



International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

Sustainable Development through Project Prabhat – A Case Study of Hindustan Unilever Limited

Ms. Sarvamangala K. J¹, Dr. G. Sudarsana Reddy²

¹Ph. D Research Scholar, Department of Studies & Research in Commerce Tumkur University Tumakuru – 572013. Karnataka.

Mail Id. saru9082@gmail.com

²Professor Department of Studies & Research in Commerce Tumkur University Tumakuru – 572013. Karnataka.

Mail Id. gsudarshanareddy@gmail.com

DOI- <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.4.523.42991>

ABSTRACT

Achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) is vital to achieve sustainable economic and business growth. Sustainable development refers meeting the needs of today, without compromising the needs of tomorrow. This means people cannot continue using current levels of resources as this will not leave enough for future generations. Economy, social and environment are the three pillars of sustainable development. By adopting sustainable development practices business enterprises can respond to current needs along with taking steps to develop and preserve the human and natural resources necessary in the future as well. Businesses that practice corporate social responsibility (CSR) aim at their communities, the economy or the environment. The Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) has been initiated various activities under CSR. The aim of the paper is to study the various sustainable development initiatives taken by HUL under Project Prabhat and its impact on the society by contributing economy, social and environmental development. It is a case study. The paper is purely review paper. Prabhat is the sustainable community development initiative that aims to create sustainable and inclusive communities.

Keywords: Development, HUL, Prabhat, Sustainable, Business, Growth

A country's development depends on industrialisation, which depends on the availability of various resources. The main resources are natural resources which are in scarcity. Business organisations need to use the scarce resources carefully, and protect them for future generations. Meeting today's needs without compromising the needs of future generations is known as sustainable development. For example, use of petroleum products carefully which are exhausting day-by-day without misusing is known as sustainable development. Another example, is using recycled materials or renewable resources when building, is an example of sustainable development. Therefore, the seventeen Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs) focus on the challenges confronted by humanity like ending poverty and hunger; misery and war; unfairness and inequality. Clearly, governments alone cannot achieve this big agenda, but corporate world can help government with their mammoth power, resources and knowledge. It is no longer reducing the harm and doing charity. There are a very good number of companies actively working to achieve the SDGs. For example, Schneider Electric is committed to achieving gender equality (Goal 5), by completely removing the gender pay gap for its 150,000 employees by the end of 2017. The company developed innovative processes and practices to achieve the gender equality. HUL is committed in ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns (Goal 12) through its Sustainable Living Plan and its vision to reduce its environmental footprint by 2020. Through Project PRABHAT, HUL has worked towards creating sustainable communities around its factory locations.

Objectives of the Paper

The aim of the paper is to know the various sustainable development activities initiated by the HUL under Project PRABHAT and their impact on the society.

Methodology

The research design of the paper is case study method and it is purely based on the secondary data which have been obtained from the website of Hindustan Unilever Limited. The paper is review based one and does not involve any analysis.

Sustainable Development Goals - Origin

The agenda for Sustainable Development arrived in 2015, when 193 countries made the United Nations (UN) to agree to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda comprises of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which targets for dignity, peace, and prosperity for the planet and humankind which need to be achieved by the year 2030 through various activities like poverty and sanitation, and plans to build up local economies while addressing people's social needs.

Lot of effort went into the development of SDGs over a decade of work by participating countries. In other words, they are extension of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set for the period 2000 and 2015. About one billion people lifted out of extreme poverty, combat hunger, and allow more girls to attend school through MDGs.

Areas of Focus in SDGs

The SDGs are a set of 17 pointer targets all the member countries of the UN approved to work upon for the better future of the country. There are 17 goals with 169 targets and 304 indicators as proposed by the United Nation General Assembly's Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved by 2030. Post negotiations, agenda titled "Transforming Our World: the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development" was adopted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit.

