



IN THE MAKING - CSR AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN SOUTH ASIA

*An Exploratory review of the CSR scenario
in Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Pakistan and
Sri Lanka*

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SAWF



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INTRODUCTION

“Companies ...are moving beyond corporate social responsibility to social innovation. These companies are the vanguard of the new paradigm.” Rosabeth Moss Canter, Harvard Business Review

For businesses worldwide, corporate social responsibility, or CSR, has come to be understood as a broader obligation to stakeholders, not just a narrow answerability to shareholders. In theory, CSR is getting more and more in line with economist John Elkington's elevating principle of the Triple Bottom Line that gauges organisational success on social, ecological and economic fronts all at once. Triple bottom line directly addresses any business' three key concerns—people, planet and profit.

It would seem that women's rights would find a prominent place of focus within these three concerns. However, in practice, Corporations have limited focus on women's rights or on issues related to women. In its annual audit of funding sources for global women's rights organisations, the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) found that less than 1 per cent of the revenue of these organisations came from corporate contributions. For the report called 'Where Is the Money for Women's Rights,' AWID surveyed 1,000 women's organizations in 94 countries worldwide.

This review aims to build an understanding of CSR initiatives and assess the position of women's rights concerns in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

CSR IN SOUTH ASIA

The developing countries of South Asia are fighting poverty, inequality, conflict and lack of infrastructure and access to basic resources. The Non-governmental (NGO) sector in this region receives grants from donor agencies but there is negligible public-private sector partnership towards NGOs and human rights work. In this review, CSR is seen through John Elkington's Triple Bottom Line lens of how businesses engage with society, the environment and the community around them.

The success of CSR in any country is linked to its integration in the global supply chain. The more business it does internationally, the greater the spread of CSR within its businesses. India and Sri Lanka, therefore, have a greater awareness of CSR. In Nepal and Pakistan, where business is still evolving, CSR is much less evolved. In Bangladesh, the garments sector is more integrated into the supply chain and therefore, experiences more CSR. It is the same with carpets in Pakistan and Nepal.

In South Asia, corporate responsibility is becoming a prerequisite for sourcing goods and services. Gap, for example, inspects every factory in its supply chain for speed, innovation, cost and social responsibility standards, rejecting about 15 per cent every year. It has become clear that some sort of CSR policies are necessary to give companies a competitive edge in global business. Another trend is the emergence of institutes and NGOs that work specifically on raising the awareness of CSR through workshops and conferences, and consulting services that advise firms on CSR.

Governments have stopped short of legislating on CSR, issuing guidelines at most, and informal statements at

least. Some countries focus on giving tax benefits or other incentives for CSR. Sustainability reports and other such disclosures have become more common. In this region, businesses operate without much transparency or information-sharing, so the inclination to report and disclose is a positive development. Usually, the chosen areas of intervention are education and health with mostly underprivileged children. Most of the activities reviewed are cast in a set mould, with little creativity and innovation. Donations are common, but grant giving is still at a nascent stage.

There are very few models to assess the impact of CSR work. The aims of the programmes are fairly broad, bordering on rhetoric ('to eradicate illiteracy' for example), and tough to qualify. Work on social change, especially with women, requires a qualitative intervention; for example, in engaging with women to increase their voice and agency at the family, community and State levels, while linking with State mechanisms to actualise their rights.

It is also true common knowledge that a company that does good with one arm may also do harm with the other (Doane, 2005). For example, BP is a big CSR spender, but was also behind one of the worst environmental disasters in the US—the Gulf of Mexico explosion and oil spill in 2010. Sri Lankan garment manufacturers are changing conditions in the factory, but they have pushed for longer working hours with the government in the face of competition from Chinese garment manufacturers.

CSR in the region is still very much in the making and this is an opportunity for women's groups to engage with groups they feel they are compatible with, and put women's rights on the CSR agenda.

