

Innovative Educational Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives for Inclusive Growth in India - Challenges and Lessons Learnt

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ABSTRACT: The Companies Act, 2013 encourages the corporate sector to devote a fraction of their profits to enable education efforts in India. This is based on the premise that not only is education beneficial in itself, but it facilitates access to economic opportunities, which helps in poverty alleviation. This paper aims to understand the challenges faced by the corporate sector in implementing CSR programmes, through a case study approach of two organisations in the diversified infrastructure and chemicals sectors. The key findings are that stakeholder management viz. community, government and schools, is critical to success for educational CSR to succeed. The corporate sector has to look towards a holistic approach for education development in the pursuit of key learning outcomes. The key implications for practitioners from this study are to develop new and innovative solutions to deal with multiple complexities during implementation. They need to be sensitive towards the social and cultural context of their CSR programmes. For academicians, one of the suppositions is that they help generate consciousness and appreciation of difficulties faced at the ground level by the underprivileged among students, as well as, values rooted in creating a better world for the greater common good.

Keywords: inclusive growth, education, corporate social responsibility, industry.

1. Introduction

Inclusive growth as a strategy of economic development received attention owing to a rising concern that the benefits of economic growth have not been equitably shared (Ghosh and Chakraborti, 2010). Creation of new

economic opportunities and providing equal access to these opportunities are the congruent aspects of inclusive growth. In 2007, the Planning Commission of India stated that inclusive growth requires agents who were hitherto excluded from the process of development to become active participants in the development process. The Indian Census provisional population totals 2011, observed that only 72.99% of India's population above seven years of age was literate. The Census also highlighted the existence of a gender gap in education. While 80.89% of the males were literate in 2011, the comparative figure was 64.64% for females. Since it is believed that the human capital of a country is one of the key drivers determining the direction, speed and quality of civilization advance, availability of good quality education aimed at holistic development of every individual is a national imperative.

The concept of inclusive growth and development can be traced back to the writings of Kautilya, who in the epic *Arthashastra* extolled the virtues of a good king who created wealth and helped distribute it equitably (Prasad, 2009). The intersection with the concept of individual responsibility and personal philanthropy can be traced back to the Vedas which incorporated the *varna dharma* or social duty towards the nation, society, community, business and family. The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is an extension of the individual responsibility to the corporate sphere. The latter took root with the emergence of industry in India after 1911, when the first heavy industry for iron and steel was formed in Jamshedpur by late Jamsedji Tata. The history of CSR and education may be traced back to pre-independence period when many business houses and industrialists forayed into the education sector as enablers. Primary among them were Late Jamna Lal Bajaj, who formed the Shiksha Mandal Trust in 1919, Sir Ratan Tata who also

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formed a trust in the same year, Karve, who was instrumental in the creation of SNDT University in 1916, Raja Annamalai Chettiar who was pivotal to the creation of colleges in south India, Birla family which helped in the establishment of BITS Pilani in 1946 and Lala Shriram who helped form IIT Kharagpur in 1959.

While the period from 1991 till 2000 marked important developments in the areas of globalization and evolution of standards in various aspects of corporate working, education found focus in the form of Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015) under the aegis of the United Nations. India also took upon the target of achieving universal primary education by 2015. Horwitz and Budhwar (2015) have discussed this changing scenario in CSR functioning in the 2000s. Several initiatives have been undertaken by the corporate sector in the sphere of education. Some of the educational CSR practices include providing vocational training, aiding student placement into jobs, strengthening school infrastructure and encouraging students to complete their education through merit scholarships (Bhatnagar, 2013).

The current paper is focused on sharing the experiences of two organizations in the realm of education as part of corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts. Their efforts have been started under what researchers state to be *Educational CSR*. While literature review reveals discussions on various aspects of CSR in the education space, none of the researchers have discussed the specific challenges faced by the corporate sector in the implementation of educational CSR programmes. The studies usually take the form of generic and all-encompassing CSR enablers and barriers research. Hence, important lessons and knowledge that may be learnt by the corporate sector in specific fields may be lost without consequent gains in terms of shorter learning cycle for those interested in pursuing similar initiatives. It is with this specific objective of understanding both challenges and enablers that this research paper has been put together. This research paper should be of interest to corporate CSR professionals, especially those associated with execution on the field.

