



Child Welfare CSR Initiatives of Cement Corporates in North East India

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ABSTRACT

Children below 18 years of age account for almost one third of the world population (UNICEF). They constitute the most vulnerable and marginalised section of community since they lack knowledge, physical strength and voice to raise by themselves. In India, more than 60% of the population are young that need to be taken care of with special focus on the children that constitute the future of a nation. Children constitute one of the most important stakeholders in the business community since businesses involve various external and internal stakeholders like employees, community, customers, government, the environment etc. in the operation of their business. With the gain of might, corporates or business entities are entrusted with the responsibilities of protecting the human rights of their stakeholders including children and operate in a responsible manner. In India, the adoption of the Company Act, 2013 introduced certain new provisions under section 135 of the Act and mandated for spending of annually 2% of average annual profit of latest three years for certain categories of corporates in activities as specified under schedule VII of the Act. The Schedule VII activities are adopted to encourage business in nation building process by complementing the national social policies as well as to encourage corporates in developing responsiveness towards its stakeholders. The initiatives undertaken by corporates since the inception of the Company Act in 2014 have touched many social issues benefiting the children. Education received major chunk of CSR (approximately 35%) spend by corporates in the first five years after the inception of the new policy in 2014 (The Economic Times) that goes primarily for children. On this backdrop, the present study has been conducted to examine the child welfare CSR activities of Cement industrial sector in north-east India and examine the compliance of various national and international goals. A qualitative research design has been adopted for the study and the data have been analysed manually. The results have shown that the cement corporates are implementing various child welfare CSR activities in the neighbouring communities in sectors like education, health & sanitation, nutrition, sports, covid-19 initiatives and clean energy and complied certain Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR activities, Sustainable Development Goals.

Introduction

Children constitute the most important human resources of any nation. They constitute the most vulnerable and marginalised section of community since they lack knowledge, physical strength and voice to raise by themselves. Children below 18 years of age constitute 40% of India's population which is about 400 million that account for almost one third of the world population (UNICEF). According to census report of India in 2021, 50% of India's population are below the age of 25 years and more than 65% are below 35 years of age (en.m.wikipedia.org) that need to be taken care of with special focus on the children that constitute the future of a nation. Children are entitled to a joyful childhood with nutritious diet, learning without burden and a safe environment that support children to develop themselves into perfect human resources.

In India, Children are facing various issues like malnutrition, orphanages and adoption, child labour, school enrolment and drop out issues, rape case victimisation, child prostitution, homelessness and street children issues etc. The constitution of India has included various provisions to protect the rights of children as fundamental rights and provided many directions under directive principles of state policy. On the other hand international communities are also urging the states to follow the provisions of international human rights instruments. Traditionally it is the duty of a state government to protect the rights and interest of its citizens including children. But in the current scenario, corporates are becoming integral part of the society and there is a growing acceptance that corporations also take an important role for protecting the human rights of its stakeholders. There is growing obligations on the part of the corporates to protect the rights and interest of its stakeholders as the economic might and political influences of corporations has grown, and as corporations have become more involved in delivering services previously provided by governments. Corporations have come to recognise that part of being a good corporate citizen includes respecting the human rights of those who come into contact with the corporation in some way. This might be direct contact (for example, employees or customers), or indirect contact (for example, workers of suppliers, or people living in areas affected by a corporation's activities (Lakra P., 2014). Children constitute one of the most important stakeholders in the business

community since businesses involve various external and internal stakeholders like employees, community, customers, government, the environment etc. in the operation of their business. In India, the adoption of the Company Act, 2013 introduced certain new provisions under section 135 of the Act and mandated for spending of annually 2% of average annual profit of latest three years for certain categories of corporates in activities as specified under schedule VII of the Act. The Schedule VII activities are adopted to encourage business in nation building process by complementing the national social policies as well as to encourage corporates in developing responsiveness towards its stakeholders. The initiatives undertaken by corporates since the inception of the Company Act in 2014 have touched many social issues benefiting the children. Cement corporates are implementing various CSR activities in the neighbouring communities in sectors like education, health & sanitation, rural development, skill building, sports, covid-19 initiatives, environmental conservation, clean energy etc. These initiatives by corporate sectors have potentials to boost up the socio-economic situations to a considerable extent and simultaneously complied with the Sustainable Development Goals as well as other global guidelines. As a matter of compliance of the global principles and guidelines, government of India has published the "National Guidelines on Responsible Business Conduct" principles in 2019 and recommended companies in India to follow the ten principles provided in the said guidelines for sustainable growth of corporate sectors. Community is an important stakeholder of corporates and children being an important component of the community need to be taken care of by corporates through various initiatives. On this backdrop, the present study has been conducted to examine the child welfare CSR activities of Cement industrial sector in north-east India and examine the compliance of various national and international goals especially sustainable development goals.