BANGLADESH

In Bangladesh, government policies are helping, but the economy is still suffering from inadequate infrastructure, political uncertainty and corruption. Even at a 7 per cent growth rate, poverty remains its biggest challenge. Its industry is largely made up of small and medium enterprises (SME) that form the supply chain of Western multinational companies like IKEA, Unilever Bangladesh, Standard Chartered, Siemens and Nestle. Loan defaults, sub-standard goods, opaque boardrooms and limited accountability challenge good governance. There are large trade unions but they exert limited pressure on managements. Large NGOs such as the microfinance leaders Grameen Group and development giant BRAC, play a critical role in income-generation. They have spun off subsidiaries like the Grameen Phone and BRAC Bank, which are modelled on corporate lines, and even have a stated CSR policy.

Approach to CSR:

In the past, the quest for power, fame and political control traditionally drove local businessmen to contribute to their communities. CSR came to Bangladesh in a roundabout way—through the 1993 Harkin Bill passed thousands of miles away in USA. Bangladesh's largest importer, the U.S.A., threatened to boycott its goods alleging that it was using child labour in its garment industry. This turned the spotlight on factory conditions and labour practices. Under pressure from upset buyers back home, MNCs were forced to monitor and demand compliance and a minimum level of CSR work from their vendors in the supply chain.

Bangladeshi SMEs realized that CSR was important for sustaining business with the West. Hence, CSR became a buzzword in Bangladesh in the 2000s as companies announced informal incentives to encourage CSR. The turning point came in 2008, when the government said it would waive taxes by 10 per cent if the private sector spent a part of its income on CSR, particularly on economic, environmental and social development activities. It specifically mentioned 'women's rights' under social development activities.

Current Trends:

Companies are now moving beyond the staple blood donation drives, check up camps and scholarships, and developing innovative ideas such as social businesses, in which a large NGO and a big business house together target a large market for socially beneficial work. Nobel Laureate and Grameen Bank founder Mohammad Yunus calls it 'business sense combined with social needs.' A Grameen Group company, Grameen Adidas, develops low cost footwear so 'no one goes without shoes.' It has also tied up with BASF to supply sachets of dietary supplements and repellent-impregnated mosquito nets.

Under pressure to implement scalable and measurable CSR, MNCs focus on the factory as a point of intervention. Marks and Spencer has piloted its plan of becoming the world's most sustainable retailer by 2015 by setting up Ethical Model facilities at three garment factories in Bangladesh. These fair wage establishments find sustainable solutions to raising worker salaries hand in hand with improving productivity and efficiency through worker training. This initiative is unique for having used

human rights language. Walmart Foundation and CARE have also come together to train 2,500 workers in Dhaka's garment factories, all of whom are women under 30.

Where are Women's Rights?

Companies rarely mention whether their CSR activities target women, even though in some sectors such as garments, women form 90 per cent of the workforce. Research has consistently shown greater exploitation of women workers, male-female wage disparity and a near absence of conditions that allow women to organise into collectives for greater bargaining power. MNCs usually work with large NGOs and not local women's groups. Grant-giving is notably absent.

Challenges and Opportunities:

The microcredit revolution and mobile telephony boom, and the CSR activity they have spawned, have had far reaching transformative impact. Now, the country's banking regulator, Bangladesh Bank, has said it will monitor the CSR activity of commercial banks to evaluate them on the US-based Camels ratings method of assessing the health of credit institutions. Women's rights groups should see the banking sector as a potential ally, and also align with large business networks to find companies looking to do CSR work.

Examples of CSR In Bangladesh:

- ❖ Hathay Bunano is a fair-wage social business, manufacturing handicrafts for export. At its largely rural centres, it consciously employs underprivileged women who are divorced, illiterate or disabled.

