



Prayas Approach to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

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Among the fastest developing countries India has the fourth largest economy in the world, yet we are among the poorest countries with nearly 33 percent of world's poor i.e. 1.2 billion people. National Sample Survey (NSSO) 2009-10 also indicates that poverty in India has increased and the over-all percentage of the poor has gone up dramatically from 60% in 1973-74 to 73%, in 2009-10 among the urban population and from 56% in 1973-74 to 76% in 2009-10 among the rural population, albeit based on the out-moded 2100/2400 calories' calculations by the Planning Commission of India. Mr. Suresh Tendulkar (Member, Planning Commission) Committee claimed 37% of Indian population being Below Poverty Line (BPL). Mr. Arjun Sen Gupta (Unorganized Sector Commission) report had created a sensation when it stated that 77% of Indians lived on less than Rs.20 a day. Our economist - Prime Minister, Mr. Manmohan Singh has himself accepted that not less than 40-42% people in the country are below poverty line. There are huge disparities between the rich and the poor and these ever-widening schisms are causing major conflicts and a divided social order.

From 1950 till date, during the 12-Five Year Plan periods, while travelling our way from a fully planned to a mixed economy, now we are into the era of the private economy. Today, the planning process is being routinely influenced by the business and the corporate although our socialistic government has also taken up a large number of schemes, projects and programmes to eradicate, or atleast, curb the further growth of poverty. In every budget, the government is allocating increasing amounts for the social sector that constitute Poverty Alleviation, Health, Education, Environment, Children, Women, Elderly Disabled, Deviants etc. for whom hundreds of Central/State-sponsored Schemes have been formulated, implemented, even dropped. Yet, the situation remains abysmally poor in India – whose Human Development Indicators (HDIs) are at times worse off when compared to even its neighbouring Pakistan, Nepal & Bangladesh, who are among the poorest and the least developed countries. We don't cover ourselves with glory in the given socio-economic scenario.

Sixty-five years after India's Independence our democratic profile is clear and so is the respective roles to be played by the Government, Corporate, Market & Business and the Civil Society at large. The Indian government is all pervasive – from Panchayat to Parliament or from Patwari to Prime Minister, the economy has brought us to the global forefront, and the civil society is now on the streets demanding its legitimate share and playing its role in the socio-political churning of the country.

The voluntary organizations in the socio-cultural and development sector of India has always played a significant role, but the role of NGOs in country's economic change is yet to be defined. Over the years, however, the character of the social-sector and the voluntary organizations has changed significantly. As per some reports of the Planning Commission there are over 3.5 million NGOs (an expression that goes with the voluntary organizations, civil society or community-based organizations, as distinct from the private business) in India, who may legitimately be converted into the most powerful "change agents" for our socio economic transformation. These NGOs are required to play the role of the million bridges between the government and the people by helping in the implementation of the policies and schemes and also becoming the channels of communications for the masses' aspirations. The NGOs are indeed making people aware and empower them through their direct help, awareness programmes, community meetings etc about the various privileges provided by government which they cannot access on their own.

In order to add volume and strength to these programmes, the Corporate which are the visible driving force of our economy, can play a much bigger role than what they are doing right now. In the process of the on-going discussions on the Companies Bill, 2012 which has since been passed by the Lok Sabha, the CSR valuation is estimated to be nearly Rs. 18000 Crores annually, which means that so much of money may be pumped into the social-sector in addition to the government's allocated funds. Therefore, in order to add volume and strength to these programmes, Corporate can play the most important role while they truly join hands with the civil society organizations (NGOs) who are in the business of rendering their services in the social-sector, with or without the government.

NGOs of India working in the missionary mode have a long history even before the concept of CSR emerged in the way it is being perceived today. They've been working silently and selflessly for the reforms, social upliftment and development of the country. These NGOs are essentially service delivery organizations working amongst the poor and needy while employing the local people for the emancipation of their own areas, which automatically generate a sense of belongingness and responsibility while serving their own people.

NGOs are often playing a dual role when they become partners with the government amongst the deprived people in the rural areas and lend voice to the destitute in the government at the same time. Government is aware of the presence of NGOs in the remotest of areas and thus often depending on them for surveys, research, studies of its programs & policies. Today, the