2. Lacunae in Existing Research

A detailed literature review on CSR in the Education sector was carried out to identify any lacunae in the same. According to Arevalo and Aravind (2011), several studies related to the extent of CSR practices have been conducted in India. Balasubramanian et al. (2005) have identified the motivations for conducting CSR by companies. These were stated to be interest in social improvement, belief in stewardship model and reputation

enhancement. According to Chaudhary (2009), some of the external barriers to CSR included an absence of local capabilities to carry out the work, missing community participation and unorganized non-government organizations (NGOs). Internal challenges included unclear CSR guidelines, lack of consensus on implementing CSR issues, lack of dialogue with stakeholders, weak governance and effort required for collecting information to take decisions. Various researchers have analyzed global programmes related to educational CSR. Westhead et al. (2000) examined the relationship of Shell's 1994 Technology Enterprise Programme with outcomes in terms of student ability to procure full time employment after internships. The study conducted over a 36 month period did not observe any significant relationship between students undergoing the programme and procuring full time roles. Students who underwent the programme were however observed as demonstrating a more *positive* attitude than their counterparts.

A business in the community case study on Koc Holding Co. in Turkey in the area of vocational studies highlighted how the foundation of the company in collaboration with the Ministry of Education was able to increase participation in programmes by 68% (Koc, 2006). They were able to expand the ambit of vocational education to 8,000 students from 264 schools in 81 cities, connected to 21 companies and 350 employees. Rivera (2011) investigated how CSR was being applied to educational needs in Latin America. Examples of INTEL in Costa Rica and EPM (Empresas Públicas de Medellín) of Columbia have also been studied. While INTEL's efforts were focused on creating interest in Mathematics and Science, their programmes included improvement of teaching and learning, providing technology for advanced education, as well as research and advocacy to transform education. INTEL also supported science and engineering fairs with awards and donated computers to further the cause of education.

EPM on the other hand, created programmes to improve access to and opportunities for continuing education of 12,000 students belonging to the lower income group households. For instance, educational loans could be redeemed through good academic performance and social service. Brown and Cloke (2009) have brought forward the changing role of CSR in higher education in US and UK. According to them, partnerships related to CSR have been flourishing. They have also discussed two opposing viewpoints of benefits and disadvantages of corporate involvement in university education. These provide interesting insight into CSR and Education.

However, there is significant lacunae in literature on the specific challenges related to implementation of educational CSR programmes and this needs to be investigated. An attempt has been made in this paper to study the aforementioned and it is hoped that some insights may be generated through a specific investigation into this matter.

3. Methodology

The current study has leveraged case study method through interviews and content analysis of published and internet based secondary data. The study hence leveraged both primary and secondary data to accomplish the investigation into research objectives. Two organizations, one each from the chemical and infrastructure industry were selected with the help of a network of CSR professionals. These organizations had been working in the field of educational CSR and had wide experience. The two organizations were SRF Ltd. and Adani Group. Primary data was collected through personal interview of the Senior Director of SRF Foundation. In the case of Adani, a CSR volunteer and representative was met and interviewed and an information booklet containing the experiences with volunteering procured from the team for research purpose. Websites of both the organizations, as well as sustainability reports were also analyzed. This forms the basis of data collection in both the cases.

4. SRF – Mewat Rural School Education Programme

SRF, with a turnover of over \$700 million (Rs. 4,000 crore), has been engaged in the manufacture of chemical based industrial intermediates. Its business portfolio covers technical textiles, fluoro-chemicals, speciality chemicals, packaging films and engineering plastics. Established in 1982 as the Society for Organizational Welfare, it was rebranded in 2007 as SRF Foundation. Since then, the Foundation has acted as the CSR arm of SRF to provide structured programmes for community development. Under the leadership of the Foundation Director, the CSR staff functions at three levels - corporate office, field office and village level.

