medical support to Brain Tumour Patient Doimati Batra from Mundbahali village under Kurli Gram Panchayat in Niyamgiri hill slope. To improve the livelihood of Dongria Kondh people in Lanjigarh Block of Kalahandi district, VAL introduced pineapple and bamboo Cultivation in the area. The VAL signed MoU with Zilla Swasthya Samiti, Kalahandi to upgrade health service of Lanjigarh area hospital. The ownership of the hospital will continue to remain with the Government and will

be managed by VAL under partnership-arrangement. In a response to control the spreading Diarrohea in Lanjigarh block Kalahandi, Vedanta Aluminium has joined hands with the district administration in taking number of measures to stop the spreading of the epidemic. The Company has set up temporary medical camps with one doctor and pharmacist in seven villages in the hilly tribal areas. 'Project Ujjala–Rural Electrification' is a village electrification work by Vedanta Aluminium in five villages of Lanjigarh block in Kalahandi district. The Electrification work, carried out under 'Project Ujjala' will provide electricity to more than 700 households in Jagganthpur, Balbhadrapur, Kadamguda, Kendubardi, Simlibhata village of the block. Dongria Kondh women weave success with sal leave, under the project 'Jeevika' run by VAL under its CSR programme. All these Dongria Kondh women are collecting 'sal' and 'siali' leaves from the forests, stitching them into leaf plates and selling them. On July 29, 2009, they sold 2,89,000 pieces of leaf plates for Rs 86,700 at 30 paise per plate.

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