

Can CSR alleviate Poverty?

Dr. R Ramakrishnan

Chief Consultant, Vivin Consultant

Kamarajar Street, Aynambakam, Chennai 600095 INDIA

E-mail: ramakrish54@gmail.com

Abstract:

Big Global corporations have become influential in the last five decades. Governments used promote development for economic activities with Rich nations offering foreign aid to poor nations. Development is constrained due to high economic poverty, hunger, high mortality rates, unsafe water supplies, poor education systems, corrupt governments, war, and poor sanitation. No development is real unless it addresses the poverty as Hunger and Poverty continues to be the world's most fundamental and urgent issues.

Wealth creation is the key to poverty alleviation. Business must have clear goals and practical targets to be in its best. CSR is an increasingly important part of the business environment and a crucial bridge between organizations and society. CSR is propelled into the limelight in recent years. The development impact of the CSR strategies is complex as it demands for increased transparency, accountability and responsibility. Accountability is a core-element of governance as is equity, transparency, participation and adherence to the rule of law. Bureaucratic and political accountability need to be improved for making effective and efficient use of the nation's resources.

Key words: CSR, Development, Poverty Alleviation, Business, India

Introduction:

Big Global corporations have defined markets influencing the behavior of a large number of consumers in the last five decades. There has been massive transformation on the role of the government and the business over the years. The distinction between them has blurred. Many of the corporations yield more power than many governments. Public Private Partnerships is yet another area where both are together.

Governments have entered into the commercial domain on one hand and business sector through their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities are doing many welfare and development schemes. CSR is a complex aspect of the relationship between business and society. This has resulted in stakeholder orientation for business from the shareholder management. Shareholders of course are also Stakeholders. Business of business is thus no longer business alone and has to take social responsibilities being part of the society.

Historically many believed Government as the driver for growth. Governments played the prime role for promoting development taking prime responsibility for economic activities believing that the markets in developing countries are not reliable like developed economies. Rich nations used to offer foreign aid to poor nations only through the governments. But the results were very much disappointing as many poor countries become poorer. Growth can occur only when governments do not intervene and stay out of the way, and allow the development that would occur naturally.

Development is constrained due to high economic poverty, hunger, high mortality rates, unsafe water supplies, poor education systems, corrupt governments, war, and poor sanitation

Earlier governments in the developing countries established public sector enterprises and held monopoly over many key commodities. Governments Control over production, distribution and price resulted in the licence-raj that killed development in its infancy itself.

Escobar (2011)¹ equates development with the need and the means to provide better lives for people in poor countries. It includes apart from the crucial economic growth, human development—providing for health, nutrition, education, and a clean environment. Business Dictionary (2014)² defines development is the process of economic and social transformation based on complex cultural and environmental factors and their interactions.

No development is real unless it addresses the poverty as Poverty continues to be the world's most fundamental and urgent issues. We must understand Poverty as the denial of various choices and opportunities basic to human development. Poverty had increased with industrialization. Development thus should not be equated with economic growth, as measured by GDP.

Business and enterprises plays a crucial role in the social and economic development of a nation. They are providing livelihoods for the majority of the world's people and can provide the resources and technologies for eradicating poverty. No country can ever achieve development in without economic growth. Wealth creation is the key to poverty alleviation. Economic growth and Wealth generation are the foundations of business's capacity to contribute effectively for improved environmental and social conditions and are instrumental in bringing about sustainable development. Ramakrishnan(2008) ³ asserts that Business can play important role by providing resources and technologies towards eradicating poverty The business sector is the most important agents of development and change as they provide 90 percent of jobs, goods and services and contribute maximum tax revenues for the governments. Business is a core human activity that balances the economic, social and environmental issues over the short and longer-term. Business must have clear goals and practical targets to be in its best.

The products, services and their consequences by business are essentially more social than economic.

The essential conditions for business recommended by CBC& DFID(2006)⁴ are :

- Good governance;
- A steady direction of policy;
- Investment in infrastructure;
- A competitive market environment
- A transparent and effective regulatory framework;
- Zero tolerance of corruption.