Research Methodology

A qualitative research design was adopted for the study using primary and secondary data. Two leading cement industries of north east India namely Star Cement Ltd. and Dalmia Cement Ltd. located in Assam and Meghalaya were selected for the study. Primary data were collected by Focused Group Discussions (FGD) with ten (10) participants including local community members, employees and social workers who were randomly selected from age group 18 to 60 years including both male and female. Secondary data were collected by content analysis of latest five years annual reports to find out the CSR initiatives undertaken by corporates that were enlisted and discussed in FGD. Data are presented in narrative form in table and analysed manually.

Results

After content analysis and focused group discussion on the CSR initiatives of cement industries, the following activities are enlisted in table 1.

Table 1: Showing CSR activities on children and SDGs complied.

Subject Area of Initiatives	Specific Activities	National/International Goals Fulfilled
Education	<p>Digital Literacy program by Star Cement in Assam and Meghalaya for the students of LP schools and middle schools under company's flagship project, "Computer on Wheels" since 2018.</p> <p>Construction of additional class rooms and toilets in the schools of Sonapur areas of Assam by Star Cement Ltd. since 2018.</p> <p>Providing learning kits and class room items like text book, dictionary, encyclopaedia, school bag, play kit etc. to neighbouring schools of cement plants. Constructed new school buildings; renovated old ones, Distributed 1,000 Anglo Assamese dictionaries, 10,000 exercise books as well as study material, umbrellas, water filters and classroom kit and Conducted remedial classes for High School Leaving Certificate students in FY2017-18.</p> <p>Promoting One Teacher School (OTS) through Ekal Vidyalaya project run by the Friends of Tribal Society (FTS) in FY 2019-20 by Star Cement Ltd.</p> <p>Construction of a school for 75 children of migrant workers at Lumshnong, Meghalaya & Initiated a scholarship programme for meritorious students in 2017 by Star Cement.</p> <p>Construction of Shyam Shishu Mandir - a primary school for the children of contractual labour in 2016 by Star Cement.</p> <p>Initiatives on sensitising 243 beneficiaries on digital literacy and setting up of 6 e-learning facilities at Ninaidevi, benefiting 1,921 school children of 6 Government-aided high schools. The roofs of the New English School, Porle Tharf Thane, Kolhapur was re-laid, which benefited 210 children by Dalmia Cement Ltd.</p> <p>The Seekho Sikhao project undertaken by Dalmia Cement in partnership with the Seekho Sikhao Foundation in Sitapur district, Uttar Pradesh, enabled 14,071 students across 19 villages to realise their potential and dreams. During the year 2020 to 2022, the company developed and distributed more than 29,000 competency-based worksheets.</p> <p>The Dalmia Cement company has also set up 2 Common Service Laboratories (CSL) at</p>	SDG 4

	Lumshonong in Meghalaya, and Ramgarh in Uttar Pradesh, in partnership with HP India. As part of the project, a container equipped with a computer and internet connection is utilised to conduct online classes for children.	
Health and Sanitation	Drinking water facilities to schools. Construction of low cost toilets at households and educational institutions at Chamata Pathar, Mohit Nagar at Sonapur area. Distribution of Sanitary napkins to girls students at schools. General health check-up camps, periodic health camps immediately after flood disasters, specialized camps, complete eye care programs basic medicines. Contributed towards development of maternity hospital for well-being of local people in the year 2019-2020. The Company had also extended financial support for development of Paediatric Intensive Care Unit in Guwahati in FY 2018-19. In Meghalaya 3 months rehabilitation programme for 24 addicted youths of Lumshonong village in the FY 2019-2020. Drinking water facilities in most of the neighboring schools and areas of cement plant since 2017. Conducted awareness programmes on family planning, sanitation and healthcare, benefiting 500 households and commercial setups in FY 2017-18. Dalmia Bharat Foundation also constructed Individual Sanitary Latrines (ISLs) in the communities around its cement plants. It also conducts awareness programmes in schools and campaigns to help mobilise communities. During the year 2020 to 2021, an exclusive School Sanitation Block was also constructed for girl students in Lanka, Assam. 37,000 villagers were reached through company's health initiatives.	SDG3& 6
Nutrition	Dalmia Cement company facilitated 40 Anganwadis with nutrition essentials, with ICDS.	SDG 2
Sports	Star Cement organised activities for development of rural sports amongst the youths in the rural adjoining areas of industrial sites of Assam and Meghalaya in FY 2019-2020. Dalmia Cement initiated Playground development activity by earth filling, construction of boundary, equipments etc. at Langsura, Dithur, Longrung, Mieungpur, Habreng, Gobindapur, 19km, Longpung at Dima Hassao districy of Assam in FY 2015-16 & FY 2016-17.	
Covid-19	During Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, initiatives were taken for free distribution of hand sanitizer and masks to around 50,000 people by Star Cement. The company Contributed Rs. 2.5 cr. to PM and CM relief fund for Covid-19. Dalmia Bharat Cement through its Covid-19 initiatives reached out to more than 1 Lakh people on pan India basis. The Company contributed Rs. 25 cr. to PM care fund in 2020 and Rs. 1.5 cr. to CM care fund in 2021 as a support for combating Covid situation.	SDG 2&3
Energy conservation And excess to clean Energy	Provided solar study lamps to students of the neighbouring community of cement plants throughout India during the last three years that has helped poor school children to study in pollution free and cost effective environment.	