- ❖ Working with businesses, the Smiling Sun Franchise Programme (SSFP) provides health services at 41 factories. Similarly, one of the world's largest family planning organisations, the Marie Stopes Clinic, covers 135 factories, especially garment and fish processing plants, with focus on women workers.
- ❖ The mighty Square Group of companies invests in its female workers at factories in eastern Bangladesh's Pabna district. It deploys women consciously in non-traditional jobs such as petrol pump attendants and looks after them, breeding a loyal female workforce.

INDIA

India is among the world's ten largest economies. It baffles theorists, especially those who were wary of its experiment with the mixed model economy-laissez faire, as well as state control. The intrinsic social charter of the public sector and the compelling profit orientation of the private sector seemed mutually exclusive, but co-exist harmoniously. The Indian model proves that it is perfectly possible to have public sector organisations as well as private enterprise, all in one thriving economy. Indian industry is not new to CSR, the public sector has an institutionalised social charter, and the private sector, too, has been active in this arena.

Approach to CSR:

Historically, large, family-owned conglomerates have made generous contributions to social and general development, building educational institutions, temples, hospitals and even townships around their works. The Tata group instituted trusts to make grants to organisations working on social issues. However, consulting firm KPMG's Corporate Responsibility Survey 2011 shows that India is far behind the world in CSR: only 16 per cent of its top 100 listed companies have a CSR strategy in place. The government has toyed with the idea of making it mandatory for companies to spend 2 per cent of their profits on CSR, but instead issued a 6-point CSR guideline for businesses, covering voluntary, ethical practices.

Current trends:

Many corporate houses have set up philanthropic foundations, with clear goals and a serious approach to 'doing good.' The thrust of these foundations is heavily on

education and to some extent, health. There is a concerted, institutionalised effort to make India a knowledge-based economy. CSR, business ethics and related subjects are receiving serious attention at business schools and at special executive programmes.

The approach seems to be getting more and more scientific, with stress on scalable, replicable, quantifiable and measurable models of implementing CSR and gauging its impact, where departments have targets to meet. For example, the Ambuja Cement Foundation undertook CSR activities on health in the vicinity of its factories, and tracked parameters such as neonatal health and infant mortality. The Jindal group states that one of its key aims is 'to be admired as a socially responsible business.' The Mahindra group is said to be considering sending its willing employees on year-long sabbaticals to NGOs. Many companies encourage, and even urge, their employees to actually participate in a meaningful CSR activity on a given day in a month or year.

Social venture capital organizations and social entrepreneurship initiatives have multiplied in the last few years. Multinational Acumen Fund harnesses a network of philanthropic investors to support entrepreneurs providing critical solutions and services – water, health, housing, and energy – to the underprivileged. Similarly, UnLtdIndia provides seed financing and incubation support to 'social start-ups.' Such initiatives have added energy and a renewed vigour to finding solutions for problems that may seem at times insurmountable.

Where are women's rights?

Most existing CSR activities have only superficial reference

to women's empowerment. Some companies, however, do have an explicitly stated understanding of gender disparities and appoint professionals for the job. Mahindra Group's Nanhi Kalli project is an education initiative but with a deeper understanding of the forces that keep girls from school. Tata's Second Chance Internship Programme helps women return to work if they have taken a career break for gender reasons such as childbirth. In 1998, L'Oreal and UNESCO started a Women and Science programme to recognise the achievements and contributions of exceptional women worldwide, by awarding Fellowships to promising scientists with the objective of furthering their research. The women of prominent business families, such as Rohini Nilekani, Sudha Murthy, Roshni Nadir and Nisaba Godrej, head the CSR wings of their organisations, which will help to bring focus on issues of women's rights.

One of the largest corporate initiatives supporting women's rights in the US, the Avon Foundation, recently gave large grants to select Indian women's groups for working on violence against women. Another American firm, the financial services giant Edelweiss, also recently invited proposals from NGOs working on gender issues for its EdelGive Social Innovation Honours 2012 which supports projects on women's empowerment.