CSR is an increasingly important part of the business environment and a crucial bridge between organizations and society that create awareness amongst Corporates, NGOs, civic bodies and government of the value and importance of social responsibility. It has evolved from Corporate Philanthropy to Stakeholder management and Sustainable development over the years to bridge the gap between the privileged and the disadvantaged of society. CSR is an extension of efforts to foster strong corporate governance.

CSR is a commitment to a set of values that recognize the role of business in building a better society. Valor (2005),⁵ Fairbrass et al (2005)⁶ and Blow field & Frynas (2005)⁷ identify CSR as an umbrella concept. Freeman(1984)⁸ and Crane and Matten (2004)⁹ conclude that the concept of CSR has led to the emergence of a variety of practices due to the range of contrasting definitions

World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)¹⁰ has thus defined CSR as "Business' commitment to contribute to sustainable

economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community, and society to improve their quality of life.”

Development is a complex issue that operates at many levels and diverse ways. The importance of business as an actor in the development of society is the result of the globalization of the world economy and the related trade liberalizations. In the last thirty years, the financing of economic development has changed enormously.

CSR is as a commitment to a set of values that recognize the role of business in building a better society. The concept of CSR has led to the emergence of a variety of practices due to the range of contrasting definitions. The proportion of the amount from the Private sector for development has increased manifold with Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for developing countries and reduced aid from governments.

Hunger is the most important problems and needs to be addressed on priority. World Bank report (2006)¹¹ estimates 19.4% of the world population (more than one billion people) live on less than one U.S. dollar a day. This has to be addressed by engaging managers, employers and all other stakeholders by building a virtuous cycle within the corporate value chain. Business, the main driver of economic development can provide the resources and technologies for eradicating poverty. Corporations were created at the end of the sixteenth century for managing colonial trade. Over the centuries, their legal form slowly changed as they became free to choose their own activities. Corporations have a legal identity, distinct from the people who run it, having some civil and legal rights. Corporations are an integral part of society and influence all aspects of public and private life making them important and powerful players in today's world. They have a clear stake in ensuring people are treated properly, receive fair and equitable wages, and operate under safe working conditions. Due to increasing influence and power of corporations, CSR is propelled into the limelight

in recent years. CSR includes environmental, social, and governance issues and extends beyond the interests of shareholders to the interests and needs of diverse stakeholders.

CSR thus links the organizations and society to understand the value and importance of social responsibility among all the stakeholders. They can reduce the gap between the privileged and the disadvantaged of society.

Business and society are interdependent. Business need to take full account of the societal expectations. It is the masses, more than classes, that really nurture business. CSR matters as the enterprises can impact their employees, communities and other stakeholders through them. It mirrors the core values of the society when it is developed voluntarily that goes beyond legally- required actions. CSR thus involves increased efforts for aligning corporate goals with those of society. CSR widen understanding of the potential risks and opportunities for the business while offering wider social or environmental gains as it encourages companies to look at a wider range of stakeholder interests. Firms can become more competitive in terms of product quality when they have closer links with consumers understand their needs better. For meeting goals of poverty reduction partnership between business, governments and civil society groups is essential. Maximization of shareholder wealth was the only objective fifty years back as Business meant profit making as articulated by Milton Friedman. He considered this corporate responsibility as a “subversive doctrine” threatening the very foundation of free enterprise society (Friedman, 1962). He argued that corporations existed to make money for its shareholders, and need to be responsible by engaging in free and open competition without deception or fraud.

Crane and Matten (2004)¹³ traces the range of social activities of business, conducting many functions previously exercised by government. Corporates assumed more power and control with

Globalization and the introduction of privatization, liberalization. This change can be seen by an increasing (actual or perceived) impotence of the governments. A new social structure came with the change in society with the rise of democratic institutions. The concept of welfare nation led to the social republic making government doing many of the jobs done by corporations. The free-market spirit dominating the global economy today has eroded the ability of governments to regulate business activities. Institutions provide the framework that drives the society and economy towards development. North (1990) asserts that the quality of institutions and the relationships of the different institutions in society also act as a determinant of economic performance and development of the country and is supported by Coase (1992), (1998).

