

# Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives for Promotion of Public Libraries

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## ABSTRACT

This article is intended to understand whether the corporate social responsibility initiatives of the corporates are improving the state of public libraries. It also seeks to understand whether corporates take initiatives proactively to promote public libraries, how the public and private sectors are lending their support to the public library movement, what will be the way forward, and opportunities ahead to tap CSR resources for developing the public libraries.

**Keywords:** Corporate social responsibility, public libraries, public sector, private sector

## 1. INTRODUCTION

"No success or achievement in material terms is worthwhile unless it serves the needs or interests of the country and its people." - Mr. J.R.D. Tata

Way back in early 70's when I reached my village after my PG examinations, the only agenda before me was to prepare for competitive exams. My village being a remote place even the local vernacular used to reach only at about a mid day, leave a side any magazines. One school teacher advised me to go to a public library in a small town nearby where newspapers and magazines suitable for learning general knowledge and General English. After 6 months of my first visit to the public library, I landed in a good job. Such is the importance of public libraries for the poor people from the rural areas.

Public library, by definition, may consist of state, district, town-level libraries run by central and state governments and local bodies. By context, they may also include libraries attached to government schools. Extending their coverage and maintenance of such Libraries has become a major problem to the successive Governments due to budgetary constraints. Though, establishment and maintenance of public libraries is the duty of the government, some corporates both in the public and private sectors have taken on themselves the responsibility of spreading of education, and as a corollary they have been doing a great service to the public libraries, by way of their corporate social responsibility (CSR).

The CSR refers to the involvement of corporates in socio-economic development programmes. Generally, such initiatives are taken in the vicinity of the

area in which they operate, and sometimes at other places also depending on the cause they support. The corporates undertake a broad variety of activities covering health, education, environment, sports, music and culture etc. Many organisations give priority to health and education. In the area of education, they support/assist in construction of school buildings, providing furniture and supply of books for the libraries, etc. There are no separate initiatives observed for the purpose of promotion and development of public libraries.

## 2. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY MODELS

The CSR models followed by the corporates in general, in promotion and development of public libraries can be classified as follows:

- (a) Establishment of full-fledged libraries in govt schools.
- (b) Construction of a building for housing a library.
- (c) Supply of books or grant for purchase of books.
- (d) Assisting a library renovation.

## 3. CSR INITIATIVES IN PRIVATE SECTOR

Major private sector organisations like TATAs, Birlas, Godrej, etc. have established schools at various places and have provided excellent libraries in them. They also have provided libraries in areas around their work places. The new generation companies like Infosys, Wipro, etc., are also doing a tremendous job in promoting education along

with providing books to the libraries. Some IT companies like Microsoft, HP, Zensar, and Cadence, gift books to schools.

The Infosys Foundation partners with schools in rural India to enhance education and library facilities. It has embarked on the 'Library for Every Rural School' programme to donate books in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, and Kerala. It has set up 35,000 school libraries, the largest rural education programme in India. A book that simplifies computer education for rural areas has been published in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu. In 2010-11, the Infosys Foundation supplied books to Door Step school, a mobile school that provides free education to underprivileged children in Pune and renovated the library of Gokhale Institute of Public Affairs for research students. In 2009-10, it supplied books to book banks accessed by poor students in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. In 2008-2009, it donated personal computers to schools and the Delhi Library, and donated furniture to colleges and libraries in rural areas of Karnataka and Maharashtra<sup>1</sup>.

The Ajim Premji Foundation of WIPRO, through its Ajim Premji University and demonstration schools initiatives, is making efforts to provide good quality education. As of June 2012, demonstration schools are operational at 6 places in Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Chattisgarh. It intends to enhance the number to 100 schools by 2016. Quality education would obviously include quality libraries too. The Foundation include libraries of the Azim Premji University Library, Bangalore; Institute of Assessment and Accreditation library in New Delhi; Azim Premji Foundation's State and District Institutes of Learning and Development Libraries, Jaipur, Sirohi, Tonk, Dehradun, Uttarkashi, Udhamasinghnagar, Dhamtari, Puducherry, and Yadgir<sup>2</sup>.

The Coca-Cola India, on 1st June 2012, along with cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar and campaign partners NDTV, UN-Habitat, Charities Aid Foundation (CAF), Tata Teleservices, Pearson Foundation and Sulabh International, celebrated the completion of the 100th school under the initiative. The 'Support My School' initiative, launched in January 2011, focuses on providing sustainable sanitation facilities, infrastructural development, and improved access to water, libraries and computer centres along with teacher training in government schools across the country. The revitalisation of the first 100 schools touched the lives of over 43,000 children in 10 states with the support of its campaign partners<sup>3</sup>.