The 17 goals under the Sustainable Development Goals are: (1) No Poverty – end poverty in all its forms everywhere; (2) Zero Hunger – attain food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; (3) Good Health and Wellbeing - ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing being for all at all stages; (4) Quality Education Guarantee inclusive and equitable quality education, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; (5) Gender Equity - empower all women and girls through achieving gender equity; (6) Clean Water and Sanitation – make sure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; (7) Affordable and Clean Energy - ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all; (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth - Encourage sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; (9) Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure - Built strong infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation; (10) Reduce Inequalities - Reduce inequalities within and among countries; (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; (12) Responsible Consumption and Production - Ensure sustainable consumption and production pattern; (13) Climate Action – Take serious actions to combat climate change and its control its impact; (14) Life below Water - Preserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources; (15) Life on Land- Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably managed forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss; (16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions – Encourage peaceful and inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and (17) Partnerships for the Goals – develop partnerships for implementation of sustainable development plans. In achieving the SDGs business houses can play vital role through sustainable business.

Sustainability in Business

A business is said to be sustainable when the business operates in such a way that it reduces negative environmental impact in a particular market through sustainable business strategy. A corporate firm's sustainable business practices are naturally analysed against environmental, social, and governance (ESG) metrics. As people face irreversible changes in the Earth's system, the threat of climate change has become too risky to ignore. The exceedance of environmental verges is raising concerns about domino effects in global natural systems and societies. Business firms feel the both pressure and opportunity in formulating sustainability goals when they are not already in the practice.

Need for Sustainability in Business

Businesses are happening in an unpredictable world. Ever-surging demands on energy and food supply, diminishing natural resources, and drastic change in climate are disrupting business operations and supply chains in an unexpected ways. Therefore, it is very important now than ever for private and public firms to fundamentally rethink the way they function. Transforming into a successful sustainable business requires new levels of resilience and agility, rooted in responsible practices that preserve our planet. Sustainability is a business imperative and should be core to the strategy and operations of every business.

PRABHAT – A Sustainable Community Development Initiative by HUL

We cannot imagine a house, village, town, and city without the Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL)'s product. It is India's largest Fast-Moving Consumer Goods conglomerate with its products touching the lives of nine out of ten households in the country. HUL works to create a better future every day. Hindustan Unilever has its factories across rural areas in India. In 2013, Project PRABHAT was conceived with a very clear intent that they need to make a difference to the lives of the communities around them.

Prabhat – Developing Sustainable and Inclusive Communities

PRABHAT is the sustainable community development initiative that aimed to create sustainable and inclusive communities. It intended to build support local community in fulfilling their needs at a bottom of the pyramid as per the India's development agenda and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The activities of Project Prabhat are going on over 26 locations across the country. More than 5,000 HUL employee volunteers participated in the volunteering activities under Project Prabhat in the last seven years. In In In India around 45 lakhs people from 12 different states and two union territories have directly benefited through partnerships with over 20 NGOs.

A brief discussion of a few programs of Prabhat is in order:

1. **Economic Empowerment:** Prabhat's Livelihood centers in collaboration with Social enterprises and NGOs like LabourNet India Services Private Limited American India Foundation Trust, Yusuf Meherally Centre, Institute of Livelihood Research and Training, Anudip Foundation, Head Held High Foundation and Mooo Farms Private Limited involved in enhancing employability and income generation among rural communities and bringing a positive change. Conduct of training on tailoring, beauty and hair care shops; electrician; retail sales; e-commerce; data entry operator; tally; graphic and web design; mobile and laptop repair; welding and the like help economic empowerment. Further empowers the Prabhat beneficiaries to find right employment or start their own ventures. More than 95,000 individuals were trained and certified in skill-based training.

To improve dairy farming, they have been running Project Mooo, an app-based intervention where technology is used to enhance the income of dairy farmers. Other value chain interventions where Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) were supported to increase the yield of pulses maize, mushroom, mahua, goat farming and poultry