Development and institutional change do not occur overnight. Corporations thus need to have a long-term engagement character by involving community and contribute to development through their CSR strategies. Further they should be focused at those groups in society who are in the greatest need of development assistance.

Keefer and Knack (1997)¹⁷ explain the underdevelopment in Third World countries by the prevalence of an inefficient institutional environment in these countries. There is thus need for institutional change to promote development. Development activities and interventions needs to be designed carefully with proper planning to be of good quality to provide significant and sustainable benefits.

According to the doctrine of social responsibility, Quality of life is as important as quantity. Business activities have consequence beyond the production of goods and services and business is responsible for those consequences. By being both effective and efficient, the socially responsive organization meets its social responsibilities without wasting organizational resources in the process Business

need to protect and improve the welfare of society in areas like consumer affairs, environmental affairs, and employment practices. CSR offers real opportunities for the governments of developing countries by developing capacity within public policy and regulatory institutions to free up existing resources, and make additional resources through partnership.

Public participation is recognized as the face of sustainable development. Public sector actors can mandate public participation in defined circumstances relating to private sector investment as Governments are large-scale consumers themselves.

We have now public business coexisting with private entrepreneurship. Public companies were started to avoid monopoly and exploitation. Five roles for public sector engagement with CSR identified by IIED for the World Bank Group(2007)¹⁸ are

- Regulation;
- Facilitation;
- Partnership;
- Endorsement; and
- Demonstration.

Though these roles are distinctive, in practice more than one of these government roles, can be seen in the policy instruments of the governments for promoting CSR

In the era of globalization, Corporations and business can no longer confine to the traditional boundaries of the nation-state due to the spread of the market and the change to highly decentralized mode of production. Earlier businesses were more or less localized and periodic acts of charity constituted CSR. With the current global business environment,

business must have deliberate policy and strategy to capture the entire environment systematically on sustainable basis.

Principles of Sustainable Development is closely linked with CSR and argue that enterprises should be obliged to make decisions based not only on financial/economic factors but also on both the immediate and the long-term social, environmental and other consequences of their activities

Contemporary academic literature that analyses or examines the characteristics of efficient CSR strategies in terms of their development impact are not many. Orlitzky et al(2003)¹⁹, points out that most of the academic articles on CSR treat the concept of CSR primarily from the perspective of the individual firm, study the trade-off between profit motives and social responsibility which is supported by Garriga and Melé(2004)²⁰. Effects of CSR on the community is almost absent from these studies.

The impact of CSR and its contribution to development received little attention in the current development economics discourse. The economic and social perspective has a greater potential to treat the interests of all in the society, while the management perspective is oriented in the profit-making objectives of the corporations. Hence the economic and social perspectives on CSR and its contribution to development need to be considered.

According to Keith Davis (1975)²¹ organizations as members, draw resources from society. And must return to society the value of those resources as required by the society. In his opinion

1. Social responsibility stems from social power enjoyed by the firm.
2. The firm should disclose to the public its activities through social audit.
3. For decision making, the social costs and

benefits of social responsibility activities and services should be calculated.

4. The Price must include the social costs.
5. By improving education, the firms should solve societal problems.

Globally, CSR has emerged as an important area of action for large corporations. These Corporations must find solutions to global problems. Governments, NGOs and the media must make them accountable for the social consequences of their activities. Carroll (1991)²² captured the essence of CSR by his famous pyramid that implies four dimensions from which business strategy should be built.

- The foundation of a responsible company is not to be profitable alone
- Society demands the company to obey the law also
- Expects it to be ethical toward all stakeholders and
- Be a good corporate citizen in the communities it lives and operates.

For Visionary companies CSR is an opportunity knowing that responsible practices are good for society as well as for business. Business leaders have slowly seeing the connection between sustainability and sustaining the business enterprise. Both calls for balancing acts among influential stakeholders between long and short term.