#### **4. CSR INITIATIVES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR**

In the public sector, the present day Maharatnas, Navaratnas and Miniratnas have all contributed enormously for promotion of education, there by promoting and development of libraries. One of the methods followed initially by the public sectors for

social development is adoption of villages. In the adopted villages they provide necessary facilities including libraries in the panchayats. The panchayats of course have to maintain the day-to-day running of the library. Libraries were not established in such interior places, where no one would have thought of establishing a library nor have resource to establish one. Listing out libraries provided in such adopted villages will be a herculean task. This also true with many private sector companies also who have adopted the villages.

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), India's exploration and production major, is a Maharatna public sector company. It is the highest profit making Company in India for several consecutive years. The ONGC has committed to spend 2 per cent of its profit before tax on CSR activities, making it the organisation that spends the largest amount of money on CSR in the country. The ONGC has its own CSR policy, for more than 20 years, i.e., much before the Government issued guidelines to PSUs to formulate a CSR policy of their own. The ONGC is present across the country. Present study is limited to one of its work centres at Rajahmundry.

The Rajahmundry asset of ONGC is functioning in the districts of East Godavari, West Godavari, and Krishna Districts of Andhra Pradesh. The Rajahmundry Asset responds very positively to the requests of the local people in many ways in the areas of education, health, local development, entrepreneurship, women empowerment, etc., and had spent an amount of Rs. 285 lakh, in 2010-11.

Education is an important area which is promoted by ONGC. Under this head, grants are given for construction of class rooms, furniture, compound wall, fans, lighting, drinking water, school uniform, toilets, games items, etc. ONGC also provides books to libraries in schools, upon their specific request. In the last ten years only about 30 schools in East and West Godavari Districts of AP have approached ONGC and obtained support for library-related activity. In addition to the schools, The Gautami Library, a public library at Rajahmundry was also supported by ONGC for preserving the old classics in the library.

Of late, it was observed that the proposals received by the ONGC are mainly for provision of computer-related items for the schools and the requests for library-related activity are minimal. Perhaps the digital revolution could be the reason.

#### **5. THE WAY FORWARD**

The public libraries, generally maintain a low profile. They look mainly towards government for their funding rather than tapping other available resources. Now a day, the Government has made it mandatory to all public sector companies to spend 2 per cent of their profits. Even private sector is

being asked to increase their expenditure on CSR, and an amendment to the Companies Act is also on the anvil. Taking this as an opportunity, the concerned authorities need to come out of the bureaucratic mindset, change their attitude and start approaching the organisations, officially, and seek their involvement in the development of the public library movement.

NGOs may also utilise this opportunity and propose establishment or development of existing public libraries, and work with CSR wing of Corporates in promoting public libraries.

The Government may think of establishing and maintaining, on a sustainable basis, at least one public library in every town with a population of 10,000 or more to enable democratisation of information and access to quality of education at such remote places. This can be tied up with corporates for funding under CSR initiatives. This is not to be taken as that the CSR is to supplement the Government responsibility, but the fact is that the Government is short of funds and the corporates are looking for better opportunities to invest the CSR funds in a way that promotes greater good and development of public libraries one such opportunity.

Due to lack of awareness and paucity of time, those at the helm of affairs at CSR activity cannot proactively take up the non-priority areas like the public libraries. It is for the concerned to generate awareness and involve them in the process for the benefit of the public at large.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The need for the public libraries need not be overemphasised. They cater to the rural poor to large extent even today. But their reach need to be enhances and the quality and number of the books needs to be improved. CSR activity of

the corporates can immensely contribute to the public library movement, provided they are properly approached and informed of the impact the public libraries can make on the rural poor but bright children. In our enthusiasm to develop the public libraries, we should not lose sight of the fact that, the present day generation is more tuned to the digital world, Wi-Fi connectivity, etc. have almost made lost their touch with the reading habits. Library enthusiasts also need to inculcate the reading habit amongst the youngsters to improve the foot falls in the public libraries.

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**Dr P. Vijay Kumar** is currently working as Associate Professor in Godavari Institute of Engineering and Technology, Rajahmundry. He holds an MA, LLB and an MBA degree; and also trained in Sustainability Reporting from GRI, Amsterdam. He has more than 30 years of industrial experience as HR professional in NMDC, CCI, and in ONGC as CSR consultant. He has published more than six articles on CSR in various national and international journals.