2. **Environmental Sustainability:** Apart from the empowering individuals through training and making them economically, project Prabhat has been making a positive impact on the environment through activities like (i) water conservation, (ii) waste management; and (iii) climate action.
 - a. *Water Conservation:* There were number of farmers whose land located around HUL factories. It has been working with farmers around its factories, under water conservation initiative, Prabhat supports farmer in managing demand and supply of water in agricultural practices. Moreover they help in plotting community water resources, provide innovative water conservation methods and collectively build strong water structures. Along with the water conservation, building water structures, farmers were able to receive good quality seeds and fertilizers as and when required. Water governance at the village level through 'Paani Panchayats' helps farmers decide the right crops to grow based on the water availability in their villages.
 - b. *Waste Management:* The waste management programme aimed at promoting the concept of 'zero waste' landfill in societies. The multiple activities undertaken under this programme are awareness sessions on segregation of waste at source, creation of a community biogas plant, setting up of kitchen gardens at a household level and in behavior change communications. Eco-vehicles have been used to collect waste at door step. The first programme on uses of biogas plant to power streetlights was launched in Haridwar in association with Swayambhu Innovative Solutions Private Limited and thereby saving energy. Further, during the COVID-19 lockdown, the project has widened in scope and plastic waste has been used to create handwashing stations have no-touch foot paddles to ensure COVID-19 safe behaviour. Taking learnings from the pilot at Haridwar and aligning with the Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0, the programme has now expanded to Pondicherry. Moreover, cleaning drives across the ghats of the Ganga River have also been executed, spreading awareness of the importance of cleanliness and protecting nature.
 - c. *Climate Action:* Prabhat involved in afforestation dives in association with Parmarth Samaj Seva Sansthan in Sumerpur, UP, Chhindwara and MP. Tree plantation drive was carried out in association with Industrial Associations and Municipal Corporation of Rajapura, Punjab.
3. **Health and Nutrition:** Good Health and Wellbeing is the third SDGs. 'Poshan Saathi' programme has been launched supporting with the National Nutrition and focused on the health of women, especially pregnant and lactating women (PLW). Under this programme, a network of Poshan Saathis spreads behaviour change on nutrition to adolescent girls, women of reproductive age, mothers of children under five and PLW.

Further, Prabhat Telemedicine Centers (PTC) and Prabhat Swasthya Seva (PSS) program were started in 10 places nearby their manufacturing plants with the aim to provide affordable and quality health care. Women can consult doctor over phone and equipment is given (pulse oximeters, medicines and oxygen concentrators as needed) for home healthcare. To support holistic health and wellbeing of communities, Centers organise bi-monthly free health camps with the support of with the Public Health Centers (PHCs).

4. **Project Shakti:** With the objective of nurturing women with an entrepreneurial mindset and financially independent a *Project Shakti* launched in villages across India. Under the Porject Shakti programme, women micro-entrepreneurs called as Shakti Ammas have been trained on the basic beliefs of distribution of HUL brands. Shakti Ammas are permitted to sell the products of HUL to retailers in nearby villages and also directly to households within their communities. The team of Rural Sales Promoters (RSPs) given train on negotiation and communication skills to Shakti micro-entrepreneurs in managing their businesses well. They also help impart training to Shakti entrepreneurs in sales, marketing, and accounting by recruiting and training sales agents from villages. Incentives to Shakti micro-entrepreneurs are now directly transferred to their banks and motivating them be a part of formal banking segment.

5. **Resilience during COVID-19:** During COVID-19 lockdown travel restrictions interrupted the distribution of products on time and became the key challenge to service Shakti entrepreneurs in remote areas. Shakti Ammas can place orders over phone for placing orders of essential products and ensure continuous supply of stock to the Shakti entrepreneurs.
6. **Asha Daan - A gift of hope:** HUL believes in '*doing well by doing good.*' In the year 1976, HUL assisted IN setting-up *Asha Daan* a home for the abandoned and children with disabilities, HIV-positive people, and the needy in Mumbai. *Asha Daan* Housed in a 50,000-square feet plot and managed by the Missionaries of Charity (founded by Mother Teresa). HUL offers care and support to the inmates at *Asha Daan* in Byculla, Mumbai thereby upkeep of the premises. It has been providing provided shelter to many for over four decades.
7. **Suvidha:** Accelerated urbanisation posing challenge in providing access to proper hygiene and sanitation facilities (clean toilets, purified drinking water, and state-of-the-art laundry services) to urban low-income households in India. The first Suvidha centre was launched at Ghatkopar. The centers built in discussion with the local community to foster a collective sense of responsibility alongside togetherness and pride since the members of the community are involved in the administration, cleaning, and managing of the day-to-day functioning of the centre. Furthermore, behaviour change programs for the communities around the centers on the importance of good habits via various interventions on WASH and nutrition to ensure improvement in individual and overall community health. To encourage maximum usage, the centers provide the amenities at an affordable cost of Rs.150 a month for a family of five and rupee one for one litre of water. Children have free access to the toilets.

