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Volunteering to lead from the front



Chemical manufacturers in India have undertaken several path-breaking steps under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme to make a meaningful difference to society. The initiatives encompass right from water management, health and education to recycling waste. The results of such initiatives have tremendous effect on society.

■ Prasenjit Chakraborty

There has been a significant transformation in the way CSR is being perceived throughout the world. 'Responsible Care' is a social initiative adopted by 90 per cent of the chemical manufacturers globally. "The India chapter of the chemical manufacturers has been encouraging alignment with these global norms, indicating that CSR is undergoing a paradigm shift from simple philanthropy towards initiatives focussed on the Millennium Development Goals, thus resulting in sustainable solutions at the grass roots level," points out Sudhir Singh Dungarpur, Head & Partner - Development Sector Practice, KPMG, India.

CSR activities could be categorised into community development initiatives on health, education, women empowerment, financial inclusion, and environmental

issues. There has been a transformation in the outlook towards CSR, with companies becoming more open, flexible, transparent, responsible and accountable towards these initiatives. "Besides advising our clients in this sector on CSR strategies, we have also assisted them with developing systems for reporting, measurement and monitoring these initiatives on a regular basis," says Dungarpur. There are different areas of CSR such as education, farming, sustainability, self-employment initiative for women, etc.

Imparting education

Education seems to be the most preferred area for companies. Naturally, several companies have taken initiatives in this direction. For instance, in India, LANXESS has carried out several projects in the area of education and skills training. These initiatives have been undertaken in schools and training institutes near its sites in Jhagadia and

Nagda located in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, respectively. "As a part of child welfare and education programme, we have supported the girls' education initiative by the Government of Gujarat, namely Kanya Kelavani Nidhi," says Dr Joerg Strassburger, Country Representative and Managing Director, LANXESS India Pvt Ltd. Similarly in Nagda, LANXESS supports self-employment at Shaskiya Prathamik Vidyalaya. In order to support girl students, sewing machines, embroidery machines and peripherals such as ceiling fans, water purifiers, etc, were provided to them so that they are trained in tailoring along with their academic curriculum.

Similarly, Dow Corning worked with the Dhoksangvi School (near Pune) to provide them with a science laboratory and a library, which provide the senior students with better and more convenient learning opportunities. "Earlier, a mobile science laboratory used to visit the school once a year and they did not have a library at all," points out David Longo, Site Manager, Pune Manufacturing Facility, Dow Corning. It also conducts regular science days at its plant to create awareness about silicones and their benefits in everyday lives. Students also participate in sessions on career development, personal development, safety and hygiene.

In order to promote a better learning atmosphere, Akzo Nobel has helped with the construction of a government school classroom in Cholappanahalli, a small village about two kilometre from its factory in Bengaluru.

Farming arena

The approach of CSR varies from company to company; however, the goal is same - social development and community welfare. For instance, integrated water management is the key programme of Tata Chemicals Society for Rural Development (TCSR) in the Mithapur region of Gujarat as non-availability of quality water is one of the biggest concerns of this drought-prone region. The initiative immensely

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benefitted the farming community of this region. "This programme has helped in creating 246 million cubic foot capacity of water in the parched area of Mithapur and has provided critical irrigation facilities covering 6,895 acre of land. About 236 medium water harvesting structures such as check dams have been built for better percolation and water harvesting. Moreover, 2,165 small water harvesting structures such as farm ponds, farm bunds have been deepened and salinity pushed back by increasing the underground water buffer," says Alka Talwar, Head – Community Development, Tata Chemicals Ltd. The programme has helped in improving the production by 40 per cent and achieving a direct economic gain by Rs 240-270 lakh per year.

TCSR's Livelihood Development Programme seeks to strengthen income-generating capacity of marginal farmers who are not adequately covered by the 'Natural Resource Management Program'. It focusses on micro-enterprise development, aimed at building capacities through extensive training, helping identify enterprise opportunities and supporting these activities through micro-finance and marketing. The main vehicles driving this component are the formulation of self-help groups in villages; the Rural Entrepreneurship Development Programme; skill-building through Vocational Training Programme; Uday Foundation (rural BPO) and promotion of rural handicraft (Okhai). This programme has spurred the self-help group members into utilising their savings for investing in an enterprise.



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Country Representative and Managing
Director, LANXESS India Pvt Ltd

It has helped in increasing individual savings leading to financial security. "Collaboration with organisations such as Dalit Shakti Kendra, NABARD, and Gram Technology has further strengthened this programme. So far, 5,521 people from 62 villages have undergone skill development training programme," says Talwar.

As a responsible corporate citizen, Akzo Nobel is also not far behind. It works in the interiors of Maharashtra and helps below-poverty-line farmers towards development of barren land. "We are associated with the Department of Botany (RJ College) so that we could assist the farmers in planting fruit-bearing trees and also help them with inter-farming techniques. This project won an award for being the best community practices project, within Akzo Nobel, globally," says Asesh Sarkar, General Manager, RD&I, Decorative Paints, Akzo Nobel India. Plans are also afoot to go a step further; it is working on a water harvesting project on the same land.

Sustainability initiative

For chemical companies, sustainability is one of the prime focus areas. Keeping this in mind, in 2011, LANXESS celebrated 'World Environment Day' with Stree Mukti Sanghatna (SMS) – Women's Liberation Organisation. SMS is an NGO that works for the welfare of women rag pickers and offers professional services for office waste management by holding a 'best from waste' paper competition where the SMS team judged and selected winners. LANXESS India now collaborates with them for recycling its used paper in support of the cause of zero waste. SMS converts this waste into branded stationery for internal use.

Similarly, TCSR's Environment Conservation and Care programme encompasses renewable energy and bio-diversity reserve plantation project. Restoration and conservation of coastal ecosystems such as coral reef restoration, mangrove plantation, and protection of endangered species such as whale shark,



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Head – Community Development,
Tata Chemicals Ltd

Asiatic lion have been undertaken in partnership with institutions of excellence – Wild Life Trust of India (WTI), and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Under this initiative, 275 whale sharks have been rescued till now. Eco-clubs have also been formed to create awareness among the community members on environment conservation.

Going proactive

According to Dungarpur, best practices in CSR were evolved internationally in the early 1990s under the Kyoto and Basel conventions, and these were proactively adopted by companies in Europe. Many of these practices have been formalised under the 'Responsible Care' industry initiative promoted by the International Council of Chemical Associations. "These include bans on production of various chemicals deemed harmful to the environment. Not all these bans are enforced in India, due to which many Indian firms have been generally reactive rather than proactive in their adoption of sustainability and CSR initiatives," he points out.

Larger Indian companies have responded to evolving standards being enforced by their global clients. The Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) regulations of 2006 require buyers of chemicals in Europe to be able to trace inputs back along their supply chain to the original producer. Those Indian firms that are part of such supply chains have rapidly developed wide-ranging CSR responses. It is time for others to follow suit. ■

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