



CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY A Critical Cog in the Wheel of Development

* Mohini Daljeet Singh

Where do we stand as a country today?

We in India need to take a hard look at ourselves. Compared to other countries our track record in development is far from satisfactory. A man may have a mobile phone, but does not have access to clean drinking water, a toilet, healthcare or basic infrastructure like electricity or roads. The poorest of the poor in the world live here even while malls are springing up everywhere. The population stratification is the steepest in the world. In a country of more than 1.2 b people, we have a shortage of doctors, teachers, nurses, policemen, soldiers in fact of all skilled workmen. The harsh reality of a high rate of malnutrition and infant mortality cannot be brushed under the carpet or simply wished away. Above all, the complete breakdown of the "value system" has brought the sense of morality, ethics and social justice to an all time low.

Where is the disconnect? Is this environment conducive to growth and development? In a country sixty six years old (not young) there has been grave failure. However, it is not the time to fix responsibility for the past, but it is time to take responsibility for the present.

What is India Inc's take on this? Are we waiting for "policy change" at the national level? Can we remain myopic and unaffected, like a duck in water? I think there is an urgent call for "Back to Basics". We all have a role to play. Sustained growth has to be inclusive. Tipping of the balance will result in disaster. Social and economic asymmetries cause imbalances leading to law and order situations and even revolutions. Economic growth must be as a nation, not in exclusion of the people. The imbalance may not be obvious to some because of a large middle class population that lives in urban areas and is hopefully getting 'roti, kapda' but this constitutes a minority of the total population. With exposure to media they are also well aware of what they do not have access to leading to frustration. There are some people in tribal areas who still eat rats to survive and have no knowledge of electricity even today.

At a time when Corporate Social Responsibility is being projected as mandatory, it is the ideal opportunity for corporates to establish priorities and work on their selected platform with accountability and responsibility, focusing on areas where their efforts will result in nation building.

There is a need for corporates to take on institutional responsibility and ownership in executing CSR in the line of their business. It is simply a matter of looking and reaching outwards, out of the circle of the routine profit making cycle. This effort of reaching outwards

inevitably widens one's reach and reaps gains for the company while bringing about positive change in the environment. Such positive change from different directions merges into direct "Growth". Corporate Social Responsibility is a Win- Win situation.

What are the pre-requisites that a company should imbibe before it's CSR becomes a significant entity?

- A sense of collective responsibility
- Accountability
- An ability to see the larger picture; the larger good which will bring additional value to the company.
- A sense of nationalism; pride in the nation and its achievements. The ability to think as an Indian.
- Good Corporate Governance and Ethical practices which are also a part of Corporate Responsibility. These must filter to the individual level.

Execution needs commitment, authenticating of partners and monitoring processes. Employee's engagement is important. Involvement and support from the top management is vital for the success of CSR projects. Employees realize the importance of CSR initiatives to the company when support from top management is visible. I have seen that those employees who engage in CSR initiatives get involved and feel empowered by their personal ability to make a difference. They feel proud to belong to an organization that does good work for the needy. They are motivated and form a more committed work force.

Areas of work could be:

1. Healthcare
2. Education
3. Skills training
4. Building infrastructure
5. Environmental issues.

No doubt CSR is not the only solution. It is but a small cog in the engine of development; however it is a critical part. Without the corporates taking on the mantle of social responsibility and aiding and pressurizing the government to do its bit, this engine could come to a grinding halt

The time to act is NOW.

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