Sustainability at its core - Suvidha has been carefully designed, keeping the environmental impact of water usage into consideration. Circular economy approach to water is used in the design of Suvidha like using recycled water from showers, handwashing facilities and laundry services for flushing in the toilets. The centers are saving 35 million liters of water every year. All Suvidha centers are solar powered. 9 in 10 users find Suvidha centers are easily accessible and inclusive. Suvidha toilets have access to more than two lakh people have access to clean & hygienic toilets every year. 3/4th of the users opined that use of Suvidha has improved their self-esteem. 44 per cent reduction in reported incidence of diarrhea among Suvidha users. All most (99 per cent) users reported that the toilets are clean and hygienic on all days.

Women Safety and Wellbeing -Under this programme '*Suvidha centers*' provide toilets which is easy and safe access to toilets with a separate entrance. It recued the burden on women in the communities. The centers are well-lit at night, equipped with CCTV cameras and a panic button. Further, the laundry facilities at the center have helped reduce the time spent on handwashing clothes and women have more time available for education, employment, child-care, other activities and rest

Impact of Project Prabhat

- Project Shakti impacted individual over 1,60,000 individuals to become Shakti entrepreneurs spread across 18 states. It has improved the confidence among women, enhanced skills, the livelihood, and self-esteem of women with the entrepreneurial mindsets. Prabhat's 17 Livelihood Centers have provided over 95,000 skill development certifications, generating employment for more than 50,000 people of which 70 per cent are women.
- Project Prabhat has been making a positive impact on the environment through activities like water conservation, and management; waste management with the idea of '*zero waste*' landfill in societies. Creation of community biogas plant, setting up of kitchen gardens at a household level, introduction of eco-vehicles for collecting waste at door step. Used recycled plastic in producing hand washing stations without touch using foot paddles to ensure COVID-19 safe behaviour. Prabhat involved in afforestation drives and tree plantation drives.
- Prabhat Telemedicine Centers and Prabhat Swasthya Seva program have been started in 10 locations near their manufacturing sites. It created an opportunity to the women to consult doctor over phone. Supported in maintaining health by providing equipment pulse oximeters, medicines and oxygen concentrators as needed) for home healthcare. The centers conducted bi-monthly free health check camps and supported the holistic health and wellbeing of communities.
- During the times of COVID-19, more than 12 lakhs people benefitted from the distribution of hygiene kits in the year 2021. Apart from this, Prabhat created awareness about care need to be taken during COVID-19 and distributed masks. This created employment for women by stitching face masks and cloth bags.
- Under the caption '*doing well by doing good.*' *Asha Daan* programme a home for the abandoned and children with disabilities, HIV-positive people, and the needy. It has been providing shelter to many for over four decades.
- Suvidha became a solution to the challenge in providing access to proper hygiene and sanitation facilities (clean toilets, purified drinking water, and state-of-the-art laundry services) to urban low-income households in India. The programmes saving 35 million liters of water every year.
- With the aim of *women safety and wellbeing* '*Suvidha centers*' provide toilets which is easy and safe access to toilets with a separate entrance with CCTV cameras and a panic button. The laundry facility at the center saves time and helps use the same for education, employment, child-care, other activities and rest.

Conclusion

The efforts that a business makes to maximize its economic impact that the business has on communities or societies within which it operates. This does not refer to the 'profit' that company shows on the financial statement but rather refer to how the community or society 'profits' from the presence of the business. Sustainability includes a triple bottom line in evaluating company performance: the environmental, social and economic impact of the business. Since pursuit of this triple bottom line is centered to Sustainability, HUL has contributed their best in creating sustainable communities through project Prabhat. They have worked in over 12 states, 2 union territories, nearly 2000 villages and they have impacted 3 million people of our country. Actions on water conservation and management; construction of check dams, and the concept of water Panchayat have almost tripled the income of farmers and today of life is visibly better. It has impacted over 11,400 farmers. Prabhat Livelihoods Programme is helping family unlock the impossible making dreams come true, helping people live out the biggest and most bold dreams that they could ever have. HUL has proved that corporate has capacity in building sustainable community.

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