Discussion

It is observed that corporates are undertaking child welfare initiatives in sectors like Education, Health and Sanitation, Nutrition, Sports, Covid-19 care, Conservation and Clean Energy that are benefiting children directly or indirectly. These initiatives have complied with several principles of sustainable development goals (SDG) at local levels. In the education sectors corporates are providing assistance to school children by providing school kits, study materials, scholarships for meritorious and poor students, drinking water facilities in school campus, digital literacy, awareness and cultural programmes, development of school playground and school infrastructure etc. In education sectors the companies have complied the sustainable development goals no 4 that aims at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In health and sanitation sectors corporates are providing services like health check-up camp, paediatric unit, awareness programme, support during covid-19 pandemic situation, drinking water facilities etc. Other important initiatives in this sector are the construction of toilets blocks at school and awareness on sanitary and sanitation to school students. These initiatives not only help villages Open Defecation Free (ODF), it also saves the expenses on medication and indirectly helping children to live in a clean and safe environment. Although these initiatives are taken at community level, children are also benefitted that have fulfilled SDG 3 that aims at ensuring healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages as well as SDG 6 that ensure access to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation. While corporates providing nutritional support to children at Anganwadi centres and distribution of ration to community members during covid-19 pandemic situation has helped to achieve goal 2 of the 2030 sustainable development agendas that seeks to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition. Energy conservation is one of the thrust area of Dalmia Bharat Foundation with its soil, water and energy conservation strategy. The Clean Lighting programme is aimed at providing access to clean and green energy by making use of solar lighting products including solar study lamps for school children. It can be observed that except education sector, children are not targeted as the prime beneficiary and in the rest of the sectors, children are benefited indirectly as part of the community. Many issues of children like school dropout, lack of access to higher education, odd practices with children, nutritional need for children, rights of children to live in a safe and clean environment, care for women employee having children etc. are needed to be cared for. But the north eastern states receive only a small per cent of the total CSR funds spent

in India. In the financial year 2016-17, only 1.24% of the CSR fund is utilized in India. Among the eight North Eastern states, only Assam receives a significant amount of CSR spending (Bas, B.K., 2020). The High Level Committee on CSR observed that the NER (North Eastern Region) is receiving a miniscule proportion of the total CSR expenditure. It is desirable to step up the flow of CSR funds in this region. Assam has received maximum CSR fund of Rs 653.19 Crores within the NER in the first four financial years after the inception of the Company Act in 2014. The funds emerging from the obligation of the corporates towards CSR activities might be a crucial source to supplement the efforts taken by the Government and also bring in efficiency in delivery of basic services to the people (HLCR, 2018). It is desirable that corporates should consider for equitable distribution of CSR funds across states and across all issues to reach the unreached.

Concluding Remarks

Corporates are spending in various sectors like education, health and sanitation, rural development, environmental sustainability etc. under its CSR policy. But very few initiatives are being taken wherein children are directly targeted as beneficiaries. Education, health, sanitation and nutrition are the sectors wherein cement corporates are directly benefiting children. Children are indirectly benefited being the members of community through other CSR activities like rural development, covid-19 care, sports, conservation and environmental sustainability etc. In some sectors corporates are co-operating with government's projects and in some other sectors CSR initiatives are overlapped with government initiatives. It is desirable that corporates should shoulder such CSR initiatives for children that are still unreached for promoting the cause of children.

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