Successful economic regeneration is vital for reversing the deep rooted problems of the most deprived areas and require real business involvement to build strong and healthy communities of these deprived neighborhoods. According to Farahmand (2011)²³ Corporations may be influenced to adopt CSR practices by several drivers

- Ethical consumerism
- Globalization and market forces
- Social awareness and education
- Ethics training
- Laws and regulation

Good governance, good domestic policies and partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders are vital for development success. Business sector and entrepreneurship can play a key role in generating wealth, economic opportunity and widespread societal benefits. Prosperous companies are the best guarantee of economic development and job creation. Companies can contribute effectively to the improvement of social conditions by creating jobs and economic growth only when they are profitable and successful.

CSR can widen understanding of the potential risks and opportunities for the business while offering wider social or environmental gains when they look at a wider range of stakeholder interests. Prabhakar and Misra (2013)²⁴ identified the drivers pushing business towards CSR as:

- The shrinking role of government
- Demands for greater disclosure
- Increased customer interest
- Growing investor pressure
- Competitive labour markets
- Supplier relations

The development impact of the CSR strategies is complex as it demands for increased transparency, accountability and responsibility. NGO can complement existing state regulatory systems as

watchdogs in CSR by monitoring with increased transparency, improved technical capacities, and new mechanisms of accountability for workers and consumers. They have the ability to audit companies and to report their findings to concerned consumers with their organizational power and resources than the individual consumer. NGOs are positive towards CSR as they can influence corporations to comply with their requests.

Palmqvist (2007)²⁵ categorizes the operational phase of the CSR strategies of international companies in a developing context into two main categories

- Social and environmental concerns of a company related to its internal structure are in the first category such as occupational health and safety, minimum wages, anti-corruption, human rights compliance at the workplace and maintaining good relations with supplier and employees. Venkateswaran (2004)²⁶ identifies the primary tool used for these issues as the code of conduct, established by the individual companies outlining the priorities and standpoints..
- The second category is related to the external society outside the company includes voluntary projects of a philanthropic character relates to community development.

The four principal aims of most of the developmental activities are:

- Promoting increased stakeholder participation
- Getting feedback and learning at each stage;
- Using Logical Framework and other results-oriented management tools and
- Changing our attitudes, behaviors and skills in support of each of the above.

Maintaining adequate stocks of financial, produced, natural, human and social capital is essential

for Sustainable development. The life cycle of any development initiative from initial idea to completion and evaluation follows as under

- Identification
- Problem and situational Analysis
- Design
- Start up
- Implementation
- Monitoring review impact evaluation and
- Building partnerships

All Corporates irrespective of size and orientation are trying to earn customer loyalty through community development schemes, good corporate governance and by engaging stakeholders, within and outside the company. It is therefore necessary that managements at all level understand the scope and content of CSR to make value added contributions towards building the company's brand image and reputation.

Fierce competition has given way to co-operation and collaboration. and corporations has to woo their employees, customers and other stakeholders for their survival. For a developing country like India, these changes are very significant.

Kumar and Balsari (2004)²⁷ traces the long traditions of engaging in philanthropic activities and participating in community development by the Indian society and industry. CREM-

report (2004)²⁸ identifies them to the rich and nuanced cultural and religious background of India. Reed (2004)²⁹ and Roy (2005)³⁰ describes the Notions of generosity and trust, as advocated by Gandhi and his followers as having served as an ideal for many business leaders both during pre and

post-independence times. Chatterjee and Pearson (2000)³¹ find the current Indian business society as a complex mix of ancient traditions that appreciated ethical values and the institutional and corporate values of the colonial period.

The economic reforms 1990s opened the Indian economy for international competition and privatization. According to Kumar (2006),³² India gained increasing importance in the world economy after the economic reforms in 1991 by deepening its integration with external trading partners and opening up its borders to international investment and liberalized trade. According to Balasubramanian et al.(2005)³³ and Baxi (2005)³⁴, CSR as a driver for the development of the relationship between business and society have accelerated swiftly in India during the last ten to fifteen years, in line with the general progress of CSR in the world economy. However, India's rapid economic growth has not translated automatically into development of the country and improved living conditions for the population.