Challenges and opportunities:

In giving grants or offering support to an NGO, most companies do not follow an open process of inviting applications and evaluating proposals. Instead, they make allocations on their own judgement and recommendations. There is also a traditional deficit of trust between profit-driven companies and socially

motivated NGOs. As a result, companies like to work with NGOs they know and understand, leaving out large numbers of genuinely committed NGOs, and creating more distance between themselves.

However, a whole new generation of industrialists is more amenable to working with NGOs; business schools are teaching CSR more seriously, and new and attractive models of firm-NGO partnerships are emerging. There is an environment of encouragement for innovative ideas, and platforms for these have increased. Mahindra's Spark the Rise is one such campaign that pledges INR 4 crore as seed capital to nearly 50 socially relevant innovative ideas.

Examples of CSR in India:

- ❖ The ICICI Foundation for Inclusive Growth makes prospective fellows compete for an exhaustive leadership training programme that aims to create a cadre of socially responsible leaders.
- ❖ The Godrej group of companies supports the highly successful Teach For India venture and many other laudable programmes. Their recently launched think tank, the India Culture Lab, aims to add to the nation's intellectual capital.
- ❖ The Aditya Birla Centre for Community Initiatives and Rural Development works on education, health care, sustainable livelihood and infrastructure development, with the aim of building self-sustaining model villages.
- ❖ Logistics Company TNT trains its employees to handle crises in their regions, and extensively supports eco-friendly efforts

NEPAL

Nepal's most vibrant sector is its service industry, especially tourism, generating more than half of the nation's GDP. The decade-long civil war that began in the mid-90s hurt tourism badly but it has steadily picked up since the establishment of a parliamentary democracy in 2006. The largely agrarian nation also earns substantial export income from garments, pashmina and handicrafts. Asian Paints and the Dabur group are some of the international corporate houses in Nepal. Prominent local businesses are large family owned groups like the Chaudhary Group, Sarada Group and Jyoti Group. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in carpet making and handicrafts are part of the supply chain of Western MNCs.

Approach to CSR:

The UN Global Compact brought CSR to Nepal in 2003. A strategic programme, the Compact helps businesses align their operations with high value human rights, labour welfare and other important matters. A 2006 survey by consulting firm Lotus Holdings and Action Aid Nepal said that very few Nepali businesses could relate to the term CSR or were aware of it. Since then, organisations such as the NGO National Business Initiative, have been aggressively promoting CSR. CSR is not yet part of the policy or legal framework but it was indirectly included in Nepal's Three Year Interim Plan (2007-2010). It urges greater public-private partnerships in development and more transparency, accountability and inclusiveness in business. More and more companies are appointing CSR officers and examining their social role, symbolising that CSR is taking root in Nepal.

Current trends:

The thrust is on social inclusion and on making business sustainable. Some of the large companies operate with paternalistic benevolence in a model reminiscent of colonial times, having various facilities for employees (like clubs or recreation centres). Many companies are focussing on using their own skills or acting in their own business interest. Yeti Airlines harnesses its expertise by delivering food and other aid in times of emergency. Hotel Association of Nepal promotes a waste management project called 'Hamro Nepal, Ramro Nepal'. Nepal Investment Bank funds conservation work of Mount Everest and the large Chaudhary Group focuses on health care, art, culture, sports and spirituality as part of its 'Citizen Chaudhary' initiative.

Where are women's rights?

Women's rights figure in the government's Three Year Interim Plan but within CSR discussions, they are almost absent. By virtue of being the majority of workers in certain factories, women do benefit, but they work largely in the informal sector and the civil conflict has left them with the dual burden of social integration and raising families. There are a few initiatives specifically for women and one such campaign comes from the Federation of Women Entrepreneurs Associations of Nepal (FWEAN) which employs wives of erstwhile Maoist rebels in its businesses. Another example is that of the Three Sisters Trekking Agency in Pokhara that consciously undertakes inclusive hiring to address gender and caste based socio economic inequality in the area by training and employing disadvantaged women from the region. The Indian

company Asian Paints has manufacturing units in Nepal, and working with an NGO called Maiti, it supports a shelter for women rescued from trafficking.