The SRF Group has a strong history of delivering quality based education through distinguished institutions like SRF Vidyalaya, Lady Shri Ram College and The Shri Ram School. The aim of the CSR programmes in education is to extend the practice of academic excellence in the rural areas for the disadvantaged children. The four programmes under the SRF umbrella of educational CSR include SRF Vidyalaya (1991), project Shiksha at Bhiwadi (2005), Mewat Rural Education Programme (2010) and, Shri Sambandh (2010). SRF's CSR model is focused on *impact through collaborative partnerships*.

The present case study aims to understand the journey of the Mewat Rural Education Programme (MREP) and challenges encountered along the way. The development of the initiatives reflects the needs of the community as have presented themselves from time to time, as responses to these needs.

4.1 School and Child Transformation at MREP

The Mewat Rural Education Programme (MREP) was formulated to provide value based quality education to children in Nuh Block of Mewat district in Haryana. The SRF Foundation has been involved in 28 primary and 19 middle schools, spanning 19 villages since 2010. The target beneficiaries were 16,000 children in the age group 6 to 14 years. The other beneficiaries were about 350 teachers with respect to the capabilities programmes. SRF followed the dual strategy of developing both the school and the child to meet programme objectives.

School Transformation

In order to transform the schools in ambit, SRF Foundation worked with the schools to understand the gap in facilities, capabilities and application of technology between what existed on the ground and that which must be present in a model 21st century school. To address the gap in technology application and also to provide a holistic learning experience, in 2010-11, SRF Foundation leveraged their partnership with IBM to launch the IBM Kidsmart programme in 18 primary schools. Each Kidsmart center catered to 400 students in the age group 3 to 8 years. The programme was designed to develop cognitive, reading and physical abilities as well as creative skills amongst students. To promote the spirit of scientific temper amongst the students, it launched *Avishkar*, a mobile science van in 2012. Fitted with science equipment and models to provide practical demonstration of theoretical concepts learnt in the classroom, the van also encouraged a keen interest in science amongst both students and the village community.

To address the gaps in facilities, the Foundation helped in the development of school infrastructure like drinking water, toilets, class room furniture, laboratories, libraries and sports facilities. Teacher and school leadership capabilities have an important role to play in overall child development. Under the Shri Sambandh programme, the Foundation provided academic services like need based teacher trainings and workshops on curriculum design, preparation of learning materials, leadership skills, designing co-curricular programmes, evaluation of academic programmes and evaluation of academic performances. It partnered with Aga Khan Foundation, Aga Khan Development Network, Mewat Development

Agency and Chemical Business of SRF to provide these services to schools in Delhi, Uri, Bhiwadi and Haryana. The programme impacted 5,000 children and around 200 teachers.

Transformation of the child

One of the biggest problems faced in Mewat district was student enrollment in schools. The Jazba–E–Taleem programme, launched in 2011, aimed at increasing student enrollment with the help of community outreach programmes. In the same year, Dastak–E–Taleem initiative was created to enable field workers to visit houses for this purpose. These programmes targeted around 3,500 students who were out of school. The aim of this programme was to ensure all children were enrolled and undergoing education.

Education of girls was a key focus area of the Foundation. To help school girls, aged eleven to fourteen years, to complete their primary level education Udaan was launched in 2011 in collaboration with CARE India. Udaan is an eleven month residential programme, aimed to teach Hindi, Mathematics, Environmental Studies, Urdu and Quran to the students, after completion of which, they would be free to enroll into regular schools.

4.2 Enablers and Challenges

While enhancing education in the rural areas was a mandate of SRF, one of the key enablers of this programme was strategic partnerships with other like-minded institutions. These included governments (Department of Elementary Education, Haryana Government and Mewat Development Agency), academia, non-profit (Care India and Agha Khan Foundation) as well as the corporate sector (IBM, Coca Cola, Schneider and Tetra Pak). A formal sharing of responsibility helped the foundation achieve its targets in a shorter time span on a larger scale.

