

# INDIA INC MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Taking it as their social responsibility towards the community, most of the corporate houses are becoming instrumental in bridging the gap between haves and have nots

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The recent 'Red Rickshaw Revolution' thrilled every one, an exciting new initiative by the Vodafone Foundation. On March 9, three women, Sunita, North India's first woman rickshaw driver; Laura, country head, Vodafone Foundation in India and Carina, a Vodafone Foundation supporter, embarked on a nine-day rickshaw journey from Delhi to Mumbai. They travelled across five states, covering a distance of more than 1500 kms. Along the route, they claim to have discovered and encountered many of India's unsung heroes, the 'ordinary women' doing 'extraordinary things', while raising crucial funds to empower more. The campaign stirred not just people in India but also across the world. The Foundation seeks to empower women so that they can gain an equal footing in society and to reach rural areas and support the people living there.

If funds coming from such CSR campaigns are properly channelised, many women can prove a turning point in their lives. Similarly, events like Airtel Delhi Half Marathon and Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon, annually, generate funds for the benefit of the downtrodden and financially challenged strata of society.

Today, all corporate houses want to give something back to their communities in the form of charitable projects, which is popularly referred as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Organisations contemplate on the interests of the society and take initiative to contribute to issues regarding the overall upliftment of their community in terms of health, education, sanitation and environment. Almost all organisations, big or small, from every sector in India today have commendable CSR initiatives. And they make sure their employees take an active part in them too. However, there are some organisations that have gone that extra mile and have launched some very unique and exclusive CSR initiatives.

As an integral part of their organisation, organisations today announce their CSR commitment while integrating workplace, marketplace, environment and community concerns with business operations. CSR as a concept has already taken deep roots in India and testimony to the fact is more and more entrepreneurs are waking



up to the fact that businesses do not exist in isolation. Employees, stakeholders and general public, all form an important network of industry and must cater to their social responsibilities as well.

Government and public sector companies too actively participate in CSR activities, by planting trees to protect the environment, by planning considerate policies for senior citizens and retired employees.

"When large industries like Vedanta are set-up, people do have expectations. The group is meeting the needs of those in need, while providing nutrition to the children, education and primary health, empowerment in rural women, rural sanitation, agriculture development, youth training to unemployed youth, to name a few, to help uplift the community as a whole. Reaching out to about 3.1 million people in over 1000 villages in India and across the world, Vedanta is working closely with about 150 prominent NGOs," Pavan Kaushik, head of corporate communication, Vedanta Group.

"The philosophy of giving back to the society is driven by our roots, culture and mythology. Anil Agarwal, chairman, Vedanta Group says, 'what ever we earn, a portion of it, should go back to the society'," adds Kaushik

How do corporate houses ensure that money reaches right people? Some organisations directly involve themselves in the community development issues, others work in alliance with NGOs and some big names, especially the Bollywood types work individually too.

Rajani Khamsera, ex member, Social Welfare Board, Delhi Govt, feels, "Companies must look at the financial execution part themselves. Outsourcing their responsibility to some NGO doesn't serve the purpose at all".

"To ensure effective implementation of our CSR programmes, besides the supervision by government machinery, Vedanta Group has its own dedicated team of about 200 people for direct

supervision and quality management. Committees are also set-up at village levels for rightful realisation," adds Kaushik

Besides, Khamsera strongly feels that only an iota of corporate set up genuinely contributes to the welfare community, others only look at CSR as a brand promotional activity or a competitive tool. Echoes, Mishra, "Earlier, CSR was never a priority for corporate organisations. But today it's a priority, for businesses can't grow in isolation. Two good organisations can compete with each other only if they are socially active."

Dwelling further on the role of NGOs in CSR activities and how is it a win win situation for both NGO and corporate, Santanu Mishra, co founder and executive trustee, Smile Foundation, says, "A corporate takes help of an NGO because of various social and professional reasons. Different NGOs have expertise in specific areas, with several geographical benefits. Also, a corporate always wants to associate itself with another brand while looking at its credibility in terms of governance, execution and cost effectiveness. Also, a community doesn't believe easily on the intentions of a corporate and this is where we as an NGO help, for we work with them very closely at various levels. NGOs are equally benefited, for they are able to raise funds to serve the people in need as well as in terms brand positioning."

Smile Foundation is a national level development organisation, currently claims to reach out to more than 200,000 children and youth directly through 185 welfare projects on the issues of education, healthcare, livelihood, women empowerment and advocacy across 25 states of India. It claims to work with 120 corporate organisations in their CSR activities.

Eventually, if we look at it, it's the society, which is benefiting from the corporate world. So holistically speaking, CSR is being used as a driver for inclusive development of India, in every aspect and is on the right track for better future.