Challenges and opportunities:

CSR is in its formative stages in Nepal and an opportunity exists to seed the thinking with the gendered aspect, or make room for corporate support for women's rights work. CSR can also help build peace through inclusive employment policies, raising compliance standards and building good relations among businesses, employees, consumers and the community.

Women entrepreneurs and associations like the FWEAN and the NBI have spread awareness and acceptance of the idea of CSR by bringing businesses together, giving voice to shared concerns, setting agendas, and actively implementing and monitoring some of these ideas. They could be an important ally in advancing women's rights via CSR.

Examples of CSR in Nepal:

- ❖ Formation Carpet, a company that highlights 'business with ethics,' was awarded in 2006 for having a model factory, and received international recognition. It started a crèche and educational facility Hostehainse for their weavers' children. It evolved into a scholarship fund, and is now a self-sustaining organisation, supporting the education of 1,500 children nationwide.
- ❖ Dabur Nepal, an independent company from India's Dabur Group, has a medicinal plant project to preserve natural reserves in Nepal. It has well-

equipped greenhouses to help farmers cultivate Himalayan medicinal herbs.

- ❖ A group of carpet traders in the West started the Label STEP initiative in Nepal. In its CSR workshops, it brings together the industry's stakeholders—entrepreneurs, employees, authorities and trade unions—to hammer out minimum wages for weavers which is considered a 'breakthrough for fair carpet trade.'

PAKISTAN

Over the decades, Pakistan has been bogged down by violence, terrorism and political uncertainty; the economy is weak but there is enormous potential for its growth. Massive development projects, the spread of telecommunications, privatisation and economic liberalisation and an expanding services sector augur well. The country's industry ranges from textiles and apparel to food processing, pharmaceuticals, shrimp, fertilizer, and paper products. It has a range of large industrial and manufacturing companies in steel, cement, oil, gas and mining, a developed trade sector, multinational companies' supply chains, and huge family owned businesses. But Pakistan's largest business segment is made up of SMEs in the carpet, sports goods and textiles sectors.

Approach to CSR:

Companies have traditionally made donations for the underprivileged. However, serious CSR came in the 1990s through the Sialkot Partnership against child labour. It involved the government, the international labour organisation (ILO) and private stakeholders. Pakistani businesses are actively discussing the relevance and practicability of CSR. It is nascent, but in time, this understanding of CSR will transition from arbitrary and scattered charity to essential and sustainable business strategy. There are no legal mandates for CSR, although in 2009, the primary business body Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) asked all listed companies to post a social report along with their annual financial statements. Most listed companies now report on their social activities. To incentivise CSR, the UN Global Compact

Pakistan has instituted a prize called 'Living the Responsible Business Award.'

Current trends:

In Pakistan, multinationals undertake CSR in line with their global policy and factories servicing the global supply chain run such programmes. Nestle has a strong presence in Pakistan—the country is the world's fourth largest producer of milk. In a community based purchase system, Nestle gathers milk twice daily from more than 150,000 dairy farmers in the Punjab province. This is seen as a part of Nestlé's CSR strategy that includes helping farmers scale up with resources and technical assistance and in undertaking training programmes.

Children's education and public health are the preferred areas of intervention, as the government spends only 2 per cent of the GDP on education and less than 1 per cent on healthcare. The Fauji Group of companies has a charitable trust called the Fauji Foundation for welfare work in healthcare, education and vocational training. German company BASF Pakistan focusses on education and has established a BASF Kids Lab, a chemical lab for school children. After the devastating Muzaffarabad earthquake in 2005, the company built an elementary school in the city. Proctor and Gamble's Mission Taleem awards 100 scholarships to school students. Frito Lays, for example, supports NGOs working with underprivileged children and says that making good products and having good employee relations are also socially responsible business. Pakistan State Oil rehabilitates people who were internally displaced during military operations against militants in the Swat valley on Pakistan's north-eastern border with Afghanistan. Pakistan's largest independent power plant

KAPCO, has CSR focussed on housing, hospitals, hostels and schools. Merck Pakistan has a reforestation project near Quetta, Baluchistan, and it supports a renovation project at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences.