The second enabling factor was synergy in goals through a structured need assessment of the community. A continuous evaluation framework spanning project leaders, school management, village functionaries, parents and government representatives helped ensure a smooth communication of past achievements, success stories and next steps. This helped the process of change management among the stakeholders. Key challenges external to the organization were observed to be about creating a need for change and building support for change. Rapport building with multiple stakeholders and understanding their needs, which formed the basis for CSR engagement, could take between 6 months to a year. The process of obtaining permissions from the state,

district and block level functionaries also took time. It was also a difficult task to engage with village *sarpanches* and parents, to encourage them to send children to schools. This needed a prolonged and continuous interaction with the community.

Further, it was not sufficient to merely provide school infrastructure. Maintenance of the facilities like toilets required engagement of sweepers and avoidance of thefts of installations. The teachers also needed to play a more active role in ensuring adoption of hygienic practices by the school children. Key internal challenges included ensuring that the right individuals were assigned to the projects. The field office specifically was more challenging where the environment was not always conducive and required individuals to be mobile. Execution often became difficult. This required the organisation to have a nurturing environment, and to handhold staff with trainings and adequate mentoring to overcome the difficulties encountered. Staff motivation was ensured through an interesting 5R framework - where employees were encouraged to think creatively of *how fast, better, cheaper, larger and steadier* they could perform their role. A robust awards system for leading and implementing programmes helped keep the staff motivated.

5. Adani CSR Programme

Adani Group, with a turnover of \$2,084 million (Rs. 12,504 crores) is an infra-structure entity engaged in coal mining & trading, edible oil & agro-commodities trading, logistics & infrastructure for horticulture trading, agro-storage business, port operation and electric power generation using solar power (AEL, 2013). The Adani Foundation is the nodal CSR entity of the Adani Group and it was set up in 1996. Influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of Trusteeship, the foundation strived through various participatory projects to bridge the gaps in services delivered by the Government.

The foundation operated in 175 villages and towns within 6 states covering more than 1,65,000 families. It was found to focus on education, community health, sustainable livelihood, water resource development, community environment projects and rural infrastructure development as key activity areas. Within education, the Foundation was oriented to improvement of quality of education in the rural and urban areas along the lines of the UN MDGs. Their efforts included setting up their own schools as well as supporting the government schools. This took the form of Adani Vidya Mandir (AVM), Adani DAV Public School and support provided to government schools. Enhancement of student enrollment, retention,

bridging gaps in existing education system and promoting girl child education formed the key specific focus areas. Support in the form of programme, materials and infrastructure formed the backbone of their engagement.

5.1 Challenges and Enablers

This study is focused on challenges and enabling factors in the educational CSR space in Mundra Taluka in Kutch district of Gujarat. The district ranked amongst the lowest (23rd position out of 26 districts) in terms of literacy rate. The Taluka was observed as having two primary problems by the Foundation team. These were lack of enrollment and dilapidated school infrastructure. With the primary occupation of the population being agriculture and related activities, children chose to be occupied in helping their parents. For those who wanted to study, children in 60 villages were serviced by 103 government primary schools, but only 18 secondary schools and 2 higher secondary schools. A brief highlight of enrollment statistics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Enrollment of students in seventh standard, eighth standard and Pushed out of School (Source: Transforming Lives...Experiences of Adani Foundation in Mundra, Kutch, Gujarat, 2012, p 21).

<i>Enrollment - Seventh Standard</i>	
Boys	Girls
921	815
<i>Enrollment - Eighth Standard</i>	
Boys	Girls
747	357
<i>Enrollment - Pushed out of School</i>	
Boys	Girls
174	458

Apart from lack of education infrastructure, other factors like absence of safe transportation to schools, long walking distance to nearest school, social customs of lower age of marriage for girls and gender based discriminations were responsible for low school enrollment as well as school drop-outs. The inadequate infrastructure was reflected in high student to teacher ratio, 16% vacant teaching positions and lack of sufficient teachers from within the area. The staff noted that this could be one of the reasons leading to un-capitalized potential of emotional bondage to pull students to the school. The foundation focused on improving primary

infrastructure facilities, provide teaching aids and train teachers to handle government grants better.