India became the first country to have CSR spending mandated by the law in 2013. Dharmapala and Khanna (2016) ³⁵ found a substantial increase in CSR activity among companies subject to section 135,³² which is an indication that the legislation has had a positive impact on CSR spending. Several studies indicate that while CSR in the run up to the Companies Act, 2013 was less than desirable, there was gradual increase among Indian companies in their focus towards CSR.

Farrington and Clarke (2006)³⁶found migration from rural areas into the cities has increased, following the growth of the Indian economy resulting in increases in urban poverty, slum-dwelling and urban homelessness .

In any economic activity, Labor force plays the most important role and has the capability to define the growth and development of any country. The migrant labor force that forms the secondary labor

market from rural areas present a pressing situation concerning poverty and underdevelopment. As lower income families often end up paying more than middle income and high income families for their day to day necessities from groceries to automobiles, being poor is a costly affair.

As per the World Economic and Social Outlook Report, (2016),³⁷ more than 90 per cent of workers in India are in vulnerable unorganized sector without suitable legislation or appropriate representation. Most of them work in the agricultural sector and about almost half of them are self-employed or smallholders. The ILO Conventions drawn up, to fit the needs of European countries with well-established categories of workers and employers, are hardly suitable for these Indian workers.

Partners in Change (2000)³⁸ and Sagar and Singla (2004)³⁹ found that the most CSR compliant companies operating in India are large, well-established Indian business houses and large international companies. Kumar and Balsari (2004)⁴⁰ found the majority of the workforce in India is not employed by these large companies, but belongs to small or medium sized companies or are associated with the unorganized sector of the Indian economy . CSR thus likely to touch only a fraction of the Indian workforce.

SMEs constitute a pillar of the Indian economy and the primary source of employment, their vitality is stifled by a number of handicaps. They have limited human resources and people with less skills as people with good core skills prefer to work for well established companies. SMEs have trouble financing their growth as they are less appealing for banks and investors. Further the cost of penetrating international markets and networks are prohibitively high in proportion to their capacities.

In developing countries development of the SMEs is crucial for improving the impact of business

on society. CSR commitment of big companies, must include SME development and then only improvements in social and environmental impact can go hand in hand with improvements in quality and management. SME in India have not much awareness about CSR and looked CSR as expenses. They are slowly awakening to the necessity of adopting a holistic approach to the community. And becoming a good corporate citizen is essential to their long term well-being. It is no longer a question of affordability of being socially responsible, and more a question of the costs involved of not being a responsible corporate citizen.

Commitment to CSR is moving increasingly from passive philanthropy to more active and strategic engagement in line with the growing recognition and development of CSR in India. Businesses must realize that community awareness and service is not an option but a requirement, with the growth of consumerism and wealth in urban India. Balasubramanian et al. (2005)⁴¹ and Caprihan and Shivakumar (2004)⁴² find that corporations in India are adopting an approach where CSR becomes an integral part of the strategic business planning,

The greatest potential for success in the global economy is having an educated, healthy, and adaptable workforce. High-quality education and health care coverage for all are indispensable to fighting poverty. Development can have real meaning only when these two objectives are achieved. India still has the largest number of working children in the world and the progress made in the case of children's welfare seems to be very nominal. On the positive side, India has made some progress in overall indicators: infant mortality rates are down, child survival is up, literacy rates have improved and school dropout rates have fallen.

The Indian economy is still challenged by widespread poverty and increasing gaps between different income groups creating opportunities for CSR to contribute to development. Accountability is a core-element of governance as is equity, transparency,

participation and adherence to the rule of law. In a country like India, with the largest number of poor people in the world, good governance has to mean being pro-poor and gender conscious. Bureaucratic and political accountability need to be improved to fight corruption, and promote people's participation for making effective and efficient use of the nation's resources.

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