Where are women's rights?

Unlike Bangladesh or Sri Lanka, women are not the majority workforce in Pakistan's export-oriented businesses. However, the carpet industry employs a large number of women workers. As a result, companies undertake CSR for women in the production chain. For example, the STEP fair trading initiative in carpets conducts training for women weavers in the villages. As part of its CSR programme with UNDP in rural Punjab, Nestle has trained more than 4,000 women livestock workers in primary animal healthcare. This is part of their strategy of 'identifying and targetting a crucial stakeholder – the farmer's wife'. For this programme, seven teams of three women each—a veterinary doctor, a sociologist and an animal husbandry specialist—visited villages and trained women in milk production, animal husbandry, hygiene and the Nestle milk collection system.

Overall, however, women's rights as a target area of CSR seems fairly absent (except for the odd focus on girls' schools). Most corporate giants, who do have some programmes, see women more as consumers than stakeholders. For example, Tetra Pak has a sophisticated packaging factory in Pakistan and special school feeding programmes worldwide. It has a safe, packaged milk scheme in one district for underprivileged school children. It also has a Women's Awareness Campaign to raise awareness on milk consumption. Proctor and Gamble's Always School Education Programme educates young girls

about feminine health and hygiene, and how to cope with the pressures and demands of growing up.

Challenges and opportunities:

Pakistan's labour unions are not very strong. Labour policies of its military governments discouraged unions. The state has made very little effort to improve working conditions in general. This is a big challenge, as the country has to compete in markets where this is a high priority matter. Some international organisations have started working on these areas: FES, for example, joined with other groups to introduce a code of conduct in the textile industry while the STEP initiative brought stakeholders together to arrive at a commonly agreed fair wage for workers.

Examples of CSR in Pakistan:

- ❖ The National Bank of Pakistan patronises sports, sponsoring and nurturing national sporting champions. It recently opened a new CSR wing at a sports complex in Karachi.
- ❖ Within a year of starting operations in 2008, Barclays Bank Pakistan committed substantial funds to CSR projects on education and against child labour.
- ❖ Tele-communications Company Mobilink gives grants to NGOs working on health and education, white-washing schools, an SMS literacy programme and celebrations at orphanages and old age homes.
- ❖ Shell Pakistan's 'social investment' programmes include scholarship programmes, transforming a scavenger town into a model village and entrepreneurship workshops for students.

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka has a well-developed, largely export-based corporate sector as well as vibrant agriculture. The country is now in a stage of recovery from three decades of armed conflict; economic growth is picking up—it was 8 per cent in 2010. Sri Lanka stands out in the region for its near total literacy and free health and education schemes. The country has a vibrant and diverse private sector, with multinationals, trading companies, local plantation owners and traders, and SMEs working for multinationals in the readymade garments industry.

Approach to CSR:

Long standing businesses, especially plantations, had a culture of social activities to support and retain labour and management. CSR came into prominence when multinational companies introduced Codes of Conduct and when the UN Global Compact arrived. Then in 2003, the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce started its Corporate Citizen Awards, which propelled many businesses to firm up a CSR policy. Having a CSR policy and implementing it are increasingly becoming the norm in Sri Lanka.