The team realized that democratic institutions like the village level education committee played an important role in the education system and took measures to involve them. To improve access of the students to the school, the Foundation team decided to provide bicycles to all girl students, irrespective of their socio-economic status. Additionally, all male students hailing from Below Poverty Line (BPL) households were also given cycles. The male students were prioritized in such a manner that children who had passed the 8th standard and lived at a distance more than 2 km from the school received the bicycles. In 2010-11, 745 cycles were distributed, with an additional 166 in 2011-12 that were given to new girl students who enrolled in class 9.

Many other initiatives aimed at improving student teacher interaction were undertaken. An education volunteer programme was initiated to recruit local youth who had passed the 12th standard, and needed jobs. They were provided training in teaching pedagogy and provided with an incentive for their efforts. They were required to provide support to the teaching staff and also help in administrative matters of the school. However, gradually with the initiation of the *Meena* Communication initiative by UNICEF and the *Sarv Shiksha Abhiyaan*, the Adani volunteers were given duties to participate in it.

The *Meena* Communication programme was focused on girl child education and gender sensitisation. It analyzed the attendance in school and empowered children from 3rd to 7th standard, through informal institutions like the *Meena Manch* and the *Meena Cabinet*. Weekly meetings of these groups helped regular students interact with the non-regular ones to understand the reasons for non-attendance and provide information to the teachers. This helped in increasing school attendance.

The roles and responsibilities of the volunteers hence became implementation of *Meena* communication programme in schools, developing co-curricular activities, remedial teaching and creating an environment for healthy reading habits. Since the volunteers were taken from the community and knew the parents and children on a personal basis, it helped create an atmosphere of trust between the foundation and the community. The programme could hence be scaled to 78 schools in 35 villages. The teachers too were provided with frequent training to enhance their skills resulting in higher child satisfaction.

5.2 Learnings from the Adani Case Study

The case study made it clear that one of the key enablers has been the support provided by various departments of the state and central government as well as organizations like UNICEF. Experience sharing and incorporation of inputs into programmes led to cordial and professional relationship with the government officials. Third party need assessment surveys, participatory rural appraisals, formation of village development committees, cluster development advisory committees, advisory council with anacompany led to high level of engagement and participation from the members, leading to ownership and sustained adoption. The volunteers were granted flexibility in scheduling visits to schools assigned to them, leading to better results. One of the other learning's was that gender inequality needed to be addressed in the rural areas. The provision of cycles to all girl students helped address this challenge to a great extent.

6. Conclusion

The case studies have highlighted two important focus areas in the sphere of education, development of the child and the school. Development of the child has many facets. It has been seen that working with the families to ensure enrollment and provision of multi-faceted quality education is perceived as beneficial for the child. This helps ensure attendance and successful course completion. Both the case studies show that the corporate sector needed to involve the community in the development of the school and its infrastructure. The needs assessment exercise should reflect the true requirements of the school and initial engagement may require that the organizations adopt a broader and more holistic approach, which may span over a period of two to three years. Since organizations may have prior experience in a particular service e.g. construction of sanitation facilities, playgrounds or advisory service to improve curriculum etc., various organisations functioning in a particular district may adopt a collaborative approach to develop those schools which need such interventions.

In this exercise, the role of the district authorities is pivotal in ensuring corporate resources are focused in the right direction. This is what could be potentially called a cluster or area approach. As has been seen in the case of SRF, collaborations have also helped in speed and scale of delivery. This is a demonstrated approach to making a difference in the area of education. The other important learning from the case studies was the importance of focusing on operational excellence matters. This helped develop trust with the communities being served. The governance mechanism needs to be robust and

professional to ensure communication and escalation of issues, to be solved in a collaborative manner. The processes involved in service delivery need to be monitored with the right metrics to provide the right gauge into the system. It is proposed that the corporate sector should provide immersive training experience of six to eight months to university students by providing them with an opportunity to work with the community. This sensitisation exercise can be a win-win solution for the universities as well as corporate sector. This will help increase consciousness amongst the students who will be future leaders of our country and help them to look merely beyond the profit motive towards social and environmental responsibilities for the greater common good.

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