Current trends:

The apparel and telecommunications sectors are CSR leaders in the country. Ethical business and sustainable practices are increasingly presented as Sri Lanka's USP. Sri Lanka Apparel launched the 'Garments Without Guilt' campaign to make Sri Lanka a preferred destination for apparel manufacturing outsourcing. As part of this, three of Sri Lanka's largest apparel manufacturers (Brandix, MAS Intimates and Hirdaramani Group) have launched 'eco-

factories,' investing US\$ 5 million and more to make hi-tech, eco- friendly factories. They work with retail giants such as Marks & Spencer and GAP, known to stress heavily on sustainability.

The focus is currently on the special role of CSR in the post conflict era, where companies help in the recovery process, supporting internally displaced persons, or provide services for 'war heroes' or those injured during the war. Plantations have traditionally worked with large foundations for specific projects, such as schools, health facilities and community projects for local workers. For example, the Kahawatte Plantations and Dilmah brand's philanthropic arm MJF Charity Foundation, send children to visit Colombo and watch cricket matches, and run nutrition programmes, crèches and medical facilities. Telecommunications giant Dialog Axiata has dropped the S from CSR, using only Corporate Responsibility. Sri Lanka's largest listed company John Keells Holding uses the word sustainability, instead. It has set up a foundation aligned with the Millennium Development Goals, working on education, health, community, livelihood development, environment, arts and culture, and disaster relief. The Employers Federation of Ceylon has developed gender equity guidelines for companies, as well as workplace codes of conduct or procedures to address sexual harassment at the workplace.

Where are women's rights?

In the apparel industry, women workers are the beneficiaries of CSR initiatives as they form the bulk of the workforce. The Garments Without Guilt website says: "Our ethical sourcing and sustainable development practices

aim to empower women and support their communities through poverty alleviation and offering opportunities for education and personal growth.”

MAS holdings is one of the major apparel manufacturers in the country, specialising in lingerie for brands like Victoria's Secret, Gap, Marks and Spencer, Nike, Reebok and so on . They have developed Women Go Beyond, a programme to educate and empower its 92 per cent female workforce. MAS offer English classes and other training to allow for greater mobility in the work place so that seamstresses can work their way up to be supervisors in a directed way. The Go Beyond framework has 4 points: career advancement, work-life balance, rewarding excellence and community action. An interesting part of the programme is on site classes held on a range of issues, including reproductive health, domestic violence, and entrepreneurship.

Challenges and opportunities:

Sri Lanka has strong labour laws and policies in place because of its social welfare history, but increasingly, there are worker-management tensions in the garment and plantation sectors, and labour problems in general. Trade unions initially resisted CSR, seeing it as a strategy to destabilise and liquidate the trade union movement, but workshops, trainings and discussions with trade union leaders have ironed out most of the differences. In Sri Lanka, CSR is transforming from colonial ways of charitable acts to a broader, more contemporary stakeholder approach. It is poised to be a differentiating element amongst businesses in the region, and is strategically being seen as something that must be embraced and honed.

Examples of CSR in Sri Lanka:

- ❖ Telecommunications giant Etisalat distributes free laptops in rural schools, runs knowledge centres and libraries for 'deserving and deprived schools,' has housing projects for disabled 'war heroes,' among others, and an income generation scheme for rural housewives that makes grocery bags from recycled waste.
- ❖ A digitally-equipped, hi-tech hearing centre gifted by Dialog Telekom PLC to the Ceylon School for the Deaf and Blind received an Excellence award at the Asian CSR Awards in the 'Concern for Health' category. Dialog Telekom has received three consecutive World GSM Awards for using digital technology for community benefit.
- ❖ MSM Networks, a communications company, has a fund called 'Change' that supports initiatives for the hearing and visually impaired, sponsors the Jaipur Foot as well as local disabled athletes in the Para Olympic Games.

CONCLUSION

CSR initiatives in South Asia are gaining in momentum, although their progress is more discernable in some countries than others. While women's rights require a greater focus and thrust within the CSR policies of various Corporations, more opportunities are now emerging for collaborating on this issue in the region, between Corporations and NGOS. The time is now right for a concerted strategy on working together towards this cause.

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